Out of the Depths: The Healing Potential in Abba Kovner's "My Little Sister" and the Holocaust Poems of Dan Pagis

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Summary

Can healing come from great tragedy? This is the question that this thesis attempts to answer by looking at the specific cases of Abba Kovner's "My Little Sister" and Dan Pagis' Holocaust poetry as examples of healing literature. In order to find the answers I sought, I studied Holocaust stories and poetry by both Israeli and American authors. I also read sources on the potential healing nature of literature as well as background information on the Holocaust in Jewish history and in literature.

Chapter One of this thesis analyzes "My Little Sister" in its Holocaust context as well as how Kovner's allusion to Song of Songs effects his message. Dan Pagis' poetry and his use of language, time, and memory are analyzed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three discusses the three narrative-types wounded stories often employ according to Arthur Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. It also explores in what way Kovner and Pagis' poetry utilize these narratives. Finally, in Chapter Four, this thesis investigates the healing potential in these poems as well as their possible healing uses. In the end, the answer to my initial question is, yes, healing can come from great tragedy. The literature of suffering has the potential to emotionally heal both author and reader.

Introduction

Can healing come from great tragedy? That is the essential question I wished to answer with my rabbinic thesis. The answer, however, could fill volumes and therefore, the question needed to be focused. Two summers ago I studied the healing power of the psalms as a part of my Clinical Pastoral Education program. I was intrigued by the notion that the psalms had the power to help present-day sufferers express their thoughts and feelings when they could not find their own words to do so. The time period and tragedies suffered were vastly different, yet the thoughts and feelings experienced by the sufferers were so similar. I began to wonder if other literature could have the same power. The following semester, while taking a class in the literature of the Holocaust, I was led to the central question of this thesis: Is there healing potential in Holocaust literature for the wounded reader?

Once again I had to narrow the subject matter because it would have been impossible to study the whole breadth of Holocaust literature. I decided to focus on Israeli Holocaust literature for two reasons. The first, and more minor, reason is that this literature would fulfill my Hebrew requirement. The far more important reason, however, is because Israel itself has led to healing. While a modern Jewish state might still have been established if the Holocaust never happened, it was because of the Holocaust that the world felt the urgency and necessity for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. During the Cold War the United Nations was divided and the resolution to make Israel a state was one of the few for which both sides voted.[1] In addition, "[f]or

[1] Edward Feld, *The Spirit of Renewal: Crisis and Response in Jewish Life*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1991), 152.

many survivors from the wreckage of Europe, moving to Israel became the only acceptable alternative after liberation....It was clear to them, as it was to much of world Jewry, that to start over they would have to change the direction of Jewish history and tell a radically new story."[2] In other words, it was clear from the UN resolution that the world saw the need for Israel in the healing process and that many survivors, themselves, could only see a new beginning, which is often necessary in order for healing to occur, in the new Jewish homeland. If Israel was established as a place of healing and refuge, than perhaps its Holocaust literature would reflect that.

Israeli Holocaust literature was still too vast a subject, and I therefore researched in order to hone my topic even further. I finally decided to focus my thesis on poetry, and specifically on the Holocaust poetry of Abba Kovner and Dan Pagis. I chose these two poets both because of the similarities in their biographies and writing styles, as well as for their differences. They were both born in Eastern Europe into secular Jewish homes, they were both survivors who later moved to Israel and became great poets, and they both tragically died after having suffered and battled with cancer. That is where the similarities end, however. While Pagis spent most of the Holocaust in a concentration camp, Kovner hid in a convent and later led the partisans fighting in the forest; and while Kovner later became politically active in the establishment of Israel, Pagis became a university professor and lived an intellectual life. In addition, their writing styles, at least for their Holocaust works, are vastly different. Abba Kovner's major Holocaust work is "My Little Sister," an epic poem consisting of 46 smaller poems, which tells the story of brothers and sisters trying to survive during the war. Pagis' poems, on the other hand, are

[2] Ibid., 151.

much shorter and tend to each focus on one aspect of the tragedy. The one exception is "Footprints" which is longer and tells the entire story of one survivor, but even this work does not reach the epic scale of "My Little Sister." I felt both their similarities and their differences would make for an interesting comparison when exploring the healing potential of their works.

Before I discuss the actual process of my research, it is important to first state the three basic premises upon which this thesis operates. The first is that I make a clear distinction between physical healing and emotional and spiritual healing. Physical healing involves alleviating one's symptoms or changing one's circumstances, and it is clear that even the best and most expressive works of literature can have no effect in this manner. Emotional or spiritual healing, on the other hand, consists of changing and improving one's mental outlook, and poetry can aid in this process. The second premise is that the Holocaust is not a singular event which stands apart from the rest of history. Rather, it is part of the long tradition of suffering in the histories of both Jews and non-Jews alike. Furthermore, because it is part of this tradition, those who survived the Holocaust may have something to learn from past sufferers and have something to teach future sufferers. The final premise is that while reading the stories of the wounded can aid in the healing of others who are wounded, this does not mitigate the suffering which has taken place. No one is advocating that some must suffer in order that others heal. However, considering the suffering has already occurred, healing is a possible and inadvertent positive outcome that may come from it.

With these notions in mind, I first analyze the poetry in the context of what it says about the Holocaust. In Chapter One I discuss the link between "My Little Sister" and

Song of Songs. I show how Kovner connects his text to that of Song of Songs, and then I discuss the impact of this connection on Kovner's message. In Chapter Two I look at how Pagis uses language, time, and memory to express his thoughts and feelings about the Holocaust.

Having established an understanding of these poems in their original context, I then study them within the rubric of the "wounded storyteller," which Arthur Frank describes in his book, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, & Ethics*.[3] He explains that wounded stories tend to fall into one of three narrative-types: restitution, chaos, or quest. With an understanding of each of these narrative-types I then re-examine the poems previously discussed to discover into which, if any, of the narrative-types they fit. This discussion constitutes Chapter Three.

Finally, in Chapter Four, with the realization that Kovner and Pagis' poems are indeed wounded stories, I discuss their possible healing potential. I begin by looking at the ways in which they may have the power to help other sufferers find meaning in their suffering and feel less lonely, and I conclude with some practical usages for the poetry. While recognizing that this may not occur in the same way for everybody, in the end, the answer to my original question is "yes." Healing can come from great tragedy. A sufferer can be emotionally healed by hearing the stories of other sufferers.

[3] Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness & Ethics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.)

Chapter One
Song of the Holocaust: Abba Kovner's "My Little Sister" and The Song of Songs

In order to understand the potential uses a poem has outside the context in which it was written, one must first understand the work within its own context. "My Little Sister" by Abba Kovner was written as a response to the Holocaust and must first be studied as such. This chapter will examine Kovner's life and how he uses silence in this poem to express the horrors of the Holocaust. The majority of the chapter, however, will be devoted to analyzing the connection between "My Little Sister" and Song of Songs, and it will conclude with the impact of linking these two texts has on Kovner's message.

Abba Kovner was born in 1918 in Sebastopol, Russia and was educated in the Hebrew High School in Vilna as well as in the School of the Arts. From a young age he was a member of the Zionist youth movement *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tsa'ir*, and when WWII began, he became a part of the underground until the Germans invaded. Upon the German invasion, Kovner and sixteen other members of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tsa'ir* hid, dressed as nuns, in a Dominican convent. As it became clear that all European Jews were to be destroyed and that Vilna was just the beginning, Kovner left the safety of the convent and returned to the ghetto. At a meeting of the *He'Chalutz* movement in December 1941 Kovner drafted a manifesto for the ghetto population with the famous quote "Let us not go like sheep to the slaughterhouse." In 1943 he joined the resistance and became its leader. He and a few others began to help all those who could walk or crawl to escape to the forest through the sewers. Soon after, Kovner lost his brother which haunted him the rest of his life. He fought with the partisans until the end of the

war.

After the war he was one of the founders of the Berichah Movement, and the driving force behind the Eastern European Survivors Association. In late 1945 Kovner went to Palestine from Britain to ask permission of the government, for a revenge war against Germany. He was arrested on his way back to Britain and jailed in Cairo. He was eventually transferred to a Jerusalem prison where he was later freed by the *Haganah*. After his release in 1946, he joined *Kibbutz Ein Ha'Choresh* with his wife who was also active in the underground during the war. He became a famed writer and in 1970 received the Israel Prize for literature. In addition, Kovner helped to conceive and build the Diaspora Museum. He died of cancer in 1987.[1]

"'Poetry', says Kovner, 'is in a sense, a request for pardon for what we do in our lives, and for what was done to us. If there is any moral meaning to poetry in general, perhaps this is it. A way of asking forgiveness for the evil in human existence.'"[2] It is clear by his definition of poetry that, although most of his work does not deal directly with the Holocaust, all of Kovner's poetry has been shaped by his life experiences. Those who have written about him have said that, like his life, his poetry has "...bridged

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[1] All background information on Kovner's life came from the following sources: http://history1900s.about.com/library/holocaust/aa030799.html; http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/biography/Kovner.html; http://english.gfh.org.il/abba_kovner.html; Edward Alexander, "Abba Kovner: Poet of Holocaust and Rebirth," *Midstream* 23.8 (1977), 50-59.; Zvia Ben-Yoseph Ginor, "'Meteor-Yid': Abba Kovner's Poetic Confrontation with Jewish History," *Judaism* 48.1 (1999) 35-48.; Zvia Ben-Yoseph Ginor, "The *Sheliah Tsibur* as a Poetic Persona: Abba Kovner's Self-Portrait," *Prooftexts* 15.3 (1995) 227-247.; Shirley Kaufman, "Introduction" in *My Little Sister and Selected Poems* by Abba Kovner, Shirley Kaufman, trans., (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1986.; Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 259-263.; Eli Pfefferkorn, "The Fearsome Incantation of Silence in Abba Kovner's 'My Little Sister'," *World Literature Today* 52.4 (1978) 554-558.; Edna Sharoni, "Abba Kovner's Observation: Poems," *Modern Hebrew Literature* 4.1 (1975) 36.; and Alan J. Yuter, *The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature: From Genocide to Rebirth* (New York: National University Publications, 1983), 29-35.

[2] Kaufman, 23.

the moments of the Holocaust and the struggle for independence,"[3] and has "...explored the relation between the destruction of European Jewry and the rebirth of the Jewish people in Israel."[4] In addition, Edward Alexander notes that Kovner's creativity comes from the tension between his two loves - his love for the land of Israel and his love for the Jewish people. "To understand Kovner's poetry, we must recognize that it is based on the impulse to join people with land, matter with spirit, the living with the dead, past with present, life with literature."[5] Despite the fact that Kovner said one should not dwell on the past, Zvia Ben-Yoseph Ginor explains, he spent most of his life and indeed his work reviewing the past while judging both himself and others.[6] Kovner balances the chaos of his subject matter, however, with the structure in which he frames his poems. His books of short poems tend to be divided into chapters and sub-sections by subject matter, while his epic poems often have a general theme which provides cohesiveness. Ginor further comments, "The poems, like the voice and the message, are heartbroken in the interior, yet seek to harmonize and suggest an intact wholeness in their exterior surface."[7] Finally, Shirley Kaufman adds that although his poems are personal, the way in which we experience them makes them general.[8]

A good example of Kovner's literary style is his epic poem, "My Little Sister." Written in 1965, it is one of his only poems to directly deal with the subject of the Holocaust. The poem tells the story of a brother and sister who are hiding out in a

[3] Mintz, 259-60.
[4] Alexander, 50.
[5] Ibid., 50.
[6] Ginor, "The Sheliah Tsibur...", 229-30.
[7] Ginor, "'Meteor-Yid'...", 43.
[8] Kaufman, 22.

convent during the war and is narrated by the brother. Although Kovner had no sister,[9] the poem is inspired by two real-life women. The first was a young Jewish girl who crawled out of a mass grave in Ponar and returned to Vilna, twenty miles away, and reported the death of over 40,000 people. When this happened in 1941 Kovner was twenty-two years old, had already lost his first love and was about to lose his mother, something he reflects on in the last poem of "My Little Sister." He was the only one to believe the girl and he remembered her the rest of his life.[10] Kovner was also inspired while walking in Tel Aviv. He heard the screams of a woman, and was surprised that none of her neighbors seemed to be helping. The screaming and the helplessness took him right back to the Holocaust. He eventually learned that the screams were actually coming from a woman in labor in the maternity ward of a hospital. The neighbors were ignoring the sounds because they were used to them and understood what they were. Despite this fact, the silent response is likely to have influenced the meta-theme of silence in "My Little Sister".[11]

This theme of silence in is not surprising in light of the common notion that God was silent during the Holocaust.[12] Eli Pfefferkorn writes extensively of Kovner's use of silence in "My Little Sister".[13] It is his belief that, for Kovner, silence was the only way to describe the horrific experience of the Holocaust. The only other option would be to rage with a series of Jobian questions which would risk accepting that there was meaning to this event. Kovner was not comfortable with this notion and therefore "...cloaks his

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[9] Ibid, 24
[10] Yuter, 29; Kaufman, 17; and Alexander, 53.
[11] Pfefferkorn, 554; Alexander, 51.
[12] Steven T. Katz, *Post Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought*, (New York: New York University Press, 1983), 144.
[13] Pfefferkorn, 554-557.

agony in images of and illusions to silence."[14] A good example of this occurs in poem 4 of the poem cycle:

> My sister sees them up close!
> My sister does not scream. Only a spasm
> of joy in the throat. Nine nuns
> are silent in blackness towards my sister
> like faces of monuments in a foreign city.[15]

The impenetrable color black serves to highlight the terrifying situation which has caused this silence. Kovner is also able to express the alienation caused by the Holocaust with his use of statues, which cannot communicate, set in a foreign city. In addition, he highlights silence through his use of nature imagery. "In a series of sharply etched images, each one intensifying the other, Kovner poignantly points to the callousness of nature, which has joined the conspiracy of silence."[16]

> He has never barked.
> Before an alarm
> he only bares his teeth
> and his eyes are filled with blood
> Poem 18c[17]

In this case, Pfefferkorn explains, the silence represents the deep frustration that was felt by many Holocaust victims. The brother's efforts to call his sister are never answered. The "wall of silence" blocks the sound moving in both directions. Kovner uses silence most effectively when he has the reader anticipating sounds, but he/she is only left with silence. The tops of trees touch the bell but not enough to cause it to ring, or the dog

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[14] Ibid., 554.
[15] אבא קובנר, *אחותי קטנה*, (ריחביה: הוצאת הקיבוץ השומר הצעיר, 1967),17.
[16] Pfefferkorn., 555.
[17] Kovner, 40.

bares his teeth but never barks.[18]

While Kovner used the image of silence to express the horrors of the Holocaust, he was aware that he needed to find a balance between symbols and fact. If the scales were tipped in either direction, the poem would not ring factually or emotionally true. He needed to find an archetype that was poetic on the one hand, and linked to Jewish history on the other. He did this by invoking the sister from Song of Songs. By removing specific details such as place, time and family history, Kovner was able to make the sister more generally representative. The generalization is furthered by the absence of a definite article in the Hebrew title. The title should be "*Ahoti **Ha**'ketanah,*" but is "*Ahoti Ketanah*" instead. He was also aware, however, that making the sister too abstract would work against him as well. Therefore, he gave her specific childhood memories such as grief over her doll being crushed in the snow, the sound of her father's slippers and her love of chestnut trees. Pfefferkorn notes, "In the process of merging the individual with the symbolic, Kovner transmutes the allegorical figure of the *ahoti kala* (my sister-bride) into a holocaust victim."[19]

In addition to the main character of the sister-bride (who will be discussed further later), there are many other images that link "My Little Sister" with Song of Songs. The first set of images that is common to both is architectural in nature: images of towers, windows, walls, and doors. In the biblical Song, this architectural imagery begins in verse 2:9 when the woman narrator describes her lover, "There he stands behind our wall,/Gazing through the window,/Peering through the lattice."[20] This imagery continues

[18] Pfefferkorn, 555.
[19] Ibid, 556.
[20] All English translations of *Song of Songs* come from the New Jewish Publication Society edition, 1999.

in verse 4:4 when the man describes his lover's neck as being like the tower of David. In verse 5:7 the narrator depicts how poorly the town's watchmen treat her and she ends the verse by saying, "The guards of the walls/Stripped me of my mantle." At the end of the book there are two more places where building imagery is used. In verse 8:9 the brothers describe their sister (the narrator) and how they will react to her behavior. They declare, "If she be a wall,/We will build upon it a silver battlement;/If she be a door/We will panel it in cedar." Finally in response their sister says, "I am a wall/My breasts are like towers."

These last two images become representative of the rest. Both Bergant and Murphy[21] in their respective commentaries discuss the argument of whether verse nine is synonymous or antithetic parallelism. If the parallelism is synonymous that would suggest no access at any time, but if it is antithetic it would suggest that in the case of the wall there is no access, while in the case of the door there is. Both Murphy and Bergant agree that the former is more likely correct. Murphy bases his argument on the fact that the brothers board the door with a plank which does not suggest that the door represents openness. Bergant's argument is that because the Hebrew for "door" and not "doorway" is used the verse suggests synonymous rather that antithetic parallelism. Murphy continues, "Whichever understanding is adopted, the character and intent of the metaphors are fundamentally the same. The harshness of the military imagery (walls, doors) is qualified by the addition of precious adornments that signal the extraordinary value and beauty of the woman. The male lover used a similar poetic device when he

[21] Dianne Bergant, *Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry: Song of Songs*, ed. David W. Cotter (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 101. Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, ed. A. Dean McBride, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 292-3.

likened the woman's neck to the tower of David embellished with military banners."[22] In other words, all the building imagery suggests protection, and in this case, the protection of something very precious, although the brothers seem to take it too far. They are so concerned with their sister's status they forget about her happiness and what she really wants. They treat her more like property than a human being. And yet, the sentiment behind their actions is pure; they want to protect their sister, her sexual purity, and marriageability. They feel this is their duty, responsibility, and privilege

In Kovner's "My Little Sister" the brother-narrator also wants to protect his sister and Kovner uses these same building images to convey this message. In poems 1-4, 8, 29, and 33 Kovner writes of the protection that the convent walls offer. He also writes of other structures throughout the poem such as gates, windows, bell towers, and lattices; and all these images allude back to Song of Songs and the notion of wanting to protect his sister who is representative of all the loved ones who family members were unable to protect. This is all ironic considering that protecting women is the very purpose of a convent, yet in reality the convents did not always provide protection and the Catholic church was at least partially responsible for the anti-semitism which lead to the eventual rise of Nazi power.[23] In addition, in poem 39 the very nuns who were supposed to protect the little sister are the ones who ultimately send her to her death by making her leave the convent.

> Here you - here
> them.
> Until the night covers you like a canopy
> let's go.
> Say to them nicely

[22] Bergant, 101.
[23] *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 1990 ed., s.v. "Christian Churches," by John S. Conway

thank you.
Bless
every hour of
refuge.
Maybe they were not guilty -
there is always someone that is guiltier
(the sacrifice)
(the sacrifice)
perhaps they heard nothing
but the voices of their hearts:

You go, they said:
To go.
My fragile sister!
You must
go.
Come sister,
quiet.
Quiet.[24]

In addition to the convent which represents protection, or the lack there of, Kovner uses other architectural imagery, especially walls, to express the deep isolation felt by most Holocaust victims. According to Shirley Kaufman, Kovner made the following recollection during the trial of Adolf Eichman,

> I tried to make clear the special feeling of isolation common to European Jews. In an answer to a question from one of the judges, I explained that there were three walls of isolation. The first wall was a physical wall that the Germans put up between us and the world. If you tore this wall down there was another one - the neighbors you lived with before the war, who had become a threatening wall. And behind this there was a third wall - a feeling that the whole world outside was indifferent."[25]

Nowhere in "My Little Sister" are these ideas more apparent than in poem 8:

The convent wall is high.
Rising from there,
a wall of silence.
Ladder stands against wall,

[24] Kovner, 78-9.
[25] Kaufman, 13.

in the bell tower peaks of chestnuts
touch and recoil.
Three chestnut trees
on land of lakes

and mud.[26]

By using both the imagery of the cloister wall and the "wall of silence" Kovner is able to depict the isolation of the little sister and the smugness of the self-righteous Christians. As Alan Yuter explains, "The response of silence also stands in opposition to the high moral pretension of the Church. The phrase 'and mud.' added after the pause, cancels the soaring of the bell tower by revealing the ugliness and hypocrisy below."[27]

Kovner is also able to expand the meaning behind the wall by removing the definite article from in front of the Hebrew word in line 3. In the same way that the lack of a definite article in front of "sister" allowed for generalization in representation, here the absence of the definite article takes the "wall" out of the Holocaust context and enables it to allude to other walls from other works of literature. More specifically the walls mentioned in poems 3 and 35 allude to Song of Songs and Jericho respectively. In poem 3 "My sister's eyes search the wall of the convent/for a scarlet thread,"[28] can be linked to "Your lips are like a crimson thread./Your mouth is lovely." from Song of Songs 4:3. The scarlet thread is also reminiscent of the scarlet thread which saved Rahab when Joshua and the Israelites conquered Jericho.[29] A connection which is made stronger by the line from poem 35a,[30] "At seventy-seven funerals we circled the wall/and the wall

[26] Kovner, 21.
[27] Yuter, 30-1.
[28] Kovner, 15.
[29] It is interesting to note that in "My Little Sister" it is the insider (the nuns) saving the outsider (the sister), while in the Joshua story it is the outsiders (Joshua and the Israelites) saving the insider (Rahab).
[30] Ibid., 71.

stood." The Israelites were commanded to march around the city six times for six day and seven times on the seventh day. After following God's command, They blew their *shofars* and the walls of the city came tumbling down, allowing the Israelites to conquer the city.[31] The fact that the walls in Kovner's poem remained standing only highlights the total impotence of the Holocaust victim. Furthermore Pfefferkorn adds that, "Shuttling back and forth, biblical imagery is interwoven with Holocaust imagery, adding new strands of suffering to the rich fabric of Jewish history."[32]

Finally, Kovner uses the architectural imagery of the convent as a unifying metaphor for the whole poem. The metaphor works on both structural and thematic levels. On a structural level the convent provided a central place from which different scenes branch off into many directions. In addition the religious images and iconography provide an organization inside the walls which did not exist outside. As Pfefferkorn observes, "On the thematic level the convent fulfills its function in that it brings into focus the 'Covenant-bridal' symbol. Just as in Song of Songs *sister* also connotes bride, so in Catholic tradition *nun* carries the double meaning of sister and bride to Jesus....On this background of intimate relationship between Christ and his believers, the breaking of the Covenant between God and the Jews is driven home with great impact."[33]

In addition to architectural imagery, both works invoke the image of the gazelle. In chapter 2: 9, 17 of Song of Songs the female compares her lover to a gazelle, and in SS 4:5 and 7:4 the male compares his lover's breasts to two gazelles. The refrain "I adjure you, O maidens of Jerusalem,/By gazelles or by hind of the field:/Do not wake or

[31] Joshua 6.
[32] Pfefferkorn, 555-6.
[33] Ibid., 558.

rouse/Love until it please!" is also repeated in SS 2:7 and 3:5. Gazelles are known for their grace and beauty and tend to symbolize youth, firmness, and playfulness, as well. In addition they are a symbol of fertility, which is reinforced by the fact that the gazelle images are surrounded by lily and lotus flower images known for their regeneration.[34] Finally, it is also possible that there is a play on the Hebrew for gazelle and for beauty (both are *tsvi*). The use of these images makes perfect sense in a poem about two lovers chasing each other.

The image feels displaced, however, in a Holocaust poem about a brother hiding his sister in a convent in an attempt to save her life. Yet Kovner uses the exact same Hebrew from SS 2:9 in chapter 41 of his poem.

	From the underground grave
flattening me	a mound of scorpions
squeeze me	
quick and dark measured me	the voice of my beloved
(gate)	
(gate)	
house of clay measures me	house of life bisects
(gate)	
(gate)	
who find me who floods me	who fills me
my beloved is like a gazelle (דּוֹמֶה דוֹדִי לִצְבִי)	
pleasantness in the bitterness	for me
answer my beloved and say	to me
(past)	
(past)	

Poem 41[35]

Hark! My beloved!
There he comes,
Leaping over the mountains,
Bounding over the hills.

[34] Bergant, 48.
[35] Kovner, 81.

My beloved is like a gazelle (דּוֹמֶה דוֹדִי לִצְבִי)
Or like a young stag.
There it stands behind our wall,
Gazing through the window,
Peering through the lattice.
SS 2:8-9

Perhaps in his use of this image Kovner is trying to emphasize the loss of, or even attempting to recapture, the youth, softness, beauty, and playfulness the gazelle represents. The point is furthered by Kovner's inability to bring structure to his poem, especially when compared to the smooth structure of Song of Songs. The two lovers of the biblical Song still have a sense of power. Love is a game, they know the rules and are having fun playing. For the narrator of "My Little Sister," and Holocaust victims in general, life may seem like a game, but it is a cruel one where there are no rules. The different structures of these two works are representative of the control and power differential of the characters in the two. The typography of the this poem suggest fragmentation and disconnection versus the love and connection of Song of Songs.

The image of the dove is used much the same way by Kovner. It appears four times to describe the female lover in Song of Songs (1:15, 2:14, 5:2, and 6:9). Bergant feels the text is unclear as to which of the dovelike qualities the male love is attracted. She explains:

> His attention is caught by the dovelike quality of her eyes. There is nothing in the text to suggest which quality of the dove is the precise tenor of his metaphor. Is it the dove's soft oval shape? Its pure color? The gentle motion of its wings that resemble the fluttering eyelashes of a coquettish maiden? The delicacy of the bird? Doves are commonly depicted as messengers of love. Are the woman's glances communicating a desire for romance? Rather than decide on one feature as the tenor of the metaphor, it is probably better to retain the ambiguity of the reference, thus

respecting the polyvalent possibilities of the image.[36]

Kovner uses the same dove imagery, but with a twist. In poem 7 he writes, "From their kissed hands/doves ate./When my dove landed at the foot of the wall/torn of wing."[37] And in poem 19 he writes, "Christina is lame. She begins the day/ with a flutter of eyelashes. Like a dove that was frightened from her nest/Christina circles his face/and a loose wing pleading."[38] By changing the typical dovelike images, Kovner once again highlights how different the world in which his characters are living is from the beauty of everyday life. In Song of Songs the dove represents love, romance and joy. In "My Little Sister" the dove is frightened and its wing is torn. It is as if Kovner is saying that the only way love romance and joy can exist in a Holocaust setting is in a frightened and torn manner. In addition, it is no coincidence that Kovner uses the dove, a symbol of peace, in a war context. He is purposefully using this image to express the lack of both peace and peace of mind that existed during the Holocaust

Some of the most abundant images in both Song of Songs and "My Little Sister" concern family and the relationships between family members. In both works a mother is present, however, she has no voice – she is only spoken about. In SS 3:4 and 8:2 the female longs to bring her lover to her mother's house. In addition, in 3:11 the groom is described as wearing a crown his mother gave him and then in 6:9 the bride is compared to the only dove of a mother. Finally, in 8:1 the female wishes that she and her lover had the same mother. Some of these images can seem quite confusing, but if one looks a little deeper they become clear. Murphy believes the reason the female expresses a desire

[36] Ibid., 22.
[37] Kovner, 20.
[38] Ibid., 42.

to have the same mother as her lover is because she longs to be able to be openly intimate with her lover, which she could do if they were related, but is not acceptable if they are not.[39] Also it is likely that the Shulamite's desire to bring her lover to her mother's house represents her longing to show off what she learned about domesticity from her mother.[40]

The image of the mother is not quite as clear in "My Little Sister". In poem 15 the sister enters the convent without her brother or mother. In poems 28 and 38 we again see the mother as representative of domesticity. In poem 28 she is making jam and in poem 38 the narrator writes of the sister wearing a dress her mother has sewn. This alludes to the crown the mother made for the groom in Song of Songs for in both cases a mother is making a garment for a child to wear on a special day. Finally, at the end of the poem cycle (poems 45-46), the mother becomes the object of the narrator-brother's frustration. He is upset because she can muster all this sympathy for her daughter who only lived two days, but she can't be there for her sons who are suffering right in front of her. There are discrepancies in the narrative of the mother as well as that of the sister-bride. In part four, the poet looks back from the Promised Land and searches the piles of shoes for his sister's. Then he imagines all the "little sisters" who never got to say good-bye and he wants to let them know that they were not a burden.

> In seventy-seven funerals we circled the wall
> and the wall stood.
> From the promised land I called for you
> I searched for you
> among the piles of small shoes
> as every holiday neared.
> Poem 35a[41]

[39] Murphy, 188.
[40] Ibid., 188-9.
[41] Kovner, 71.

---to greet you
and if in only one whispering
word

that you were not a burden to us.
On the way
Mom walked heavy.
I.
All your brothers.
And the desperate burden.
Our strength did not give out
only the earth gave out below us.
Poem 35b[42]

In part five, however, it seems that the sister never gets the chance to live.

To this day, the walls of Bikur Holim Hospital
are saturated with
the smell of sour urine
and mortal hopes.

In the old hospital
among walls of red brick
my sister died.

She was two hours old. Suddenly
her eyelids contracted to look –
my sister never screamed.
She was not introduced to the world.
Poem 45[43]

Our mother mourned a daughter
who never came into the world.
From 1940 to 1948 the rest of her sons were cut down
and she eulogized them
and she mourned my little sister who never came into the world.

You who saw

everything.
You who saw us
mother!

[42] Ibid., 72.
[43] Ibid, 89.

How could you mourn in front of us
someone
who never entered the world?

A mother stared at me a while.
And she stared at me for a long while.
Until her lips parted to speak
and she said my son
- she was not privileged to see
the light of the world!

Poem 46[44]

The inconsistent narrative implies that the mother and sister represent all mothers and sisters who were lost in the Holocaust.

In addition to a mother figure, both texts involve brothers. In Song of Songs the female lover's brothers are aggressive in their effort to protect their sister and her marriageability. In "My Little Sister" the brother also wants to be able to protect his sister. The difference between the two texts is that in Song of Songs the brothers, ultra masculine in attitude, seem to wield some real power in their bid to cloister their sister, while the Holocaust brother is powerless and thus emasculated.

The final family image in both these texts is that of sister-bride. There is clearly wordplay in Kovner's poem between *kallah* with כ (bride) and with a ק (fragile). Song of Songs has the male lover speaking of his sister-bride, which refers to the wooing and courting that occurs between young men and women. In "My Little Sister" the sister-bride is an actual sibling (or representative of many siblings), and with this allusion Kovner is expressing the closeness the siblings desire but cannot attain because of their circumstances. In Song of Songs the lovers are eventually united, but in "My Little Sister" the only resolution is the silence of death because no earthly union is ever

[44] Ibid., 90-1.

consummated.[45]

There is also a play on sister (sibling) and sister (nun).[46] The same word is used for both in Hebrew just as it is in English. This allows for a mixing of images and a certain lack of clarity as to which sister Kovner is referring.

To give to love the
walkers in snow. The
oppressed. The
oppressor. All the
lost ones because they are lost
to be brought back
in mercy
with open arms
with ringing of bells.
With Blood

Nine sisters soaked with pleasure
the morning rises
to love.
My little sister
is scared.

Poem 14[47]

The nuns are too preoccupied with their own salvation to give any love or Christian charity to the little sister. They both, however suffer frustration. The nuns because they cannot act on their natural sexual impulses and the little sister because she will never reach the marriage canopy with her family.[48] In addition, "my sister's shaved head" in poem 40 could refer to either the shaved head of a nun or that of a death camp victim.[49] The comparison of these two "sisters" serves to emphasize that while the nuns suffered voluntarily, the little Jewish sister suffered against her will. They are all sisters and they

[45] Yuter, 31.
[46] אחות is also used in reference to a nurse in poem 24.
[47] Kovner, 29.
[48] Yuter, 33.
[49] Alexander, 53.

all suffered but just as the connotation of sister is different, the suffering is vastly different for the nuns and the sibling. A point which is only heightened by the irony that Christ whom the nuns worship also suffered innocently.[50]

Along with the sister/bride motif there is also other wedding imagery in both these texts. Song of Songs, in addition to mentioning brides and grooms and clearly being a love story, is also used in many wedding ceremonies today. Towards the end of "My Little Sister" the wedding imagery becomes abundant. In poem 28 there is the image of the sister sitting at her groom's table at the signing of a *ketubah*. In poems 36 and 37 Kovner writes of vows and promises, using the traditional הֲרֵי אַתְּ מְקֻדֶּשֶׁת in 36.[51] And finally, poems 39 mentions the wedding canopy. Kovner is using the wedding imagery to convey the promises the brother wants to keep, but cannot, and to emphasize the fact that the sister never gets to marry because her life was tragically cut short.

In addition, there are other phrases and images that appear in both Song of Songs and "My Little Sister." For example, both mention a scarlet thread (SS 4:3, L.S. 3), both use the image of women's breasts (SS 4:5, 8:8, 8:10, L.S. 15), and both use the Hebrew phrase לִבָּהּ עֵר – my heart is awake – (SS 5:2, L.S. 28). Honey (SS 5:1, L.S. 28), and "rise up" (SS 2:10, 2:13, L.S. 38) and the Hebrew דּוֹדִי (SS 5:7, L.S. 41) also appear in both texts. These similarities only strengthen the connection between these two works.

The final link between these two texts involves the connection to Passover. In Poem 38 of "My Little Sister" Kovner writes "This night all in snow" (הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה בַּלּוֹ בַּשֶּׁלֶג), which is a clear reference to the Four Questions of the Passover seder. Song of

[50] Yuter, 32,
[51] Kovner, 75.

Songs, of course, is the text read in synagogue on Passover. In addition, Passover and the Holocaust have often been linked because the survivors had an exodus of their own, moving from slavery to freedom. With this reference it is likely that Kovner is providing a glimmer of hope that life can begin again after the tragedy of the Holocaust, or it is simply another ironic contrast.

Since it is clear that the connection between these two works is no accident, one must now ask why Kovner might have chosen to allude to Song of Songs in his poem. On a literary level Song of Songs is a love story about a man and a woman, but on an allegorical level it is about the relationship between God and Israel. This can be found in many Jewish sources such as *Midrash*, *Targum*, and medieval commentaries. This allegorical interpretation is why Song of Songs works so well for the Holocaust which was both an individual and national tragedy. As Pfefferkorn notes, by referring back to happy memories of the covenental bond, Kovner only highlights the breach of covenant the Holocaust caused.[52] Finally, Pfefferkorn posits, "Though the poem carefully veers away from ideological commentary, it would be mistaken to assume that Kovner does not have a quarrel with the world that watched and withdrew. How should a Jewish poet who has witnessed the mass murder of his people react to the world's apathy? In a rare confessional moment Kovner hints at the difficult choice he had to make between keeping silent and telling the tale of unprecedented horror."[53]

> I vow by you today
> we shall not tell for better or for worse
> of the world that was ruined. Only trembling
> how will this passage of our lives
> be told now--

[52] Pfefferkorn, 556-7.
[53] Ibid., 558.

Poem 37[54]

Kovner may not have known exactly how to express in words the tragedy which he suffered, but he did understand the importance of doing so. He was aware of the significance of leaving behind a testimony for those who did not witness the suffering first hand. It is possible that on some level he was aware that his work could someday bring healing to others, an idea which will be discussed further later on.

[54] Kovner, 76.

Chapter Two
Language, Time, and Memory: The Holocaust Poems of Dan Pagis

Having studied Abba Kovner's "My Little Sister" in the context in which it was written, we must now do the same with the Holocaust poems of Dan Pagis. Like Kovner, Pagis was also a Holocaust survivor. He was born in Bukovina (formerly part of both Austria, then Romania, and is now part of Russia) in 1930 and raised in Vienna. During the Holocaust he spent three years in a concentration camp, -- a major formative experience -- and then immigrated to Israel in 1946. There he learned Hebrew and became a teacher on a *kibbutz*. Ironically, because he grew up in a Germanized Jewish home, it is likely that Pagis would never have learned Hebrew or had any connection to the Jewish homeland or Jewish culture, had it not been for the Holocaust. In 1956 he moved to Jerusalem and received a doctorate from Hebrew University in Hebrew Literature. He taught medieval Hebrew Literature there for many years and was also a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Harvard, and the University of California at San Diego and at Berkeley. He died of cancer on July 29, 1986.[1]

While some who wrote about Pagis tried to pigeonhole him as a Holocaust poet, his Holocaust poems only make up a small section of his larger work *Gilgul* (*Transformations*). While the common themes of entrapment and flight and captivity and freedom can be found throughout *Gilgul*, not just in his Holocaust works, one should

[1] All Biographical information came from the following sources: Stephen Mitchell, trans., *The Selected Poetry of Dan Pagis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 157; Naomi Sokoloff, "Transformations: Holocaust Poems in Dan Pagis' *Gilgul*," *Annual Review*, 8 (1984), 215; Robert Alter, "Dan Pagis and the Poetry of Displacement," *Judaism*, 45:4 (1996), 399; and Yair Mazor, "Tender is the Touch of Intellect, or: See Under 'Time'; Portrait of Dan Pagis as a Contemporary Hebrew Poet," *Modern Judaism*, 15:2 (1995), 137.

not assume that all these works are really about the Holocaust. Rather it is Pagis' treatment of the Holocaust that enables the reader to better understand his other works.[2] In other words while the Holocaust colored the way in which he saw and wrote about the world, only a few of his poems deal with the Holocaust directly.

Pagis certainly uses his Holocaust poetry as a vehicle to express his anger and frustration at the atrocities suffered during the war. Whether he is railing against God in "Another Testimony," or expressing the sadness and frustration of a mother about to die in "Written in Pencil," or sarcastically imagining the events which would need to occur in order for reparations to be effective in "Draft of a Reparations Agreement;" Pagis' feelings about the Holocaust come through clearly in his tone. In addition, his Holocaust poems are all rich and contain enough images and allusions for a chapter to be written about each poem. In order to focus the discussion here, I have chosen to concentrate on the three major themes than run throughout these works -- language, time, and memory -- and how Pagis uses these themes to express his feelings.

While Kovner uses the theme of silence to express his thoughts and feelings on the Holocaust, Pagis emphasizes the opposite motif of language or speech. Many of the titles of his Holocaust poems -- "Testimony", "Another Testimony", "Instructions for Crossing the border", and "Draft of a Reparations Agreement" -- make this notion evident. While there are others, like Lawrence Langer[3], who believe that the Holocaust has to be a wholly separate event, that it can never be compared to other catastrophes in Jewish and human history, Pagis does not seem to share this conviction. As Kovner's does in "My Little Sister," Pagis alludes to other suffering in his poems, an indication

[2] Sokoloff, 215.
[3] Lawrence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

that they both believe that suffering during the Holocaust is comparable to suffering throughout history. For example, Pagis refers to the first murder in "Written in Pencil," and in "Footprints" he juxtaposes the strife between Isaac and Jacob with that between the Nazis and the Jews. By not separating the Holocaust from the rest of history, Pagis allows the modern-day reader to have a conversation with the speaker-victims of his poetry. If, for example, the reader is suffering and is angry with God, he/she could have a conversation with Pagis through "Another Testimony." By placing the Holocaust in the continuum of suffering, he allows the reader to learn what the speaker is trying to teach.

Pagis also uses time as a way to connect the reader and the speaker. As Yair Mazor notes, "Pagis' poetry displays a complexity of facets of time, such as historical time, personal time, evolutionary time, archeological time, objective time versus subjective time, scientific time versus emotional time, psychological time, space time, and more."[4] According to Tamar Yacobi, Pagis uses four major time devices in his poetry. Each device has a way of drawing in the reader. The first is "telescoping," that is, condensing a long period of time into a relatively short literary expression.[5] This device can be seen in the poem "Europe Late." In this poem the whole pre-war idyllic time period in condensed into eighteen lines. By describing the whole era in short, terse descriptions, the reader can enter the poet's world, if only temporarily. Another time device is "collocation," bringing together different historical periods in one literary time period.[6] Pagis employs this technique when he makes Eve and Abel Holocaust victims in "Written in Pencil." If characters from the past can enter the present, then why not

[4] Mazor, 144.
[5] Tamar Yacobi, "Time Denatured into Meaning: New Worlds and Renewed Themes in the Poetry of Dan Pagis," *Style*, 22:1 (1998), 95.
[6] Ibid., 98.

readers from the future? "Collocation" allows the reader to imagine being a part of the speaker's situation. A third time device is "juxtaposition through time perspectives," locating the observer in the present but taking the reader through his/her past and future as well.[7] Pagis employs this device in "Footprints." In this poem the author has survived the Holocaust, but looks back on those experiences and, by the end, looks to the future. This technique allows the reader to better understand the subject of the poem by providing a full history of the present situation. The final time device Pagis uses is the "reversal of the irreversible," going back in time to change the past, which of course, cannot in reality occur. The best example of this technique is in "Draft of a Reparations Agreement." Pagis uses this time device to make clear how ridiculous the notion of reparations really is.[8] He presents a sarcastic scenario of what must happen in order for there to be true recompense. The conclusion he draws is that no amends can be made. The reader is drawn in by this technique because, in all likelihood, he/she feels the same way.

The final major theme which Pagis' Holocaust poetry addresses is memory. At the entrance of one of the barracks at Auschwitz, which is now a museum, there is the quote, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." Memory plays a significant role in the whole subject of responses to the Holocaust. Those who survived might want to erase all traces of the Holocaust. They may start new families, have their tattoos removed, and begin living life anew; and yet they can never forget all the horrors they endured or the loved ones they lost. In addition to the inescapable memories of those who survived, there is also the burden of witnessing the Holocaust, the

[7] Ibid., 105.
[8] Ibid., 110-12.

responsibility of the survivor to offer a record of the suffering endured. Pagis plays with these notions of memory in many of his Holocaust poems.

Perhaps Pagis' most famous poem, "Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway-Car" utilizes all three of these themes in its short six lines. In this poem, the Holocaust drama is set against the backdrop of the Cain and Abel story from Genesis 4. Eve, in a railway car with Abel, tries to get a message to her other son , Cain (a known murderer), but sadly, is prevented from completing her message.

Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway-Car
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[9]

The theme of language and the power of linguistic expression begins in this poem with the title. The two adjectives (כָּתוּב and הֲחָתוּם) frame the two nouns (בְּעִפָּרוֹן and בַּקָּרוֹן) exemplifying the notion of being trapped. This beautifully constructed title suggests that while locking up other human beings is a terrible thing, the ability to express that horror in an aesthetically beautiful manner speaks to the ability of language to transform experience.[10] If the use of language allows the reader a better understanding of the victim's plight, it can encourage the reader to act if he/she finds him/herself or others in a similar situation, even if it cannot change the situation which has already

[9] While I have done my own translations in preparation for this thesis, I have chosen to use Stephen Mitchell's because I feel he was able to capture the poetics of Pagis better than I. All translations are from his book, *The Selected Poems of Dan Pagis*, with the exception of "Another Testimony," for which I used Naomi Sokoloff's ("Transformations: Holocaust Poem's in Dan Pagis' *Gilgul*," 1984) reprint of Mitchell's translation in *Points of Departure* (1976).
[10] Sokoloff, 216-17.

taken place. This poem requires a reader's response and reaction. The use of the second person plural in lines 4 and 6 indicates that the reader has a responsibility to act.[11] The reader can no longer help Eve, but maybe it is possible for the reader to learn the lessons of the Holocaust and to help others in order to prevent such atrocities from happening again. The word אם (if) at the beginning of line 4 is an indicator that it is this which Pagis was trying to express. Despite the fact that Eve dies before she can finish her message, enough of it has been recorded, so that the reader has been enlisted to the cause of witnessing and opposing the cycle of murder and violence. There are limitations to poetry, however, and the unfinished ending of the poem speaks to them. The rest of the poem is so tightly constructed that this ending is quite jarring. It is symbolic of the ending many Holocaust victims met.[12] The ending is also circular ("tell him that i...i am eve/with my son abel), suggesting an endless cycle of violence. Poetry may be able to inspire change in the future, but it cannot change what has already happened in the past.

Pagis also expresses the importance of communication through his allusion to the first family of the Bible. By choosing to evoke Eve, the mother off all humanity, Pagis expresses that what happened during the Holocaust was a crime against all humanity. It also suggests that murderousness is a characteristic of all humanity since the beginning of time, in light of the fact that Cain murdered his brother. Eve becomes the symbol of all the people who died before their time or never got the chance to communicate their message. As Naomi Sokoloff argues,

> This, then, is a poem about captivity that in some measure sets the captive free through words, and in doing so it also

[11] Ibid., 218-19.
[12] Ibid., 217.

> helps to contain the horror of her suffering. The moral implication is significant: as we in our reading empathize with the victim, we humanize her; that is to say, we cannot forget her nor dismiss her experience from our consciousness -- though certainly there are times when we might like to -- as something alien, something entirely other that and apart from ourselves.[13]

Eve may have been trapped and she may have perished, but her message is free to live on. It has survived. Language and communication survive the Holocaust. "If nothing else, the very use of the biblical allusion here suggests that the literary tradition of the ages may still offer an effective way of expressing ourselves about social events in our own times."[14] We can understand another's pain by comparing it to other pain with which we may be more familiar.

Pagis' use of devices related to time also begins with the title. The last two words of the title בַּקְרוֹן (in a railway car) and חָתוּם (sealed) situate the poem in the Holocaust, and the first two words כָּתוּב בְּעִפָּרוֹן (written in pencil) indicate that the text is a record of an event that actually took place historically. "Pencil" indicates an impermanency which increases the urgency to take in the message and pass it on, or else it might disappear. "Written" and "sealed" also allude to the high holidays when our own fate in written and sealed in the Book of Life or Death. The first word of the poem, כָּאן (here) situates the reader in the present of the poem. The lack of details about location, along with the use of both Holocaust and biblical imagery, however, have a universalizing effect on the reader.[15] Because Cain is referred to as בֶּן אָדָם meaning both "son of Adam" and "son of

[13] Ibid., 220.
[14] Ibid., 219.
[15] Ibid., 217.

man" the author either indicates that he does have some humane qualities, despite the fact that he is traditionally the first murderer,[16] or that murder is essentially human. The use of Cain puts the Holocaust in the context of the first murder. While the experience of enduring the Holocaust may not be clear to all, everyone has a family and the knowledge of how horrific it would be if one member murdered another. If one considers humanity as being one big family, than the Holocaust was an instance of intra-familial murder. This is different from other wars where death is often seen as a casualty. The reader who did not experience the Holocaust can now begin to understand what the author is describing and find meaning in it.

Memory does not have a large or prominent role in this poem, but it is present in the background. Everyone wants to be remembered by those they leave behind, but it is not clear that this will be the case for Eve. Her son Abel dies with her and the role Adam and Cain will have in keeping her memory alive is uncertain. What does remain of Eve is her message and the hope that she has gone on to her eternal rest. In the wake of her death, others must take on and complete her message.

In this second Holocaust poem, "Draft of a Reparations Agreement," Pagis uses sarcasm to help the reader think about and discuss a difficult notion.

Draft of a Reparations Agreement

All right, gentlemen who cry blue murder as always
nagging miracle-makers,
quiet!
Everything will be returned to its place,
paragraph after paragraph.
The scream back into the throat.

[16] Ibid., 219.

The gold teeth back into the gums.
The terror.
The smoke back to the tin chimney and further on and inside
back to the hollow of the bones,
and already you will be covered with skin and sinews and you will live,
look, you will have your lives back,
sit in the living room, read the evening newspaper.
Here you are. Nothing is too late.
As to the yellow star:
it will be torn from your chest
and will emigrate
to the sky.

By highlighting in an exaggerated and laughable manner just what reparations would need to make amends for, Pagis expresses skepticism at the very notion of making up for atrocities committed.[17] As Sokoloff observes, "Pagis' indirect, ironic approach,...allows us to talk about intolerably serious things. All in all, the poem implies, we are human beings and must cope with our loss in human terms, even when that loss is beyond measure."[18] Certain things cannot be replaced or reversed, and this is certainly true for people who have died. The reader may know this, but those who thought of reparations did not seem to understand this concept. While there is no direct address to the reader in this poem, as there is in "Written in Pencil," Pagis draws the reader in with humor and irony. He/she is asked to connect with the victim and his/her concerns, and the use of humor and irony assures him/her that he/she is not alone in thinking that the notion of reparations is ridiculous.[19] It also creates an ironic distance. Pagis' technique is not intimate. He does not build an emotional relationship with the reader. He evokes a response which is not necessarily born of intimacy.

[17] Ibid., 223.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

As stated earlier, Pagis also uses time imagery to express the impossibility of reparations. By using the device of "reversal of the irreversible", Pagis asserts that in the same way one cannot go back in time, one can also not repay a lost life. Teeth that have fallen out of the gums cannot be restored, bones that have lost their skin and sinews will never be re-covered, and lives that are lost cannot be replaced.

Whereas in "Written in Pencil" memory is seen as positive, a possible legacy despite the great tragedy of life lost too soon, in this poem, as in many others by Pagis, memory is more of a burden. Not only is the speaker burdened by the memory of all the horrible events of the Holocaust itself. but he is also burdened by the memories of what life was like before and can never be again. In thinking about what reparations would truly entail, the speaker must remember how wonderful life was before the Holocaust -- a painful burden indeed.

The next poem, "Europe Late," uses beautiful images to describe the idyllic period right before the war. It does not speak directly to the power of language. It does, however, draw the reader in with direct address, but the reader is a spectator of the re-enactment of the mood before the war. It is only the speaker who is communicating.

Europe Late
Violins float in the sky
and a straw hat. I beg your pardon,
what is the year?
Thirty-nine and a half, still awfully early,
you can turn off the radio,
I would like to introduce you to:
the sea breeze, the life of the party,
terribly mischievous
whirling in a bell-skirt, slapping down
the worried newspapers: tango! tango!
And the park hums to itself
I kiss your hand, madame,

your hand as soft and elegant
as a white suede glove. You'll see , madame,
everything will be all right,
just heavenly – you wait and see.
No, it could never happen here,
don't worry so – you'll see – it could

In addition to language, this poem uses time devices to enhance its message. The unfinished ending allows for a telescoping between the time period of the poem and the time period of the reader.[20] The abrupt ending is also indicative of the abrupt end to the time period which the poem describes, and to the idyllic and foolish notion that what was happening in the rest of Europe could never happen in such a cultured and beautiful place. This is most obvious in the double meaning of the phrase פָּאן לְעוֹלָם. The first time it is used in the penultimate line it means "here it could never", assuring the listener that the atrocities of the Holocaust could never happen in this beautiful place of which the writer is speaking. The second time it is used, however, it means "here forever", implying that "here and for always the atmosphere of good intentions and well-wishing will signify a dangerously inadequate grasp of reality."[21] Pagis uses time to both draw in the reader and to warn him/her of the problem of getting stuck in one place in time.

As in "Draft of a Reparations Agreement", this poem also asks the reader to remember a time before the Holocaust. "Europe Late" additionally casts aspersions on the time and suggests that this was an illusionary happiness. These two facts together highlight the burden of memory because they reinforce that there is no way to return to the innocence of before the war, especially because it is heightened in looking back, with

[20] Ibid., 223-4.
[21] Ibid., 224-5.

the knowledge and experience of the horrors of the war.

In "Instructions for Crossing the border" Pagis consciously uses the present tense to situate the poem between a difficult past and an uncertain future.

Instructions for Crossing the border
Imaginary man, go. Here is your passport.
You are not allowed to remember.
You must match the description:
your eyes are already blue.
Don't escape with the sparks
inside the smokestack:
you are a man, you sit in a train.
Sit comfortably.
You've got a decent coat now,
the repaired body, a new name
ready in your throat.
Go. You are not allowed to forget.

Additionally, the present tense of this poem and the use of imperative catch the reader up in the chaos of time in which the poem was written. "Instructions" also uses direct speech like "Written in Pencil" and "Europe Late" to engage the reader. Moreover, the use of the second person allows us to identify with both people in the poem -- with the instructor as we read and with the instructee as we hear the words and are able to understand what it would feel like to have the commands in the poem spoken at us.[22] For the first time Pagis addresses both aspects of communication -- the speaking and the listening.

Memory is very important in this poem. One of Pagis' major concerns is with "imprisonment and flight." In order to escape and keep his life, the person receiving

[22] Ibid., 225-6.

instructions must remember every little detail. The prolific use of definite articles reinforces this notion.[23] It cannot just be any train, or any name or any body, it must be specific. He is imprisoned by the details that will lead to his flight and escape. The blurring of these two themes becomes clear beginning with line 5. "It appears that to escape, really to escape, would be to turn to smoke like those who perished in gas chambers. Conversely, to remain a human being is to remain in a violent and ugly world. To survive is to accept the burden of memory, the burden of loss, and the burden of belonging to such a brutal world."[24] There is also the allusion to the command concerning Amalek, "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under the Heaven. Do not forget."[25] At the beginning of the poem it states "You are not allowed to remember" and at the end it states "You are not allowed to forget." How is this possible? Perhaps Pagis is suggesting that one needs to remember enough not to allow this to happen again, and to forget enough to go on with life.

Another of Pagis' Holocaust poems is "Testimony." In this poem the speaker rails against those who committed the crimes against humanity as well as at God, in whose image they were created.

Testimony
No no: they definitely were
human beings: uniform, boots.
How to explain. They were created
in the image.

I was a shade.
A different creator made me.

[23] Ibid., 226.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Deut. 25:17, Jewish Publication Society Translation, 1990.

And he in his mercy left nothing of me that would die.
And I fled to him, floated up weightless, blue,
Forgiving – I would say: apologizing -
smoke to omnipotent smoke
that had no face or image.

The speaker is so disturbed by the notion that he and the Germans were created in the same image, he insists that he has a different creator. At the end of stanza 1 the reader is likely to expect the words "of God," referring back to the creation story in Genesis, but they are missing because this thought is too much for the speaker and Pagis to bare. While humans are created in God's image, it is their bodies that make them unique because God is not corporeal. This notion can be found in Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of Faith upon which the *Yigdal* is based. שְׁאֵין לוֹ גוּף וּדְמוּת at the end of "Testimony" is an allusion to the *Yigdal* as well as to the notion that God has no body.[26] Pagis, however, ironically twists this notion. As Alan Yuter explains, "[Pagis] suggests that man's inhumanity derives from God's lack of image or likeness; he is as impotent as formless smoke. God, the Germans, and the Jewish poet have all lost their identity as a consequence of the Holocaust; God, because man can no longer have an image of God as a model; The Nazis, because they are uniforms and boots without souls; and the Jewish poet because he is now only a shade."[27] The fact that the whole poem is written in the past tense could suggest that the relationship between God and man is permanently damaged.

Like "Testimony, "Another Testimony" is also concerned with the horrors that

[26] Alan Yuter, *The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature: From Genocide to Rebirth* (Fort Washington, NY: National University Publications, 1983), 51-2, Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 267.
[27] Yuter, 52.

went on during the Holocaust. The difference between the two poems, however is that in "Testimony" the speaker's anger and comments are directed towards other human beings and God , while in "Another Testimony" they are directed towards God alone.

Another Testimony
You are the first and you remain the last,
for judgment will be impossible for you between verdict and verdict,
between victim and victim.
Listen to my heart, hardened in judgement see my suffering.
Your accomplices, Michael and Gabriel,
stand and confess
that you said: "let us make man,"
and the replied, "Amen."

The speaker is angry because God created man and, then, was seemingly absent when His creations ran amok. Notice that "in His image" is missing from the end of the penultimate line. This may be because the thought of murderers being created in God's image is too difficult to consider, a notion which is consistent with the message of "Testimony." On a positive note, the poem does stress the importance of keeping communication open not only between humans, but also with God.[28] Unlike the finality of the past tense in which "Testimony" was written, this poem was written in the present tense. The present tense indicates that this is an ongoing conversation and not a final statement.

The allusion to the creation story at the end of the poem has the same "telescoping" effect as the use of Eve and family in "Written in Pencil". While Cain put the Holocaust in the context of the first murder, the angels put the Holocaust in the

[28] Sokoloff, 227.

context of creating life. In the case of this poem the angels are accomplices rather than helpers. It is as if the speaker is asking God why He bothered to create him if He was only going to make him, as well as the rest of humankind, endure the Holocaust. As in "Written in Pencil" if the reader cannot read him/herself into the Holocaust text, he/she can read him/herself into the creation text with the changed depiction of the angels.

The last of Pagis' short poems on the Holocaust is "The Roll Call."

The Roll Call
He stands, stamps a little in his boots,
rubs his hand. He is cold from the morning breeze:
a diligent angel, who worked hard for his promotions.
Suddenly he thinks he's made a mistake: all eyes,
he counts\again in the open notebook
all the bodies waiting for him in the square,
camp within camp: only I
am not there, am not there, am a mistake,
turn off my eyes, quickly, erase my shadow.
I shall not want. The sum will be all right
without me: here forever.

In "The Roll Call" Pagis does not speak about communication, but he does use language in some interesting ways which do allow for communication between speaker and reader. In the same way that "Instructions" puts forth the ironic notion that the only true escape is death, "The Roll Call" posits that the only way to be is not to be - being present means dying.[29] In addition, like "Europe Late", this poem ends with the phrase כָּאן לְעוֹלָם, and here too the meaning of the phrase is ambiguous. It could mean that the death toll will continue to rise, with or without the speaker. On the other hand, it could mean that because he escaped he will remain alive.[30] A third possibility, as Alan Yuter

[29] Ibid., 228.
[30] Ibid.

suggests. is that while those who remain behind will soon die and be released from the ordeal which they are suffering, by escaping, the speaker's ordeal will go on forever.[31] There is also ambiguity in the meaning of the phrase לֹא אֶחְסַר in line 10 of the poem. Literally it could mean "I won't be absent" when the roll call is taken, but is it most often translated as "I shall not want" because the Hebrew is an allusion to Psalm 23.[32] The speaker is expecting, that having escaped, God will now protect him, the same protection we are assured of in the psalm. The speaker did his part and is now expecting God to do His. The irony, of course is that God did not protect the victims of the Holocaust. Many felt a distinct absence of God, rather than a protecting presence. The ambiguity in this poem further allows for the reader to decide which meaning is most authentic for him/her. It is with this ambiguity that Pagis opens the conversation between speaker and reader.

The way in which Pagis uses time in "The Roll Call" can create tension for the reader. This poem deals most directly with the events of the Holocaust themselves as it is the only one to actually take place solely in a concentration camp during the war. Pagis does distance the reader, however, by not having the speaker actually present at the events.[33] If the speaker were present the poem would need to convey the chaos and uncertainty that would undoubtedly be a part of the moment. This might be too much for the reader to handle. Perhaps the message is better delivered from a distance.

If one accepts the third explanation of כָּאן לְעוֹלָם, namely that those who remained will soon die and be released from their burden, while the ordeal of the speaker who

[31] Mintz, 266.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Sokoloff, 228.

escaped will go on forever, then one would again get a sense of the burden of memory. The speaker cannot forget all that happened and must live with it. Death is the only true escape from memory.

The final poem we will discuss is "Footprints," and it is Pagis' longest poem about the Holocaust. It is divided into three major sections. "The first section describes various scenes relating to the speaker's death camp experiences and his eventual escape; the second depicts his transformation into a quasi-spirit and his encounter with death, guilt, and memory as such; the third describes his return to the material world and his attempt to begin his life anew."[34]

Footprints
From heaven to the heaven of heavens to the heaven of night
YANNAI

Against my will (1)
I was continued by this cloud; restless, gray,
trying to forget in the horizon, which always receded

Hail falling hard, (2)
like the chatter of teeth:
refugee pellets pushing eagerly
into their own destruction

In another sector (3)
clouds not yet identified.
Searchlights that set up
giant crosses of light
for the victim.
Unloading of cattle cars.

Afterward the letters fly up, (4)
after the flying letters mud
hurries, snuffs, covers for a time.

[34] Wendy Zierler, "Footprints, Traces, Remnants: The Operation of Memory in Dan Pagis' 'Aqebot,'" *Judaism*, 41:4 (1992), 320-21.

It's true, I was a mistake, I was forgotten (5)
in the sealed car, my body tied up
in the sack of life.

Here's the pocket where I found bread (6)
sweet crumbs all from the same world.

Maybe there's a window here – if you don't mind, (7)
look near that body, maybe you can open up
a bit. That reminds me
(pardon me) of a joke about the two Jews
in the train, they were traveling to

Say something more; talk. (8)
Can I pass from my body onward—

*

From heaven to the heaven of heavens to the heavens of night (9)
long convoys of smoke

The new seraphim who haven't yet understood, (10)
prisoners of hope, astray in the empty freedom
suspicious as always: how to exploit
this sudden vacuum, maybe
the double citizenship will help,
the old passport,
maybe the cloud? What's new with the cloud,
here too of course
they take bribes. And between us: the biggest bills
are still nicely hidden away, sewn
between the soles—
but the shoes have been piled up below
a great gaping heap

Convoy of smoke. Sometimes (11)
someone breaks away,
recognizes me for some reason, calls my name.
And I put on a pleasant face, try to remember:
who else
who

Without any right to remember, I remember (12)
a man screaming in the corner, bayonets rising
to fulfill their role
in him

Without any right to remember. What else (13)
was there? Already I am not afraid
that I might say

without any connection at all: (14)
there was a heart, blue from excessive winter
and a lamp, round, blue, kindhearted.
But the kerosene disappears with blood, the flame flickers—

Yes, before I forget: (15)
the rain stole across some border, so did I,
on forbidden escape routes, with forbidden hope,
we both passed the mouth of the pits.

Maybe now (16)
I'm looking in that rain
for the scarlet thread.

Where to begin? (17)
I don't even know how to ask.
Too many tongues mixed in my mouth. But
at the crossing of these winds,
very diligent, I immerse myself
in the laws of the heavenly grammar: I am learning
the declensions and ascensions of
silence.

Who has given you the right to jest? (18)
Who is above you you already know.
You meant to ask about what is within you,
what is abysmally through you.
How is it that you did not see?

But I did not know I was alive. (19)
From the heaven of heavens to the heaven of night
angels rushed, sometimes one of them
would looked back, see me, shrug his shoulders,
continue from my body and onward.

Frozen and burst, clotted (20)
scarred,
charred, choked.

If it has been ordained that I pull out of here (21)
I'll try to descend rung by rung,

I hold on to each one, carefully—
but there is no end to the ladder, and already
no time. All I can do is fall
into the world

And on my way back (22)
my eyes hint to me:
you have been, what more did you want to see?
Close us and see:
you are the darkness, you are the sign.

And my throat says to me: (23)
if you are still alive, give me and opening, I
must praise.

And my upside-down head is faithful to me, (24)
and my hands hold me tight:
I am falling falling
from the heavens to the heaven of heavens to the heaven of night.

*

Well then: a world. (25)
The gray is reconciled by the blue.
In the gate of this cloud, already a turquoise
innocence, perhaps light green. Already sleep.
Heavens renew themselves, try out their wings, see me
And

run for their lives, I no longer wonder. (26)
The gate bursts open:
a lake
void void pure of reflections

Over there, (27)
in that arched blue, on the edge of air,
I once lived. My window was fragile.
Maybe what remained of me
were little gliders that hadn't grown up:
they still repeat themselves in still-clouds, glide,
slice the moment
(not to remember now, not to remember)

And before I arrive (28)
(not to stretch out to the end, to stretch out)
already awake, spread to the tips of the wings,

against my will guess that, very near,
inside, imprisoned by hopes, there flickers
this ball of the earth
scarred, covered with footprints.

"Footprints" seems to encapsulate the themes found in the rest of Pagis' Holocaust poems. These include: "imprisonment and escape; survival as a burden; the importance, simultaneously, of forgetting and remembering; inhuman cruelty that releases victims into a sphere of being more spiritual or divine than that of their oppressors, the difficulty of bearing witness and the place of the poet in the scheme of things."[35] There are also phrases that appear in "Footprints" which are reminiscent of Pagis' other Holocaust poems. הָיִיתִי טָעוּת (I was a mistake) which appears in stanza 5 reminds the reader of אֲנִי טָעוּת (I am a mistake) from "The Roll Call", and "trying to forget" (stanza 1), "try to remember" (stanza 11), and "without any right to remember" (stanzas 12 and 13) all make the reader think of "Instructions". An additional echo of "Instructions" can be found stanza 15 when the narrator remarks "the rain stole across the border, so did I,". With the phrase "Where to begin?" (stanza 17) "Footprints" recalls "Testimony" when the narrator asks "how to explain?" In both cases the author is expressing the difficulty of explaining the events of the Holocaust.[36] There are two final linguistic references to other Pagis poems in "Footprints" There is the mention of cattle-cars in stanza 3 which reminds us of the railway cars in "Written in Pencil", and the chattering of teeth in stanza 2 is reminiscent of "The gold teeth back in the gums" from "Draft of a Reparations Agreement". As long as one is familiar with all of Pagis'

[35] Sokoloff, 236.
[36] Ibid., 236-7.

Holocaust poetry, these allusions can be very effective. With just a few words he can lead the reader to understand volumes.

As memory plays a significant role in the rest of Pagis' Holocaust corpus, it does here as well. It is what ties this poem together. The poem begins with the title, "עֲקֵבוֹת", in addition to meaning "footprints" can also be translated as "traces" or "remnants" - all concepts related to memory. Because footprints begin in the past and remain into the future, they are representative of the endurance of memory.[37] They are also indicative of the problems with memory. In the same way in which footprints can be distorted and destroyed, memories can be unreliable and even forgotten. Finally the footprints speak to the burden of memory because they remind us that what once was can no longer be.[38] As Wendy Zierler notes, the root ע.ק.ב first appears in the Bible in the story of Jacob and Esau. It is the same root from which Jacob's name is derived (Gen. 25:24-26). The allusion to the Jacob story is effective for a Holocaust poem in two ways. First, it reminds us of the original Covenant made between God and Jacob or Israel which was irrevocably changed after the Holocaust. In addition we are reminded of the strife between Jacob and Esau, representative of Jews and non-Jews, which was so much a part of the cause of the Holocaust.[39] As the poem continues, it becomes clear that the speaker feels as though memory has been thrust upon him. He rails against this as well as against the notion of collective Jewish memory by angrily speaking of events in collective Jewish history. In stanza 3, for example, he includes the Nazi persecution in the long list of Christian persecutions, but then he rejects the Jewish and Christian notion of martyrdom

[37] Zierler, 321.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 322.

with his twisted allusion to the Rabbi Haninah story in stanza 4. In addition in stanza 5 he invokes the traditional memorial language of "being bound up in the bonds of eternal life." Whereas this phase is usually used to describe a partnership with God, here Pagis is using it to describe the "luck" of having escaped unnoticed.[40] Beginning with stanza 16 there is a change, however. The scarlet thread is an allusion to Rahab (Joshua 2) who was saved when the city was destroyed by hanging a scarlet thread on her house. This is a much more gentle image.[41] It is as though the speaker is beginning to accept his place in Jewish collective memory. He too was spared, even if it is not clear just what his "scarlet thread" was. This change of tone continues in stanza 17 with the allusion to the fourth son at the Passover seder, and his inability to ask about the Exodus story. The narrator too was enslaved and then set free, and he, too, has questions he cannot articulate. The second allusion in the stanza is to the Tower of Babel where everyone spoke different languages. This was probably similar to the refugee experience.[42] This dual view of memory, as both a burden and a connector, is not only evident in "Footprints", but in the rest of Pagis' Holocaust poetry as well. In some poems he speaks to the burden of memory and in others he uses biblical allusions and collective Jewish memory as a way of connecting the reader to the experience and allowing him/her to understand it.

Through his use of language and communication, time and memory, Pagis makes clear that the Holocaust should not stand outside of history, Jewish or otherwise. He expresses the importance of continuing the conversation and allowing everyone to take

[40] Ibid., 322-5.
[41] It is interesting to note that this is one of the same stories to which Kovner alludes in "My Little Sister."
[42] Zierler, 330-1.

part. In addition, he believes that past suffering has something to teach about the Holocaust and that the Holocaust has something to teach about present and future suffering. It is in learning these lessons of suffering that Pagis' poems could potentially be healing to other sufferers. It is this last notion that we will examine in the next two chapters.

Chapter Three
The Wounded Storyteller: Kovner and Pagis' Poetry as Wounded Stories

Having studied Kovner's "My Little Sister" and the Holocaust poems of Dan Pagis in light of what they have to say about the war and the atrocities suffered by many, it is now time to look at their possible healing potential. We must now look beyond what they have to teach about the Holocaust, and investigate what these works can teach us about our own lives. This study will be begin by looking at Arthur Frank's book *The Wounded Storyteller*, which discusses the narrative paradigms he has discovered in many wounded stories. Once Frank's theory is understood, the next step will be to examine in which paradigms, if any, the poems studied earlier fit. Finally, the next chapter will explore, on a practical level, the ways in which modern readers can use the wounded stories of Holocaust victims to help them through their own struggles.

In *The Wounded Storyteller*[1] Frank discusses three narrative-types into which most wounded stories fit. While his theory and examples deal mostly with those storytellers who are ill, he makes it clear that the same narrative-types can work with regard to suffering of any kind. In addition, he is careful to warn of the dangers of using narrative-types at all. Frank is aware that by trying to fit a narrative into an already established framework, one risks losing the creativity and individuality of that narrative. In addition, he is also aware that most stories do not fit neatly into one of the types, rather most have components of all three. Frank states that he is merely using these narrative-types as an organizing principle. He explains that listening to wounded stories

[1] Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). The entirety of Frank's theory comes from this book, especially Chapters 4-6.

can often be difficult "...because [wounded] stories mix and weave different narrative threads. The rationale for proposing some general types of narratives is to sort out those threads."[2] Frank actually wants the reader to pay attention to the differences in wounded narratives and feels that providing a structure allows for this. For example, if a reader/listener realizes that two stories he/she is reading are of the same type, that reader/listener can then pay better attention to the similarities and differences in the stories. Furthermore, the reader/listener will have a better understanding of where in the healing process the storyteller is. In being able to define the different narrative threads of a story, the recipient of the story can see what, if any, changes the storyteller has achieved and how the suffering has affected him/her.

Having explained Frank's reasoning for these narrative-types and their possible pitfalls, we are now ready to study each type. First there is the "restitution narrative," which has this basic plot: life was good, I am suffering, and life will be good again.[3] This type of story can be told either while suffering is still occurring, with the hope that things will be good again, or once suffering has ended and the storyteller has come through the other side and knows life is good again. Both these perspectives are powerful. The former because those still suffering can find a voice, and the latter because it can provide hope to those at any point on the journey, knowing someone else made it through to the other side. The restitution narrative has been around forever and continues to this day. One of the first examples is the Book of Job. After all of Job's suffering, his wealth and family are replaced. Some Bible critics believe that the restitution aspect of the story was added later. Whether or not this is true, the restitution is in the canonical version, and

[2] Ibid., 76.
[3] Ibid., 77.

therefore, a part of how we understand the story today. We are also inundated with restitution stories every day of our modern lives. One has to look no further than the plethora of medicine commercials on television. The commercials feature someone looking and feeling horrible, who then takes the medication advertised, and then is able to go mountain climbing once again. In under a minute we receive a complete restitution narrative, whether we are aware of it or not.[4]

Besides giving the reader/listener hope and a voice, the restitution narrative serves another purpose - it turns mysteries into puzzles. Frank borrows from William May and Gabriel Marcel to make the distinction between the two. "A *mystery* can only be faced up to; a *puzzle* admits solution."[5] A solution allows for the sufferer to "get it right." Even if how they "get it right" is not clear, restitution seems to be the prize for doing so. We, in the modern world, like this narrative because modernity is so concerned with turning mysteries into puzzles. Suffering without explanation is uncomfortable and an affront to our sense of fairness.

Admittedly the restitution narrative has its limitations. The first limitation is that there is no story to fall back on if restitution does not happen. What if the sick person never gets better? What if the abused cannot get away form the abuser? What if the Holocaust victim cannot live a "normal" life after surviving their camp experience? If this is the case, a new narrative must be created or the damage witll be real. The story will not have the healing power it once had. Others who are suffering will no longer find hope in the story. A second limitation is that nowadays restitution is something that some people can afford while others cannot. Those who can purchase better health care or time

[4] Ibid., 80.
[5] Ibid.

with a psychologist have a greater chance of restitution. For those who cannot afford such things, it may be harder to see themselves in others' restitution narratives. Finally, the greatest limitation of the restitution narrative is mortality. If we are all mortal, how can there ever be real restitution?[6]

These very limitations are the reason few Holocaust stories are restitution narratives. Those victims who did survive are all too aware of the many who did not. How can it be that the survivor "got it right" doing much the same as those who perished? Why was the survivor granted restitution while so many others were not? And even this restitution was necessarily partial, given that many survivors lost entire families and former lives. New families, jobs, etc. can never make up for or restore these losses. This point is driven home in Pagis' "Draft of a Reparations Agreement." These are questions the restitution narrative cannot answer. In addition, the survivor is quite familiar with mortality which makes a belief in restitution even more difficult. Finally, while many survivors did get back to life, their lives were so changed and unrecognizable. Restitution does not seem the proper description for the survivor experience.

The second narrative-type Frank discusses is the chaos story. This narrative is very different from the restitution story. While restitution is all about order and getting better, chaos is about living in disorder and losing control. The story often comes out as disjointed and without sequence, which is similar to the way in which the storyteller is experiencing life. Chaos stories also thwart the modern notions of remedy and progress, and instead concentrate on weakness and vulnerability. Restitution focuses on

[6] Ibid, 80-1, 94.

overcoming suffering, while chaos is focused on being overcome. In addition, Frank believes that true chaos stories can only be lived and not heard because by the time a storyteller can speak or write his/her story, he/she has had time to reflect and therefore is no longer in the midst of the chaos. Moreover he explains, "The lack of any coherent sequence is an initial reason why chaos stories are hard to hear; the teller is not understood as telling a 'proper' story. But more significantly, the teller of the chaos story is not heard to be living a 'proper' life, since in life as in story, one event is expected to lead to another. Chaos negates that expectation."[7] Chaos stories are also hard to hear because the anxiety the storyteller is expressing can cause anxiety in the listener.[8]

The major limitation of the chaos story is that chaos is not a place in which one can permanently live. The "healing" goal would be to move the storyteller out of the turmoil. There is, however, a challenge to doing so. One can only move forward when one is ready. Before this can happen, the listener must acknowledge the chaos and validate the teller's feelings.[9] "[A]ttempting to push the person out of this wreckage only denies what is being experienced and compounds the chaos."[10]

Like restitution narratives, chaos narratives can also be found in the Bible. Many of the psalms begin in despair and turmoil, their "...message seems to be that the redemption of faith can begin only in chaos."[11] This is a powerful message, especially in light of the fact that most of the Holocaust poems studied earlier, indeed most Holocaust stories, generally, fall into this narrative type. The psalmist's message to Holocaust

[7] Ibid., 97.
[8] Ibid., 97-100.
[9] Ibid., 110-114.
[10] Ibid., 110.
[11] Ibid., 114.

victims is that redemption is possible even if restitution is not, assuming that, post-Holocaust, the survivor still believes in the redemptive framework of the Psalms. One can eventually move beyond the chaos and begin a new life with a new sense of normalcy. This can, of course, only happen when the Holocaust victim is ready, and there are some who will never be ready to do this.

The third narrative-type Frank puts forth seems to occupy a middle ground between the two previous narratives. While the restitution narrative can be too quick a fix and not allow for validation of the sufferer's pain and the chaos narrative can dwell in the pain and not allow for forward movement, the quest narrative seeks to meet the pain and then move forward by figuring out what lessons the suffering has to teach.[12] Quest narratives have three facets and while some stories combine all three, others focus predominantly on one or two. The first facet is memoir, in which the storyteller reports his/her suffering in the context of the rest of the events of his/her life. Another aspect of quest stories is manifesto. These are the least "gentle" of the quest narratives and they often go beyond telling the reader what the storyteller has learned and demand the reader take social action. This story does not allow the reader to infer the lessons for him/her-self, rather it tells the reader what the lessons he/she should be learning are and what he/she should do once the lessons are learned. The final facet is automythology. This aspect turns the specific wounded story of one person into a more universal story. The individual concerns of the wounded are generalized to concerns everyone can understand, and therefore the lessons the storyteller has learned can be understood and practiced by the reader as well.[13]

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[12] Ibid., 115.
[13] Ibid., 119-22.

In addition to the three facets of the quest narrative, there are also three ethics that motivate these narratives. The first is an "ethic of recollection." This occurs when one recalls past actions and owns up to them. By doing this one has an opportunity to teach a moral lesson and to begin to make right a wrong or incomplete action. Quest narratives may also be motivated by an "ethic of solidarity and commitment." This takes place when the storyteller, who has the opportunity to speak while his/her fellow sufferers do not, chooses to tell his/her story. The storyteller is not speaking for the other sufferers or expressing that he/she knows what all sufferers feel. Rather he/she is telling his/her own story in an effort to communicate that he/she knows what suffering is and is standing with and supporting his/her fellow sufferers. A final motivating ethic is an "ethic of inspiration," which occurs when the storyteller becomes an exemplar to other wounded people. Through the storyteller's narrative other sufferers can gain inspiration.[14]

As with the other two narrative-types, the quest narrative also has its limitations. The first limitation is that the quest narrative risks romanticizing suffering. As stated above, most stories contain elements of all three narrative types, therefore the restitution component of a narrative can combat this limitation. The restitution narrative reminds us that, no matter the lessons learned, it is still better not to have suffered at all. It further reminds us that the true purpose of the quest narrative is not to encourage suffering in order to learn lessons, rather it is to give purpose to suffering after the fact. Because quest narratives focus on overcoming suffering and inspiring others to do so, a second limitation is that they may lead a reader to believe that any suffering can be overcome. The chaos narrative balances this notion. It reminds us how vulnerable we all can be.[15]

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[14] Ibid., 132-3.
[15] Ibid., 135.

Most Holocaust stories are not predominately quest narratives, rather they are mostly chaos narratives. This is perhaps because the notion of any purpose to suffering during the Holocaust is too much to bear. As stated above, however, the fact that these stories are written down after the war, with the exception of memoirs written during it, means that some reflection has taken place and the narratives are not completely chaotic. I propose that there is a quest component to these narratives as well. The very fact that they have been written down would indicate that the authors want their stories to have some greater purpose. They want us to learn from their suffering. Perhaps the lessons can help us with our own suffering, or they can teach us how not to treat people or how not to let anyone treat us or others.

With an understanding of Frank's narrative theories and their purpose, we can now apply them to the poems studied earlier and examine any further insights they can give us. As with most Holocaust narratives, "My Little Sister" and Pagis' poems are certainly chaos narratives. They were, however, written about twenty years after the war, and are therefore reflective and could contain elements of restitution and quest narratives as well.

There are three major way in which the chaos narrative comes through in Kovner's "My Little Sister." The first is that the narrative is very disjointed. It changes characters, times, and settings without any transitions. Kovner moves back and forth between the story of his little sister and that of the nuns in the convent. In addition, as we learned in the analysis of the poem cycle, it is likely that the sister is representative of many "sisters." This causes an even more chaotic feeling because there is a lack of narrative cohesiveness. In part four of the poem cycle it seem as if the sister died at the

hands of the Nazis because she was given away by the nuns, while in part five it seems as if the sister never lived past two days. Because we cannot piece together any one story we feel the chaos Kovner must have experienced. The lack of any time sequence only adds to the confusion. Parts of the poem cycle take place before the Holocaust and are recollected in memories, others, during and after the war is over. Still others imagine a future the sister never had. Again there are no transitions or explanations so we can sometimes feel lost. Finally, the settings of the narrative frequently change as well without notice. Sometimes the action is in pre-war Europe, sometimes in the convent, and sometimes in post-war Israel. All of this gives us the feeling of never knowing where or when we are as we read, in short, an experience of readerly chaos.

The way in which Kovner employs biblical imagery also leads to a chaotic feeling. Eli Pfefferkorn notes, "Kovner evokes biblical and traditional phrases, images, and symbols only to put them in the inverted perspective of the Holocaust."[16] Already discussed at length is the way in which Kovner plays with Song of Songs. He is constantly twisting what we expect to read. Also, in poem 36 Kovner uses the beginning of the traditional wedding vows, "behold you are consecrated," (הֲרֵי אַתְּ מְקֻדֶּשֶׁת) and we expect to read "to me with this ring in accordance with the laws of Moses and Israel." (לִי בְּטַבַּעַת זוֹ כְּדַת מֹשֶׁה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל) Instead the poem continues "by eagles and cherubs." (מְנֻשָּׁרִים וּכְרוּבִים) The angels imply a rise to heaven and the eagles are birds of prey who feed on dead flesh. These are poignant images in a Holocaust setting. This playing with our expectations happens again in poem 38. It begins with "on this night only" (הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה

[16] Eli Pfefferkorn, "The Fearsom Incantation of Silence in Abba Kovner's 'My Little Sister,'" *World Literature Today*, 52:4 (1978), 557.

בְּשֶׁלֶג), and we are expecting *matzah* or *maror* from the springtime Passover seder. Instead Kovner writes " in snow" (בְּשֶׁלֶג), inverting our seasonal as well as our liturgical expectations. These differences are jarring and make us feel uncertain and a little lost, and in doing so add to the chaos.

Finally, Kovner uses changes in the structure of his poem to express particular instances of chaos. Most of the poem cycle is organized and divided into parts, poems, and stanzas. There are, however, certain poems, which stand out because of their structure. While most stanzas are left justified, the first stanza of poem 14 is justified to the right. In this stanza Kovner writes of being oppressed and lost and is highlighting this with the positioning of the text. It too is lost in the context of the greater structure. In poem 41 there are the chaotic imaginings of the narrator who is at once describing the horrific feelings of being buried and knowing it and the immensely pleasurable feeling of first love. The disjointedness of the emotions is expressed in the disjointedness of the text. Thirdly, in poem 46 "You who saw" at the beginning of stanza 4 is the only line in that poem which is right justified. Here Kovner is emphasizing his disdain for those who witnessed the Holocaust and did nothing. Finally, there is no closure in this poem cycle. In the very last stanza we still feel as if Kovner is lost in the chaos. The structure of this stanza is an upside-down triangle -- the same shape as the funnel cloud of a tornado. It is clear that Kovner is still stuck in the whirlwind of the chaos.

I stated earlier that many Holocaust stories are predominantly chaos stories. In light of the fact that they were written after the events, however, these chaos stories usually contain elements of quest and/or restitution narratives. "My Little Sister" is one exception to that rule. It is clear that Kovner is still very much living in the chaos of the

Holocaust despite the fact that twenty years have gone by. Both the origin of the poem and its ending prove this. The fact that the screams of a birthing mother could transport him immediately back to the chaos he lived indicates that this chaos was just below the surface of the life he was trying to live and was ready to erupt at any moment. While this may not be unusual for a survivor, the fact that at the end of the poem the narrator is still lost in the chaos implies the same is true for Kovner himself. No restitution has taken place and no lessons have been posited for learning. He found enough for which to live, but he was never able to leave the chaos behind. Kovner records this very notion at the end of poem 19 when he writes, "There is life for our sister Christina/there is no getting well." Kovner further emphasizes this message in poem 35a. There he states, "No man wil heal/no heaven/the insult of your burning silence." While there is life after the Holocaust for Kovner, there is no healing.

The same cannot be said for the Holocaust poetry by Dan Pagis. While, like Kovner, the major narrative type is chaos, elements of restitution and quest narratives can also be seen in his works. As with any wounded story, we must begin by understanding and validating the chaos, and then move to learning what we can from it.

Chaos has a major function in "Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway-Car," "Instructions for Crossing the Border," "Testimony," "Another Testimony," and "The Roll Call." In all of these poems the action takes place in the midst of the war when chaos was at its greatest. In "Written in Pencil" Eve is scrambling to write down her message before she dies. She is trapped in a railway-car with one son and trying to communicate with the other. We can feel her sense of panic, which is only heightened by the fact that she never gets to finish her message. In "Instructions" the chaos derives

from the burden of the person escaping needing to memorize lots of details very quickly. There is an incredible sense of urgency because this is a life or death matter. Again readers, by experiencing it themselves, can validate the anxiety. While "Testimony" and "Another Testimony" take place after the Holocaust, chaos is still the main narrative-type. It is, however, the chaos brought about by trying to start over again after suffering. Specifically these poems are anxious about how, if at all, one can create a new relationship with God. In "The Roll Call" the chaos manifests itself through an inability to communicate. While the rest of Pagis' poems are very conversational, this poem, the only one to solely take place in the death camp, is only descriptive with no conversation at all. The only dialogue is an internal one between the narrator and himself. Naomi Sokoloff notes, "Here he is in the very midst of trauma, and so the possibility for communication is at a minimum."[17] In this case chaos causes silence.

While chaos is the main narrative in these poems, elements of the quest narrative can also be found in them. Although Eve cannot finish her message in "Written in Pencil" she has completed enough of it that there is now a burden on the reader to be the bearer of that message. This is a typical manifesto quest narrative -- the reader is called to action. In addition, both "Testimony" and "Another Testimony" call the reader to action. By setting an example that struggling with God and one's relationship with God is okay and in fact desired, Pagis is encouraging the reader to do the same. Someone who is suffering and cannot figure out how God fits into his/her life can find in these poems a voice and permission to struggle.

The three Pagis poems not yet discussed, "Draft of a Reparations Agreement,"

[17] Naomi Sokoloff, "Transformations: Holocaust Poems in Dan Pagis' *Gigul*" *Hebrew Annual Review*, 8 (1984), 229.

"Europe Late," and "Footprints" are not primarily chaos narratives. although they do contain chaos elements. "Draft of a Reparations Agreement" is actually the anti-restitution narrative. The whole poem is about how life after the Holocaust cannot be restored. There is, however, a quest component to this narrative as well. Sokoloff states, "All in all, the poem implies, we are human beings and must cope with our loss in human terms, even when that loss is beyond measure."[18] The poem can give a voice to those who have have lost someone or something very important. It also teaches that humor and irony are one way to deal with pain. "Europe Late" does not really fit any of Frank's narrative-types. At best it could be considered the beginning of a restitution narrative. It describes in detail the "everything was okay" section of the narrative, but never gets to the "now I'm suffering" and " things will be okay again" sections. "Footprints," however, completes the restitution narrative begun in "Europe Late." The poem begins with the the second element of the narrative - the suffering. In the first section the narrator's death camp experience and eventual escape are described. Section two takes a fantastical detour, but section three describes his attempt to begin life anew. The move towards restitution can also be seen in Pagis' use of allusion. As stated in Chapter Two, at the beginning of "Footprints" Pagis' narrator alludes to biblical and rabbinic texts in a negative manner, not wanting to be a part of the collective Jewish history. By the end of the poem, however, the images soften and the narrator has accepted his place in Jewish history. With this acceptance comes the notion that restitution is possible. These two poems, when read together, can provide great hope for fellow sufferers.

[18] Ibid., 223.

With an understanding of how the poems by Kovner and Pagis fit into the wounded storyteller structure, we must now further study the power of these narratives for others who are suffering. We must understand how one person's wounded story can become a healing story for others, as well as the possible healing uses of these works specifically. The following chapter will undertake this study.

Chapter Four
The Wounded Healer: The Healing Potential of Kovner and Pagis' Poetry

With an understanding that Kovner and Pagis' works are wounded stories, and that they are therefore wounded storytellers, we must now focus on how their wounded stories can be healing to others who are suffering. We will begin by examining the two ways in which hearing another's wounded stories can bring healing, and then we will look at specific examples of how to use Kovner and Pagis' poems in this manner.

To begin, a distinction must be made between physical and emotional or spiritual healing. Physical healing involves curing the symptoms or improving the physical situation. Emotional and spiritual healing, on the other hand, refers to repairing the sufferer mentally. This is a distinction that Judaism has always made. As Peter Knobel notes, the classic Jewish healing prayer is the *Mi She-Berakh*, and it speaks of three types of healing.[1] The first, *refuat ha-nefesh* (healing of spirit), "means an acceptance of our life situation and an appreciation of our human worth in spite of pain, physical illness, or loss. It is more than just coping. It is an ability or willingness to live life fully in spite of our brokenness."[2] There is also *refuat ha-guf*, the healing of the body which often implies a cure. Finally, the prayer speaks of *refuah sheleimah*, a complete healing where the goal is to bring *sheleimut*, wholeness to the person's life, "...helping them to feel valued, to understand themselves as having been created in the image of God, to understand that they have a place in the world and in the lives of other people, family and

[1] Peter S. Knobel, "Sources of Healing in Judaism: Jewish Folkways in a New Age." *Healing and Judaism*, Kerry M. Olitzky and Nancy Wiener, series eds., (New York: The National Center For Jewish Healing, 1997), 2.
[2] Ibid.

friends, and in the life of the community."[3] It is important to note that *refuat ha-nefesh* and *refuah sheleimah* can occur without *refuat ha-guf*. I would not portend that hearing the stories of others who are suffering could physically heal anyone. Clearly, simply hearing about another's suffering is not going to provide *refuat ha-guf*. These stories, however, can help emotionally heal those who are suffering. They can bring about *refuat ha-nefesh* and/or *refuah sheleimah*.

The two most difficult emotions to deal with when it comes to suffering are feelings that one's life is meaningless because of the suffering and the feelings that one is all alone in his/her suffering. Dr. Ira Byock in his article on hospice and palliative care entitled, "The Nature of Suffering and the Nature of Opportunity at the End of Life" states, "Hospice experience confirms that suffering becomes endurable -- or miraculously dissolves -- when it becomes meaningful for a person. The personal meaning of suffering may seem to others to be abstract, but for the person dying, meaning is a tangible entity, deriving substance and shape from the individual's life history."[4] He also writes, "A fundamental commitment of a hospice or palliative care team is to never abandon a patient. The commitment derives from the knowledge that, at times, simply being present can make a critical therapeutic difference."[5] Rachel Naomi Remen, a psycho-oncologist agrees. She observes, "Often, people will offer each other the most profound healings. It is not about expertise. It's about presence. It's about a kind of fearlessness and trust of life. It's about listening and respect and waiting and trust."[6]

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[3] Ibid., 2-3.
[4] Ira R. Byock, "The Nature of Suffering and the Nature of Opportunity at the End of Life" *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine*, 12:2 (1996), 250.
[5] Ibid., 243.
[6] Bonnie Horrigan, interviewer, "Rachel Naomi Remen, MD Kitchen Table Wisdom: A Conversation That Heals" *Alternative Therapies*, 3:2 (March 1997), 82.

Before addressing the ways in which hearing others' wounded stories can help sufferers find meaning in their lives and decrease feelings of loneliness, it is important to state that this may not be true for everybody. While some may begin to heal by reading others' words and finding meaning in their stories, for others these same words and stories may only lead to further depression and hopelessness. My argument is that is that wounded stories, including the Holocaust poems by Kovner and Pagis, have the potential to heal emotionally, not that they will, in all cases, lead to emotional healing.

Viktor Frankl, himself a Holocaust survivor, is one of the most well known authors on finding meaning in suffering.[7] At the end of *Man's Search for Meaning* he posits that everyone is searching for the meaning in his/her life and that when we have psychological, emotional, or spiritual issues it is because we cannot find that meaning. He states, "There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would effectively help one survive even the worst conditions, as the knowledge that there is meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: 'He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.'"[8] He spent his life writing about and practicing "logotherapy", an analytical technique where the main goal is to help the patient find the meaning in his/her life for which he/she is striving. It is important to consider that Frankl believed in and practiced this therapy both before he suffered in Auschwitz as well as afterwards. Even after the great horrors he endured in the concentration camp he still believed that there was meaning in life and that finding that meaning could lead to healing. He famously recounts his conviction that he was able to survive the camps because a manuscript for a book which he was writing was stolen, and he wanted to survive long enough to rewrite

[7] Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1992), 97-137.
[8] Ibid., 105-6.

it.[9] Frankl makes two other important points about logotherapy. The first is that finding meaning is not just something we want, but rather something we **need**. Like Freud's drive for pleasure or Adler's drive for power, it is a "primary force" in our lives. It is what drives us and that is why it is so crucial for us to figure it out. It is also important to know that meaning is very personal and different for everyone. Finally, I would take the search for meaning one step further than Frankl and add that while suffering can lead us to find meaning in our lives, we would all rather not find that meaning if it meant we could avoid suffering. In other words, finding meaning can help with emotional healing, but one should not go looking for suffering in order to learn life lessons.

How is it that hearing another's story of suffering can help one find meaning in one's own life? Sometimes what one who is suffering needs is distance. If one can remove oneself from one's own situation and focus on the suffering of another, he/she may become capable of understanding the way in which the other sufferer's life was meaningful, and then, perhaps see its applicability to his/her own life. If, for example, one who is suffering reads a Holocaust narrative and sees that someone has suffered, but that because of his/her suffering others are aware of human potential and will work to prevent another holocaust, then meaning has been given to the survivor's life. Through this process the reader/sufferer may conclude that he/she also has something to teach. Once again it must be stressed that the lessons learned are not the reason for the suffering, rather they are the inadvertent or secondary good that can come from the suffering which has already taken place.

The second, and more likely way in which hearing another's wounded stories can

[9] Ibid., 106.

be helpful is that they can take away the feelings of loneliness that often accompany suffering. There is a parable which expresses the importance in the healing process of not feeling alone in suffering:

> This guy's walking down the street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep he can't get out. A doctor passes by and the guy shouts up, "Hey you. Can you help me out?" The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a priest comes along and the guy shouts up, "Father, I'm down in the hole can you help me out?" The priest writes down a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a friend walks by, "Hey, Joe, it's me can you help me out?" And the friend jumps in the hole. Our guy says, "Are you stupid? Now we're both down here." The friend says, "Yeah, but I've been down here before and I know the way out."[10]

The parable implies that medicine and prayer can be helpful, but the real aid in healing is not feeling alone. This, too, is a concept not new to Judaism. In his chapter, "The Gift of Healing Relationship: A Theology of Jewish Pastoral Care," Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum writes that at the center of suffering is estrangement from community family and self.[11] Kestenbaum then shares that the Talmud teaches that any person who visits the sick can alleviate one-sixtieth of the person's suffering. The rabbis go on to qualify this statement, by adding that this is only true if the visitor is a "*ben gilo*," translated as someone of the same age or temperament. In other words, while any visitor can bring some relief to the sufferer, the full measure of healing can only be gained by someone with an empathetic bond.[12] In addition, Kestenbaum concludes,

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[10] As retold by Leo McGarrey (John Spencer) to Josh Lyman (Bradley Whitford) on a second season episode of *The West Wing* and quoted from http://westwing.bewarne.com/queries/story.html.
[11] Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum, "The Gift of Healing Relationship: A Theology of Jewish Pastoral Care" in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, Rabbi Dayle A Freidman. ed., (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 14.
[12] Ibid., 6-7.

> The proliferation of support groups in contemporary society reflects the wisdom embedded in this tradition. That gatherings of people facing similar concerns, from substance abuse to child loss, have become central to recovery and healing gives witness to the unparalleled capacity of the *ben gil* to relieve suffering. Support groups are not, by definition, designed to offer solutions; rather, they create a context in which the estranged can feel a sense of belonging. For many sufferers, they offer the only sense of solace.[13]

Hearing the stories of other sufferers can help a current sufferer make huge strides. To be able to read another's story and recognize oneself is quite powerful. In addition, while a story with a happy ending is great, because the sufferer can see that someone else has suffered and made it through to the other side, stories without happy endings can also be quite effective. Just knowing that one is not alone can go a long way in the healing process.

John Patton reinforces this notion in the first two chapters of his book *Pastoral Care in Context*. His major thesis in his first chapter is that healing begins when the sufferer knows his story is being heard and remembered. In chapter two, however, Patton states that simply hearing and remembering are not enough. Healing is furthered when one's story is put into a greater context. When listening to a sufferer's story, it is important to hear both what is universal about the story as well as what is particular, and to remember that each can inform the other. Patton borrows from David Augsburger when he states that each person's life and story has three dimensions: first the universal human dimension, second the cultural dimension and third the personal dimension. In other words, some aspects of our lives are like everyone else's, others are similar to some

[13] Ibid., 7.

people's lives, and still others are particular to us as individuals.[14] When listening to another's wounded story, whether it is as healer or fellow sufferer, it is crucial to figure out into which dimensions each part of the story fits. By validating both the individual and universal components of the story as well as decreasing feeling of loneliness, emotional healing can begin for both storyteller and listener. Finally, while a physical interaction between storyteller and listener can be helpful, it is not necessary for healing to occur. A written story can also diminish feelings of loneliness and provide healing. Someone can, for example, read Kovner and Pagis' poetry and, despite the fact that this may or may not effect the poet's healing, realize that others have had loved ones murdered thereby decreasing feelings of loneliness and facilitating the healing process.

One of the primary ways in which reading other wounded stories can reduce feelings of loneliness is by giving one who is suffering the words to express what he/she is feeling until he/she is able to express his/her thoughts and feelings for him/herself. When, for example, someone is first diagnosed with a terminal or chronic illness or has just lost a loved one, it may be difficult for him/her to put into words what he/she is thinking or feeling. This person may, however, be able to recognize his/her feeling in the words of others. Jews have been using the psalms in this very manner for thousands of years. Both Rabbi Daniel F. Polish and Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub have written extensively on this subject.[15] They agree that because the psalms express a variety of emotions from desolation to elation, they can be useful when one is having trouble

[14] John Patton, "The Communal and Contextual, " in *Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care*, (Westminster, 1993), 15-60.
[15] Daniel F. Polish, *Bringing the Psalms to Life: How to Understand and Use the Book of Psalms*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), especially the Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2. Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, "From the Depths: The Use of Psalms," in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman, ed., (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001), 150-171.

putting words to his/her feelings. In fact there are specific psalms which are typically read on different occasions. It is traditional, for example, to read Psalms 20, 28, 85, 86, 102, 103, and 142 in times of communal distress, or Psalms 6, 30, 41, 88, and 103 in hope of recovery from illness. There are also psalms which are likely read when offering thanksgiving, on a wedding day, on the birth of a child, on the occasion of a *brit milah*, when travelling, when seeking repentance, or when visiting a graveside.

In the same way that finding meaning in life is personal, finding expression of one's feelings in the psalms is also personal. Weintraub notes, "Finding one's...voice in psalms is, of course, a process. Doing so may well involve rejecting certain images or ideas, linking verses from different psalms, or interweaving one's own words of praise or protest. This process entails a dialogue between ancient, well-worn sacred poetry and the individual's unique and emerging expression of hopes, fears, values, and quests."[16] In the same way that a greeting card can get close to what we want to express but is never exact, the psalms may reflect much of what we are feeling but never all of our emotions. To remedy what the greeting card lacks we add our own message, and we must do the same with the psalms. They are a good beginning, but in order to be truly effective we must make them our own. A primary way to accomplish this is to study them not only in the context in which they were written, but to also learn what they have to say about our lives today.[17]

We can do the same with Holocaust poems by Kovner and Pagis. We must first read and understand them in the context and time in which they were written, and then we must study them to see what they have to say in regards to our own lives. Pagis'

[16] Weintraub, 155.
[17] Polish, xiii.

"Written in Pencil in a Sealed Railway-Car," for example, tells the story of a mother and son, who have left loved ones behind, on their way to their death in the camps. Reading the poem in this regard may begin to teach some of the horrors of the Holocaust. However, there is much more that can be gained if this poem is read in the larger context of suffering. It could provide room for finding meaning or decreasing loneliness for parents or children who are close to death, or for children who have lost a parent. It can give a voice to their feeling of frustration, despair, and anger. There are, of course extremely depressing images in this poem as well. The notion, for example, that murder is cyclical and ever-present in humanity. In the same manner as the psalms, for this poem to have healing potential we must focus on certain aspects while rejecting others. It is also helpful to have a guide or partner in this process. There are many support groups which study the psalms together, and help to focus the discussion towards emotional healing. In addition, one on one counselling can do the same.

Before discussing the practical uses of these Holocaust poems, it is crucial to note a major difference between the psalms and this poetry. The psalms cover the whole range of human emotion, while the poetry, for the most part, only deals with the more negative emotions of anger, despair, frustration and hopelessness. Therefore while the psalms could help throughout the emotional healing process, the Holocaust poetry may only be useful as a place to begin. It can help a person express his/her initial feelings, but once that person has moved beyond the anger stage, other literature or techniques will be necessary.

On a practical level, there are three ways in which I can envision these poems being used to aid in healing. The first is on a communal level. They can become a part

of our *Yom HaShoah* commemoration ceremonies. While one main objective of the ceremonies is to remember those who died and suffered, another is to provide healing for survivors and the community at large. By hearing the poetry of survivors themselves, it is possible to gain new insights into the suffering which took place. If, for example, we hear "Testimony" or "Another Testimony" we will hear the anger directed towards God and the Nazis. We may then realize anger is a valid emotion and give ourselves permission to be angry at God's apparent absence as well as at the human beings who committed these crimes. Simply allowing ourselves to be angry is an important first step. Once we know that anger is acceptable it is easier to move beyond the anger and begin to heal. Including "Footprints," a poem which ends positively with the narrator anticipating a new beginning, would be an appropriate way in which to end the ceremony. Having relived the deep suffering of the Holocaust it is important to move the participant from the suffering back to life, and "Footprints" could accomplish this task.

Individual or group counseling with Holocaust survivors, their children, and their grandchildren could also utilize these poems for healing. They could be used to help open up the discussion. Having the survivors read the poems and discuss the similarities to their own experiences, can lead them to find meaning and feel less lonely. Even if no similarities are found, the poems could begin a discussion of how the survivor's experience is different from that of the poem and perhaps even why this is so. The discussion of these poems would only be a place to start, but many times getting started is the most difficult part. Like the psalms, they could help the survivor and/or his/her descendants express his/her feelings until he/she is willing or able to use his/her own words to do so.

Finally, these poems can also be helpful in counseling those whose suffering has no relation to the Holocaust at all. Because the Holocaust is part of the larger history of suffering, its poetry can speak to those who are suffering today. "Europe Late," for example, can help a sufferer express the joy of life and the belief that nothing bad could happen felt before their personal tragedy occurred. It can also open a discussion on the feelings of loss surrounding never being able to return to that innocence. "Draft of a Reparations Agreement" is another poem that expresses a deep frustration at not being able to return to the way life was before. Reading this poem and hearing the frustration of the author can make the present-day sufferer feel less alone in their own frustration.

One of the most powerful poems we have studied is "My Little Sister."[18] Because of its length and vast narrative, it can speak to so many. Someone who has survived while others around them have died can find a voice in this poem. So can someone who has had a loved one murdered. In addition, while much of the attention is focused on the one who is suffering, the suffering of those close to them is just as important and does not receive the attention it deserves. "My Little Sister" is about a brother who powerlessly watches his sister die. Throughout the chaos and confusing narrative of this poem the one constant is the brother's love for his sister and his desire to protect her and keep her safe. He, however, is powerless to do so. That same powerlessness can be felt by all who have loved ones who are suffering and who cannot do anything to improve the situation. This poem can help them feel less alone and give voice to their concerns. In addition, at the very end of the poem the brother is angry because his mother mourned his sister more than his brothers and because all his siblings have died and there is no one left

[18] Kovner also wrote an extensive work on his experience with cancer, which also as possible healing uses. Abba Kovner, *Sloan-Kettering: Poems*, Eddie Levenston, trans., (New York: Schocken Books, 2002).

to mourn the death of his mother with him. This anger could come from feelings of guilt at having been the one to survive. This too is a common emotion for those who have lost loved ones. They do not understand why they were spared, while their loved ones were not. This poem can also speak to them and give word to their feelings of confusion and loss.

By telling and sharing their stories, the wounded become healers. As Arthur Frank explains,

> As wounded, people may be cared for, but as storytellers, they care for others. The ill, and all those who suffer, can also be healers. Their injuries become the source of the potency of their stories. Through their stories, the [wounded] create empathetic bonds between themselves and their listeners. These bonds expand as the stories are retold. Those who listened then tell others, and the circle of shared experience widens. Because stories can heal, the wounded healer and wounded storyteller are not separate, but different aspects of the same figure.[19]

Words and stories have power, and whether or not the wounded author intends it, his/her stories have the power to heal. A power which is only increased as the story is spread. By sharing the poems of Kovner and Pagis with a community or an individual who may in turn share them with others, their healing potential only increases. In addition, Kovner and Pagis' lives are given more meaning.

This thesis has attempted in its very structure to model exactly how Kovner and Pagis' poetry can be used for healing. It first analyzed the poems in the context in which they were written, and discovered they had a great deal to teach about the emotions and feelings attached to the Holocaust. It then studied the rubric of the wounded storyteller

[19] Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), xii.

and the three narrative types he/she tends to employ, and discovered that Kovner and Pagis were indeed wounded storytellers. Finally, this thesis removed the poems from their original context to ascertain how they can help others who are currently suffering. These are the exact steps one has to take when using wounded Holocaust stories to aid healing. First one must read the story and understand it in its own context, and then discover what the wounded author is expressing. Finally, if one can find one's voice in the story as well as find meaning in his/her own life and begin to feel less alone, the first steps of healing have begun. Whether Kovner or Pagis gained healing through their writing or intended for others to be able to do so, does not effect the end result. These poets have created works that absolutely have healing potential and prove that healing can come from great tragedy.

Appendix

My Little Sister - By Abba Kovner

Part I

1

They came up to a wall. Imprisoned
in a lump of ice is the iron bell ring
of a crime. As one clutches the face of a freezing man
they seized it to rub it. Until morning light
with invocations, with weeping nails
they sought the voice of the bell
to break out from the frost
from the killing silence
and the iron did not shake.
Did not tremble.

2

But with us sailed the madness
of dogs gnawing at the moon in a puddle –
and it was rung. To its voice
how is it that animals and birds did not freeze
inside the wall!
Nine sisters remembered for good
hurried to the gate. And their voices withered:

Naked. Her braid on her breast –
my fragile sister!
Standing at the threshold.

3

My sister's eyes search the wall of the convent
for a scarlet thread. In the hands of a nun a candle quivers.
Nine holy sisters look at my sister

as if looking at ashes that speak.

4

Dawn that rises from fears. In the light

that detaches from smoke, three chestnut trees
appear this morning
as if returning from the land of the living.

My sister sees them up close!
My sister does not scream. Only a spasm
of joy in the throat. Nine nuns
are silent in blackness towards my sister
like faces of monuments in a foreign city.

5
The bell rang six.
The Dominican convent is awake.
The sisters look for my sister's eyes.
My fragile sister
nine sisters in fear
look at you

looking at ashes that speak.

6
Angels accompany my sister.
A flock of angels accompany my sister
to a threshold. My little sister!
She has taken another god
a gate opens for her.

And a courtyard.

7
Nine "little sisters" in a gold frame
shine with an inner light.
From their kissed hands
Ate doves.
When my dove landed at the foot of the wall
torn of wing
their palms were gathered
with emotional supplication.
Pink as prayer beads are the joints of their fingers
now knocking
as my sister stands at the threshold:

AND THE SON SEES.

AND THE FATHER LOOKS OUT.

8
the convent wall is high.
Rising from there,
a wall of silence.
Ladder stands against wall,
in the bell tower peaks of chestnuts
touch and recoil.
Three chestnut trees
on land of lakes

and mud.

9
Visible from here is the world of
the living.
From here a whole world watches
how my face dissolves
in blue.

My sister at the wall.
The waylayer at the gates.
In the heavy night robes
with his bare feet
spying behind her back
God approaches.

10
The amazing courtyard. What yearning streams
on my land
- the evil!

These starving eyes
are pregnant with love.
The silences
and the velvet steps!
What cleanliness of hand and thought!

From his suffering image
from the feet of the cold statue
look, dust is swept
with a delicate hand

into a gold safe –
only my crucified memory
outside the fence!

In the courtyard
my sister plays in a private language
with another god.

11
White are the wall of the house.
On its floor
no woman crouched to give birth.
No man screams
from blood. Their beds
are made ready with pardons.
Small pardons drop
like a whore's pay
in the lap.
And his light dripping
warm.
If you do not come with us
- wherefore can we be comforted?

12
Night after night
the sisters breathe hard in their beds
as if lifted up on a ladder,
their bodies tremble.
From the greatness of their longing, even tonight
their gowns burn on their bodies:

In his high place
quiet as a lonely tree
He stands.
And it trickles down from him
the light of the mother and the father:

Then his white body breaks out
of gold frame
heaven! He comes down
on a ladder of thorns.
His blood is not shed.
He swings
on thin limbs.

13
He who grants forgiveness to the innocent
comes.
He bows down and says
you are my daughter –
the sun.
The frost.
The heat wave.
At once they pierce my flesh.
His blazing forehead on my face
and the wide sea within me.
No world but it.
Nothing but him in me.

Only the soul is awake and knows
that this is the lust of knowing.

14

To give over to love the
walkers in snow. The
oppressed. The
oppressor. All the
lost ones because they are lost
to be brought back
in mercy
with open arms
with ringing of bells.
blood.

Nine sisters soaked with pleasure
the morning rises
to love.
My little sister
is scared.

15
The world that watched
and withdrew.
Her beautiful doll
father's gift
they crushed her in the snow

without mother without brother
hands crossed over her growing breasts
they waved at my sister
through that gate.

They hid her in the wall.
With an expansiveness of spirit remembered for good
the ladies wait.
They are flooded with compassion

my fragile sister!
Betrayal is no harbor
no island.
Only a folded sail in a storm.

Part II
16
Beyond beyond
a city hangs. Her body still warm.
Bells are ringing:

17
You have not seen a city put on its back
like a horse in its blood, jerking its hooves
and not rising.

Bells are ringing:

City.
City.
How does one mourn her, a city
whose residents are dead and whose dead are alive
in the heart.

Bells.

Already the sisters stand ready.
Ringing
the bells chime their longing
to fixed portions
to set times
for payment. And the wall separates them from
the world.
Nine "little sisters" pace in awe

their robes float. In procession.

My sister sits at the window. She
looks out for a brother.

18
a
You did not know Vilk. In his paws
he takes me. With his warm tongue
he wets my eyes
and when he says goodnight like this
I hear my father's sandals
retiring to his room.

Tomorrow Vilk will carry me in his teeth
and I will be like one of the puppies.

b
One bell
for prayer.
Second bell
for danger.

From one a long rope hang
from the second
my sister's life.

Free from God
the dog digs for the hidden bell
at the gate of the convent
day and night:

c
He has never barked.
Before an alarm
he only bares his teeth
and his eyes are filled with blood.

Then Vilk places this creature
in the hidden kennel. He covers her face
with his hairy body
and stands over her trembling. Without a voice.

On the day of his murder, my sister washed Vilk
from head to toe

and wrote: my brother
in the sand.

19
Christina is lame. She begins her day
with a flutter of eyelashes. Like a dove frightened from her nest
Christina circles his face
and a loose wing pleading.
Christina abandons her soul aside
until he takes her to himself:

Christina knows that there is no end to the path
but only one of them
to choose.
Christina knows that she is captured
that it is promised to her that
the gates of heaven are in reach of her prayers.

There is life for our sister Christina
there is no getting well.

20
Second Christina (their God is one
not their father) is a red-fleshed
virgin, like an excellent horse.
Only the look!
This it the stricken look as the sun shines
and what is not caught
like love.
That comes in heat.
That comes in ice.
She tries hard to sleep
our sister Christine. All day
she riles with fury over the little sisters
all day long
the virgin kneels.

21
Suzanne is foreign. Maybe not to the mother of God
only to herself.
When there is a ringing from the tower
to pray
Suzanne wraps her head unintentionally

As if from a whipping.

22
Do not pretend!
Do not pretend
a figure prettier than the figure of Marie!
My God –
oh my God turn aside
from a distance
the steps of my prince.

23
Irena and Olga are glorious with love
when the two of them as one
sink down
to kiss his thin body
greedily desired
on his face mute with weeping
tears.
My sister's frozen eyes
say:
happy are the crucified for whom!

24
From our hearts we pretended there is
that there is a place in the world
where we would know everlasting life.
Your lives, how they seize the future![1]
To our sister Clarisse – the world
is a waiting room worthy of envy.

Happy is the Creator! If He has
in His world: a nurse like this,
patience like this
waiting rooms like these;

25
More blessed than the monasteries of the harlot
already sanctified with sin.
In secret order of importance

[1] Shirley Kaufman, trans., *My Little Sister and Selected Poems*, (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1986), 62.

she is already the clapper of the convent.
Not because of her loud voice
rather because of her great legs dragging
after her the great mystery of the world.

She that knew him. On her lips –
burnt straps – he is chained
unraveled like a clothesline.
The harlot, our sister!
With her head lifted she marches
first to confession
like the iron ram to bring down the wall.
From the matter inside her it is possible to form
a statue. In addition an unsheathed sword.

She
pities my sister.
And she does not like
a black sheep.

Part III
26
My sister loves the Mother Superior.
A hood covers her transparent forehead
not her trembling heart.

My sister sees the Mother Superior.
Her heart trembles maybe from an excess of faith and strength
maybe she too has
nowhere to escape.

When the sun whores with the invaders
the Mother's eyes
guard a hidden spring;

When she faces the Divine image
she steadies her body which is thin
and small – the cross falls off.
Body to body
silent. Except for the eyes.
at the end of days maybe we will know who is guilty
that a heart like this
is split at this instant in two!

Everyday the Mother Superior makes my sister memorize

songs.
She sings to her and does not speak.

My sister sings in another choir.

27
You who commanded us to be children
silent
and afraid.

The day I turned back
because a black cat crossed my path!

The day I cried for my neighbor's daughter
because her son-in-law struck an empty bucket!

Oh the night is grinding –
sleep. Fear entered all my bones
-- I cut my nails at the window!

Every Sunday
my window shakes from the bells of "The Virgin"
every Sunday
my heart is dumb with terror
of drowning ---

You who commanded us to be children
silent from the fire.

28
My sister sits happy at
her groom's table. She does not cry.
My sister will not do this
what would people say!

My sister sits happy
At her groom's table. Her heat is awake.
The whole world drinks
kosher chicken soup:

The matzah flour dumplings
were made by her mother-in-law. The world is amazed
and tastes the mother's jam.

My sister-bride sits and beside her
a dish of honey. Like this a great people!
The braids of the challah

the father twisted:

For 40 years, our father took his bread, bless God
from one oven.
Did not imagine
that a whole people could rise into the ovens
and the world with God's help could continue to exist.

And my sister in her veil sits at the table
by herself. From a mourner's hideout
the voice of the groom nears.
Without you we will set the table
the Ketubah will be written in stone.

29
One who requests the hand of my sister.
One who closed in on her in the valley
to kiss her on her mouth with no witness.
With lips that taste of clay
my grooms,
go and request her now.

We put her at the foot of the wall
that understands how to be silent.
We put her on the mound
like a naked stem.
First to bring her into his rooms
blessed is he among men
my grooms.

30
White
white
white
in white

the Dominican convent prays:
God's estate covered with flowers:
flooded with deep salvation:
what shall we do for my sister

when she is like a wilted blossom?

31
A regular morning.
The light of each star is still clear
alone.
A bright spot of light like a wandering balloon
my sister
tries to catch it

through the lattice!
The moth of light skips
the frozen window
with a patch of fine cloth
from the dress of her doll
she stretches her hand after it
and she does not give up.

32
To look with tender eyes
at the rising morning. Wipe from the lips
the taste of hot ash.
To restore
a world to its good and to innocence
as if returning to its dwelling place a bone
that jutted out of the leg of a dead person,
to return there!
To the city

and to plant chestnuts again
in the square
or ordinary bells
near the fence
and not to fear
not to fear from the beating darkness
will suddenly lock up your tears
in the stanzas of the poem

my fragile sister!
My fragile sister.

33
In the whisper of the chestnuts. In the foaming earth

filled with dark signs
in the beating heart
like a flock of gulls bursting toward you
in the smell of moss
in the wall
in joy rising up from cracks
like water collecting in grooves
at the threshold of your home
spring

spring
spring lords over the land!
Already the glow is invading the valley.
Only your angels are late.
They give no sign.
They won't say when.

Maybe a rider will return.
Maybe the brother.
In the woods my sister plays
hopscotch
with the Messiah.

34
A raped forest. Leaves and his glory sacrificed
before the violent autumn.
Naked
against stars of hostile brilliance
he ably to guarded the tubers of spring.

My house carried its roots
To its roots.
With what –
with what, little sister,
should we pull and weave dreams
now?

Part IV
35
a
At seventy-seven funerals we circled the wall
and the wall stood.
From the promised land I called for you
I searched for you

among the piles of small shoes
as every holiday neared.

No man will heal
no heaven
the insult of your burning silence.

My blessing
did not light up your eyes.
My curse
came late.

b
--- to greet you
and if in only one whispering
word

that you were not a burden to us.
On the way.
Mom walked heavy.
I.
All you brothers.
And the desperate burden.
Our strength did not give out
only the earth gave out below us:

c
In sheds off limits to us
on cold stoves.
On beds made on steaming
dung.
Facing eyes damp
with foul joy.
In front of dogs
barking proudly –

even when shame came to my every limb
with transparent nails blinding
we clung to our flesh
as if alive.

Until we rested our heads
one beside the other.
Until we saw our faces
face to face.
At the edge of the redeeming pit

my sister
we remembered your going alone.

36
You were not privileged to be condemned to death
you did not enter a covenant of blood.
On the day that you were spoken for
behold you
are consecrated
by eagles
and cherubs.

37
I vow by you today
We shall not tell for better or for worse
of the world that was ruined. Only trembling
how will this passage of our lives
be told now--[2]

38
On this night all in snow.
Turn towards
the opening of the dogs' path.
Put on your dress
that our mother sewed for you
the one
that was left over with white pleats.

We do not have another dress.
We have no other prayer.
This is the sun
there is no other.
Let's rise up, sister
your hour has come!

39
Here you – here
them.
Until the night covers you like a canopy
let's go.

---

[2] Ibid., 75.

Say to them nicely
thank you.
Bless
every hour of
refuge.
Maybe they were not guilty –
there is always someone that is guiltier
(the sacrifice)
(the sacrifice)
perhaps they heard nothing
but the voice of their hearts:

You go, they said.
To go.
My fragile sister!
You must
go.
Come, sister,
quiet.
Quiet.

40
We knew from the beginning that there was fear of danger
to cross the soft earth
upon the glowing iron
and to say to the stranger
-- there was a world here.

She comes upon me from behind
-- a choir of stones
here!
In the city street that returns without answer
my sister's shaved head
breaks out from the wall:

41

From the underground grave

flattening me a mound of scorpions squeeze me

Quick and dark measured me the voice of my beloved

(gate)

(gate)

house of clay measures me	house of life bisects
(gate)	
(gate)	
who finds me who floods me	who fills me
My beloved is like a gazelle	
Pleasantness in the bitterness	for me
answer my beloved and say	to me
(past)	
(past)	

Part V
42
As when a fire dies.[3] Still everything is standing
and was already
extinguished – the fire
the vault of heaven,
the cloth
and the brightness
in the eyes of those who stand apart.

The generous will ingather together
those who were burning. To throw water
on each man
-- is there not a stone seething inside them?

43
As in the flood dammed too late
they will surely come to the shore
to lift with a heart full of mercy
the immigrant with swollen feet
into the book of chronicles,

to extend a brother's hand!
And they gave them a hand
despite their evil smell.
And until redemption was placed between heart and understanding

[3] Ibid., 79.

they cried,
they also clapped for them.
As in a dramatic tragedy that had come to an end
They ask the
souls
to step out before the curtain.

44
They came out.
They stretched out their whole hand for bread
they still fear hunger.
They stood.
When plates of soup were raised to their nose
they unwrapped from their leggings
a tin spoon.
And all who neared when they gnawed the bones
were like tyrants and thieves:

and they rose up.

In Europe the sun was shining
and they
bought black umbrellas
as if they were spears:

and while you stood trembling
I wanted to say to you
my sister!
Tomorrow they will be first to forget
they will cover up my blood.

45
To this day, the walls of Bikur Holim Hospital
are saturated with
the smell of sour urine
and mortal hopes.

In the old hospital
among walls of red brick
my sister died.

She was two hours old. Suddenly
her eyelids contracted to look –
my sister never screamed.

She was not introduced to the world.

46
You are silent.
But our mother used to light
a candle in memory of her soul
all her life.

The candles ran out in the ghetto and the oxygen
in the bunker.
My mother kindled her soul
on all the seas.

Our mother mourned a daughter
who never came into the world.
From 1940 to 1948 the rest of her sons were cut down
and she eulogized them
and she mourned my little sister who never came into the world.

You who saw

everything.
You who saw us
mother!
How could you mourn in front of us
someone
who never entered the world?

A mother stared at me a while.
And she stared at me for a long while.
Until her lips parted to speak
and she said my son
- she was not privileged to see
the light of the world!

And she came close.
And she prepared the candle.
And her had was holding
another wick.

No one will carry my mother's casket with me
no one will come close to my mother's casket with me
come to us the great plains
lead your eyes to the white river
it scoops out its channel and shoves

like the prow of a ship
heavy in the ice
and to say with me
my mother
my mother

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