

Fiction and Silence as Testimony: The Rhetoric of Holocaust in Dan Pagis

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Abstract In both real-life and fictional testimony, the problems of reliability-judgment multiply when witnesses report events that count as extraordinary. Historians and other judges then suspect the teller of misrepresentation. On such testimonies there accordingly converge the issues of reliability and rhetoric, truth and persuasion, norm and narrative discourse. To illustrate them, my essay juxtaposes the testimonial viewpoints and practices of two survivors of the Nazi camps: Primo Levi and Dan Pagis. The two may seem poles apart: while Levi is considered the quintessential witness, Pagis chose silence, just as his poems of fantasy stand opposed to Levi's documentary prose. Yet the comparison remains illuminating because even the divides prove thematic, central, and even dynamic, in that the writers undergo a symmetrical change. While the early Levi is relatively optimistic about the success of his project, his last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, expresses a great disillusionment about his life's work as a witness to the Holocaust. The change can be traced, first, to his growing doubts about the reliability of witnesses, and second, to the reactions of readers, which made him question the very human capacity to understand whatever lies beyond one's own horizon of experience. Over the years, either party to the dialogue has turned out, or become, unequal to its demanding role.

Pagis's alternative strategy of communication—fictional, poetic, implicit—is the focus of the argument. The Holocaust surfaces as late as his third book, mainly in a small group of poems. Their dense and subtle poetic composition functions for rhetorical, notably testimonial ends. Equally important is the fictionalizing of both the world and the discourse about it. A twofold dialogic process (inset versus framing) ensues, whereby we catch a glimpse of Pagis's own viewpoint on the subject he otherwise avoided. In rejecting typical witnessing material and techniques, Pagis changes

the very priorities of representation, from the standard problematic frontal attack to a defamiliarizing obliquity heightened by the resources of fantasy. Likewise with the shift from victim/victimizer relations as witnessed nowadays by a participant to their earliest precedents in the Abel/Cain affair and, more generally, to their sources in a God-created humankind. By this boldest departure, the target of attack itself ascends, or extends, from earth to heaven, and with it everything else. This strategy is exemplified and further generalized from the two poems that not only carry it to a limit but also thematize the issue of testimony in the process, beginning with their titles: “Testimony” and “Another Testimony.” Through such odd-looking obliquities, I conclude, Primo Levi’s unachievable ideal (as opposed to his splendid documentary performance) is realized in Pagis’s bold fictions of testimony.

. . . I am wholly immersed
 In the laws of heavenly linguistics and learn
 Conjugations, verbs, names
 Of silence.
 Dan Pagis, “Footprints”

1. Testimonial Communication, Reliability, and Genre: Some Introductory Comments

1.1. *Truth-Claiming versus Fictional Discourse of Testimony*

As a communicative act, testimony always involves dialogue, or at least envisages it. In real life, court procedure schematizes and dramatizes this interpersonal exchange, from beginning to end. There, the principle informs the giving of evidence: the cross-examination of witnesses, the back reference (oppositional, corroborating, amplifying) to earlier accounts of what happened, the variant stories (re)told by the lawyers, judge eventually included—all these are more or less direct, yet always dialogic, testimonial retrospects on an elusive past. The courtroom accordingly becomes a discourse arena, where each party, regardless of (personal, professional, institutional) viewpoint, is both an addresser and an addressee. Likewise with historical research: here evidence, not least from eyewitnesses, is gathered, evaluated, and interpreted on public record, challenging fellow historians to respond (agree or disagree, scrutinize the data’s meaning and relevance and, especially, reliability, arrive at new insights and explanations, etc.) in an ongoing debate.

Across all the differences between these fields, either encodes a large-scale, multivoice encounter of truth-claiming yet fallible representations, which are therefore always open to questioning, often to mutual negative judgment. Law and history thus foreground the communicative aspect of

testimony at large and the interplay between attestor and attestee: witnesses wish to impress their audiences, who, for their part, assess both the testimony and its source, comparing reporters and reports, or reporters with their own reports. The reliability issue cannot but arise, and only grows more entangled when witnesses contradict one another or when investigators, or the rest of us, must judge the words of a single witness.

To complicate the predicament further, the ground rules themselves variously diverge. Carlo Ginzburg (1992) has thus compared the two disciplinary (in effect, discourse) systems regarding the evidence of “just one witness.” “Law and history,” he maintains, “have different rules and different epistemological foundations. This is the reason why legal principles cannot be safely transferred into historical research” (ibid.: 85, with further references).

These familiar interchanges have their fictional counterparts. But since fiction is a *mediated* framework of communication, its “reports” are devised by the implied author, while the virtuality of its events and representations prevents readers from directly investigating the reliability of fictive testimony. Hence, the very notion of (un)reliability transforms in the case of fiction: from fidelity to the facts, or the “truth,” toward correspondence to the implied norms of the text. Here the reference point must be sought in the communicative premises and goals transmitted through the fictive discourse as a whole.¹

This opposes the entire range of truth-oriented discourse—testimonial as otherwise—whose own variability pales by comparison. Among measures of the opposition at issue, one bears on the law/history pair juxtaposed above so as to tighten their unity even where they ostensibly vary in evidentiary and “epistemological foundations.” Consider the pointed twist given to the “just one witness” rule (probably echoing biblical law) in Thomas Mann’s *The Holy Sinner*. Two Roman dignitaries are visited by the same dream, which reveals where and how to locate God’s nominee for a pope. The two men believe that the independent appearance of the dream to both of them guarantees its heavenly source, with supreme objectivity and reliability to match: “Just therein lies the wisdom of the Lamb, that it doubled the visitation and provided voice for two witnesses, whose unanimous declaration . . . must put an end to all doubts” (Mann 1961: 181). Only, the fictionality of both witnesses and dreams ironically puts their miraculous claim not beyond all doubt but beyond either legal or historical rules and resources of judgment: the reader has to evaluate it from within Mann’s universe of discourse.

1. For elaboration, see Yacobi 2000, with earlier references there (especially Yacobi 1981).

1.2. How Will a Survivor Bear Witness to the Incredible?

Opposing Approaches to the Holocaust

The problems of reliability-judgment multiply (in both real-life and fictional testimony) when witnesses report events that count as extraordinary. The improbability of these representations, by standard ontic norms, often leads historians and other judges to dismiss the teller as unreliable and the tale as lie, fantasy, misconception. Even in literature, readers have often tried to domesticate the fantastic—against the narrator’s or witness’s testimony—and certainly do not take it for realism, much less reality. Yet sometimes the incredible does occur, raising most sharply the issue of persuading readers to accept what outreaches their experience and threatens their world picture. Communication is then made difficult at both ends: witnesses look for effective means to overcome the suspicion of addressees, while the latter waver between an objective and a subjective reading of the problematic reports. On the testimony of incredible events, there accordingly converge the issues of reliability and rhetoric, truth and persuasion, norm and narrative discourse.

This obstacle to communication is the problem with which Primo Levi (1988: 11) opens his last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*: “The first news about the Nazi annihilation camps . . . delineated a massacre of such vast proportions . . . that the public was inclined to reject them because of their very enormity.” The SS militiamen predicted the scenario: “‘None of you,’ they told the victims, ‘will be left to bear witness, but even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him’” (ibid., quoted from Simon Wiesenthal). “Strangely enough,” Levi (ibid.: 12) adds, “this same thought (‘even if we were to tell it, we would not be believed’) arose in the form of nocturnal dreams produced by the prisoners’ despair” (the nightmare is first described in Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* [1961: 53–54]). In other words, even before they exposed themselves to, much less encountered, rejection from actual addressees, the victims had sensed that their future tale—if they survived—would provoke disbelief.²

With these convergent issues in mind, I would like to juxtapose, espe-

2. The one principled exception to the foreseen negative reception is the therapeutic viewpoint. For instance, Dori Laub (1992: 61), who quotes Levi’s account of the prisoners’ nightmares in this context, emphasizes the responsibility of society to solicit, elicit, and cherish the testimony of Holocaust survivors, no matter how problematic its factuality may turn out to be. See also his discussion of witnesses who cannot find “an addressable other” to listen to their traumatic memories (ibid.: 67–68). For the historians’ viewpoint, already outlined above, see the collection of essays in Friedlander 1992, where some of the participants investigate the reliability of witnesses. (E.g., besides Carlo Ginzburg’s essay on “Just One Witness,” Christopher Browning (1992) analyzes testimony given by perpetrators, Amos Funkenstein (1992) compares modern and medieval views of true/false testimony, and so forth.)

cially to oppose, the testimonial viewpoints and practices of two survivors of the Nazi camps, Primo Levi and Dan Pagis. Both are Jewish writers whose deserved fame was relatively slow to spread. Nowadays, though Levi is much the better known in this domain at least, it is no longer necessary to advocate Pagis's art, as it was when I wrote my first scholarly essay on him (Yacobi 1976; shortened English version in Yacobi 1988).³ Part of the reason, and my theme, lies in his increasing association with the Holocaust, at times overstated or indiscriminate.

This brings us to the differences. By traditional lines of division, the comparison between the two may seem odd. It nevertheless remains illuminating, because even the divides prove thematic, central, and least expected, dynamic, in that the writers undergo a symmetrical change vis-à-vis their respective beginnings.

To begin with the polarity already drawn in general (or generic) terms, there is the history/fiction mismatch. Levi is renowned for his documentary memoirs, whereas Pagis confined his writing to poetry, often fantastic, as well as to literary scholarship—the one notable exception being his unfinished autobiographical piece *Abba (Father)* (Pagis 1991: 341–70). For Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, who discusses Pagis's "Prosaics of Memory" in his later texts, the move toward documentation in *Abba* suggests a relevant point of comparison between the two writers, so that the apparent mismatch becomes a meaningful opposition in the trajectory of their respective creative careers. "The autobiographical gesture of the survivor generally precedes the emergence of a fictive self and establishes a baseline of reference and authenticity. . . . Primo Levi [is one] of the many examples that come to mind"; with Pagis, however, "autobiography appears at the end of a life of the most elaborate poetic evasions [from the real]" (DeKoven Ezrahi 1994: 130). Whereas DeKoven Ezrahi assimilates the fact/fiction contrast to her theory of Pagis's evolving poetics, particularly in his last years, my object is to bring out how the linkage between testimony and rhetoric in either of these writers correlates with their primary ontic choice (historical versus fictive). These correlations assume further distinctiveness and typicality, I believe, since they involve another contrast in discourse type, between prose and poetry: the first, moreover, established as *the* vehicle of (Holocaust) testimony, the second often neglected or dismissed as too "literary" for the job of record keeping. Here, indeed, the two discursive oppositions cross.

In turn, the next point of contact apparently widens yet further, and even motivates, this twofold divide. Given the respective writing chronologies,

3. Thus, Geoffrey Hartman (1996: 3) speaks about the fictional representation of the Holocaust through "the defamiliarization of words and events in great poetry, like that of Celan and Pagis."

the generic difference between fact and fiction, prose and poetry, actually arose late. The reason is to be found in the communicative polarity generalized by Primo Levi (1988: 149) himself: between “survivors . . . who remain silent [on their experience ‘there’] and those who speak.” While Levi, in his many books and tales on the subject, has become one of the famous speakers—“the quintessential ‘witness’” (DeKoven Ezrahi 1992: 389 n18)—Dan Pagis, though a man of letters, has definitely chosen silence, first complete and literal, then modulated on occasion into poetic reticence. For a long time, not only the witnesses’ typical dialogue with the public but also more private retrospects, or so much as contact with the topic, simply appear to go against the grain. The difference vis-à-vis Primo Levi runs all along the line.

Consider Pagis’s various forms of expression, scholarly, literary, ordinary. It is probably no accident that his chosen subject of research, as professor of Hebrew literature, was medieval Hebrew poetry, far removed in time and aesthetics: also in place, actually, because he focused on the Jewish literary tradition of Spain. His own poetry also tends to avoid mention of real people, places, and events—least of all, contemporary ones—or even to invent realistic equivalents: here the options for fantastic genre and determined silence ostensibly meet.⁴ In everyday and familial life, again, Pagis refused to share the story of what happened “there,” even with his wife, Ada. In her biographical memoir *A Sudden Heart*—written after his death—she explains that, since he avoided telling her anything beyond the barest outline or some obscure hints, she had to resort to the testimonies published by other deportees from his region who may have undergone a similar experience (Ada Pagis 1995: 9, 29, 36–41, 74).

Nor do the sporadic autobiographical details that begin to emerge in Pagis’s later texts break the rule of silence. They relate to the time prior to the Second World War (with two exceptions, “Denial” and “The Souvenir,” discussed below). Most to our purpose, although for some readers he is mainly associated with the Holocaust, this is due to a small—if memorable and effective—body of poems in his third book, *Gilgul* (*Transformation*, 1970). Even so, regardless of their intensity and fame, these poems tell us absolutely nothing of the author’s—or anybody else’s—real story of sur-

4. Ostensibly, let me say in advance, because the case will prove to be more intricate, against surface appearances, as will the negative parity between his forms of discourse. DeKoven Ezrahi (1990: 349) calls the choice of academic expertise a “secure refuge for the scholar which is both aesthetically and existentially unavailable to the poet.” While her description of the scholar’s escape is valid, the following analysis will question the aesthetic and existential constraints she ascribes to the poet. We shall see, instead, how Pagis brilliantly transcends the obvious, customary routes of writing about one’s life experience and of Holocaust testimony in particular.

vival. It is therefore odd to find him on Berel Lang's (1990: 138) list of poets who "avoid documentary techniques, [yet their] references to specific events in the Nazi genocide are nonetheless *so explicitly detailed* that historical assertion and poetic abstraction often clash" (my emphasis).⁵

In short, not only does the bulk of his poetic output characterize him as one of those survivors who "remain silent" on their past history and observations in the camps; the few poems nominally targeted on that past are demonstrably both impersonal and devoid of specific facts. This holds even for the two exemplary poems we will read below—entitled "Testimony," no less. The question is why. More precisely: is it a purely aesthetic and rhetorical choice, or one determined by the uncongenial, perhaps untouchable subject matter? Is it the artist innovating or the survivor still suffering? While the answer on the psychobiographical level is beyond my scope and intentions,⁶ the poetical art does enable and repay inquiry. Here a more detailed comparison with Primo Levi can teach us a valuable lesson about strategies of fictional versus historical testimony, from their rationales and balance sheets to the specifics of their practice.

2. Communicative Expectations Frustrated: The Sequence and Lessons of Primo Levi's Witnessing

As already implied in the quotes from him above, Primo Levi did not content himself with writing his story in various forms. Throughout his career, particularly at the end, he monitored and examined its impact and persuasiveness. In this regard, if followed diachronically, his attitude reveals a marked change over time. While the early Levi is relatively optimistic about the success of his project in affecting his audience, his last book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, expresses a great disillusionment. The change, I believe, can be traced, first, to his growing doubts about the reliability of witnesses and, second, to the reactions of readers, which made him question the very human capacity to understand whatever lies beyond one's own horizon of experience. Over the years, either party to the dialogue has turned out, or become, unequal to its demanding role.⁷

5. As we shall see, in his avoidance of "specific events," Pagis is often quite as "abstract" (in Lang's term) as Celan, whom Lang (1990: 138–40) cites as an opposed case because of the lack of historical reference in his poems. For a reevaluation of Celan himself, see Wolosky 2001.

6. It has become fashionable, though, among recent analysts. For example, see Carole Angier's (2002) biography of the former and the work of Sandbank (1988, 1993, 2003), DeKoven Ezrahi (1990, 1994), and Kartun-Blum (1988, 2000) on Pagis.

7. This, again, apart from any noncommunicational, biographical developments that may have influenced his viewpoint on his life's work. For relevant details, see the two recent biographies, Angier 2002 and Thomson 2003.

On returning alive from Auschwitz, as Levi repeatedly explains, he was driven by a strong urge to tell what he saw and experienced there. This urge went beyond the emotional or psychological need to unburden himself (in the manner of the Ancient Mariner, whom he frequently cites) and even beyond the duty to expose Nazi atrocities as such. On top of these, he felt a moral obligation to transmit the last testament of those who died, to make their voice heard, through and along with his own, in what he saw as a historic universal courtroom.⁸ “Speakers” like him, he (1988: 149) maintains, “speak because they know they are witnesses in a trial of planetary and epochal dimensions.”

As with the urge to bear witness, so with the competence. In the first years after the war, Levi optimistically believed that his training in chemistry had qualified him to serve as a faithful, reliable, effective vessel of testimony and testament. All he needed was to be clear, precise, orderly, and restrained, to supply as many factual data as he could, and to avoid emotionalism and subjective commentary. In short, he should and could tell it like a chemist, in the style and method of a scientific report.

Inversely, his discussion of Paul Celan’s failure to communicate highlights afresh his own credo on the subject. Acknowledging that Celan’s obscure writing was “a reflection of the obscurity of his fate and his generation,” Levi yet never justifies it. Instead, he equates Celan’s poetic style with the “truncated” language of the dying and the mad, and rejects the assumption that only disorder on the page can reflect the analogous chaotic state of the human world. True, clarity “is a necessary, but not sufficient condition,” yet the fact remains that “if one is not clear there is no message at all” (Levi 1989: 173–75).⁹ This may sound less naive than the writer’s immediate post-Auschwitz confidence, but the scientific image and guideline of testimony writing does not change in essentials—or not yet—and he did his best to act upon it.

Moreover, the early Levi was quite as sure and explicit about the effect he would like to produce, especially on Germans. In *The Truce* (1965: 218–19) he recounts how, on his way back from Auschwitz, when his train stopped in Munich, “I felt I was moving among throngs of insolvent debtors, as if everybody owed me something, and refused to pay. . . . I felt that everybody should interrogate us, read in our faces who we were, and listen to our tale

8. For his allusions to Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s teller, see the chapter on “Chrome” in *The Periodic Table* (1984) and the epigraph to *The Drowned and the Saved*. For a narrative that includes the testament of one of those who did not survive, see, for instance, “Rappoport’s Testament” (1995).

9. I owe this reference to DeKoven Ezrahi (1992: 263–64). Referring to Celan’s “untransparent work,” Geoffrey Hartman (1996: 54) concedes that “most of the time . . . transmissibility and truth move into opposition.”

in humility” (my emphasis). The debtors may then already have looked like refusing to pay in the coin of humble inquiry and listening, but the creditors’ demand on them was still to be made, “our tale” still to be told. Later, on hearing (approximately in 1959) that his first book on Auschwitz was to be translated into German, he (1988: 168) responded with grim anticipation:

Everything changed and became clear to me: yes, I had written the book in Italian, for Italians, for my children, for those who did not know, those who did not want to know, those who were not yet born, those who, willing or not, had assented to the offense; but its true recipients, those against whom the book was aimed like a gun were they, the Germans. Now the gun was loaded.

Where the earlier likening of the Germans to insolvent debtors projects the survivor as a moral superior, whose witnessing should be received in appropriate humility, the figure of testimony as a loaded gun bespeaks an adversarial relation between the parties: the guilty target audience hostile or resistant, the victimized writer resorting in turn to violence, if only within a narrative encounter. His wielding of a figurative weapon implies the necessity and the determination to force the truth down their throats as well as a strong belief in his power over these “true recipients”—and a fortiori over the less culpable in Italy and elsewhere. Whether as a debt owed or as a gun pointed, the testimony should work.

Thirty years later, when he saw revisionist “histories” published and the revival of neo-Fascist groups in Italy, Levi was not nearly as optimistic. The less so because the success of his own documentary writing had by then elicited numerous responses to it, and some of these reactions, particularly from German readers, laid bare a wide discrepancy between his intended effect and his actual impact on the public. In *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988), he devotes a chapter to “Letters from Germans” (167–97). In the majority of cases, Levi comments, the respondents have failed the basic test of honestly facing their national past. The discovery that his German readers did not and perhaps could not understand—far less accept—what he was trying to tell them about their responsibility must have been among the chief sources of his pessimism. The debt went unrecognized; the gun misfired, after all, or, in effect, proved to be unloaded.

But the contrast presented to the earlier confidence and enthusiasm goes much further than the visible failure of the “true recipients.” To start with, it extends to the transmitter’s side: in this last book, Levi examines and generalizes his own responsibility for the problems in communication. For example, the chapter called “The Memory of the Offense” explicitly questions the reliability of all surviving tellers, himself included. Among other sources of untrustworthiness, Levi names the suppression and distortion of

truth, conscious or unconscious, in the confessions of the oppressors. But the victims, even when most intent on publishing the truth, remain likewise fallible as witnesses, and for more reasons. Levi thus calls attention, for instance, to the constraints imposed by the prisoners' suffering at the time, to their ignorance of their geographical whereabouts, to their mistakes about the complex structure of the *Lager*, to the limited comprehension of those who did not understand German, and to the effect of forgetfulness thereafter.¹⁰

Compounding the suffering-I's with the narrating-I's limitations, these factors operate against testimonial reliability. But then, whose "I" outlived the agony there and then to turn narrator? This question haunts the book. As Levi recalls throughout, the survivors generally stayed alive because they had been the favored inmates of the concentration camp, while those who had suffered most did not live to give evidence. Of course, being favored in hell is a relative matter par excellence, a peculiar distinction; yet the crucial difference it made to the victims there carries over to the accounts of victimage given after the event. "Privileged prisoners were a minority within the Lager population, nevertheless they represent a potent majority among survivors" (ibid.: 40). Apart from expressing the well-known feelings of guilt, this means that the beneficiaries of privilege are less-authoritative tellers than would be those silenced forever—if only because the latter alone have undergone the worst. Testimonies, in short, have rarely come from the deepest abyss (implied in the book's title, a quote from Dante's *Inferno*).¹¹

Equally painful is the realization of the limited ability of readers to understand—hence to believe, let alone associate with themselves—a narrative beyond their normal human experience. In a suggestive chapter entitled "Stereotypes," Levi (1988: 151) tries to answer and, more important, to diagnose such repeatedly posed questions as "Why did you not escape? Why did you not rebel?" The problem already attaches to the questions themselves, which give away their origin in current unrealistic formulas (above all, those of popular literature or show business) taken at face value and retrojected onto the brute reality of the camps. The anecdote of the "professional" advice retroactively offered by a fifth-grader exemplifies the communicative impasse in a nutshell.

10. In another chapter, he (Levi 1988: 139) feels obliged to comment about a specific event, "It is one of the few episodes whose authenticity I have been able to verify (it is a reassuring operation: after a span of time . . . one can doubt one's memory)."

11. Nor does Levi exempt himself from the rule. As Ian Thomson (2003: 504–5) rightly claims, this book is "more argumentative, tortured and skeptical than *If This Is a Man*." See in particular the explicit self-accusation—typical of the merciless self-analysis here—in the two consecutive essays, significantly entitled "The Gray Zone" and "Shame" (Levi 1988: 36–69, 70–87).

After studying for a few minutes the map of the camp that he had asked Levi to draw on the board, the boy was ready with a “simple” plan for Levi’s escape. Levi (*ibid.*: 157) comments:

Within its limits, it seems to me that this episode illustrates quite well the gap that exists and grows wider every year between things as they were “down there” and things as they are represented by the current imagination fed by approximate books, films and myths. It slides fatally toward simplification and stereotype, a trend against which I would like here to erect a dike.

As the book unrolls, his sense of powerlessness vis-à-vis the gulf between his past experience and the younger members of his audience grows more and more acute, in view of the counterforces at work. How to bridge the gulf against such odds, when everything nowadays conspires to widen it further? Toward the end, he openly admits that, for the young people of the 1980s (the time of his writing), the memories of survivors have become “matters associated with their grandfathers: distant, blurred, ‘historical,’ far removed from the ‘urgent’ problems of their present” (*ibid.*: 198). So, dubious reliability at one end of communication now goes with stereotyping at the other, loss of faith in the testimonial word with a sense of a losing battle against the trend and time itself.

The last (and not the least bitter) source of disillusionment was finding these two ends outrageously crossed in the use made of his texts to defend Nazi collaborators. Worse, the defenders even pressed into unholy service his bleak revaluation of testimony in *The Drowned and the Saved* itself, including the chapters I have singled out as most self-accusatory. One notorious case in point involved the Austrian collaborator Kurt Waldheim, who after the war rose to offices as high as secretary-general of the United Nations and, later, the elected president of Austria. When his Nazi past came to light, Giorgio Bocca, an Italian journalist, “tried to exonerate Waldheim by quoting from [the chapter on] ‘The Gray Zone’ in the Austrian’s defense. . . . ‘Bocca has twisted my words,’ Levi said, pale-faced and trembling,” in response to those who furiously confronted him with the quote (Thomson 2003: 506–7).

(Fortunately for Levi, he did not live to see his words likewise twisted even by fellow Jews—and, compounding the irony, now in the literary sphere—to defend another collaborator who had achieved success, Paul de Man. This influential literary scholar, we recall, never referred to his past, not even when asked about it. But after his death, it was discovered that he had written anti-Semitic articles for a pro-Nazi journal in occupied Belgium. When this scandal broke out, Shoshana Felman enlisted *The Drowned and the Saved* to exculpate de Man, approvingly quoting from Levi’s descrip-

tion of the “Gray [ethically ambiguous] Zone” that separated the inmates of the concentration camp. What she neglects to mention is the fact that, along with the unique moral geography of the death camps, the book highlights throughout the sharp discrepancy between the relatively normal conditions of life under the Nazi regime in the occupied territories and the unprecedented exigencies of survival in the camp. There, as Levi repeatedly points out, one could not stay alive more than a few weeks unless one resorted to some “combination.” Hence, the gray zone metaphor is specific to the concentration camp while totally irrelevant to the situation of people like de Man in the world outside. With particular reference to testimony, moreover, the defense of the Belgian collaborator similarly abuses Levi’s agonized realization that “we the survivors [having been spared the deepest abyss] are not the true witnesses” [Levi 1988: 83, in the chapter entitled “Shame”]. Appropriating this retrospective self-analysis in turn, Felman [1992: 139] claims that de Man’s “later theories bear implicit witness . . . to the Holocaust’s historical disintegration of the witness.” Felman thus draws an incredible analogy between extremes. The survivor of the death camp who, decades after, overscrupulously questions his own testimonial reliability, just because he has been “privileged” and emerged alive [as opposed to those who died within weeks], allegedly joins forces with the Belgian citizen who decided to serve the enemy’s propaganda machine, never expressed regret afterward or even acknowledged his act of collaboration, but instead helped, as literary theorist, to deconstruct the witnessing of others. In Felman’s appropriation, we simply encounter here two “gray zone” victims of Nazism, later to become two critics of testimony regarding Nazi atrocities: Primo Levi and Paul de Man.)

Bearing all these second thoughts in mind, we can gain a better understanding of Levi’s decision to open *The Drowned and the Saved* with the terrible shock recurrently experienced by many survivors: they dreamed of the return home and the welcome and the fellow feeling, only to confront the rejection (more or less brutal, more or less uncaring) of the tale they wanted to tell. The opening’s dream-turned-waking-nightmare is presumably intended to encapsulate the major theme of testimony in crisis. As Levi’s last book unfolds, however, the details turn out even bleaker than prefigured. The living nightmare, it then emerges, recalls or indeed realizes a prevision experienced in Auschwitz: the “nocturnal dreams” of the world’s disbelief, generated by “the prisoners’ despair” and voiced by the SS personnel (Levi 1988: 11–12). Not the hopeful but the fearful and mocking scenario of testimony came true before their eyes. What is still worse, with the passage of time, the impediments to appropriate reception multiply and harden: the earlier indifference and misunderstanding now converge

with, or sharpen into, stereotyping, self-dissociation, revisionism, abuse. Nor is it the details of misreception alone that darken as time passes but also the whole diagnosis of testimonial failure, which now extends in long retrospect to problems with the witnesses themselves: their access to the Holocaust realities at the time—in the various regards we discussed—and their memory since. Accordingly, even as Levi nevertheless wishes to erect in his writing a dike against current trends, he is no longer sure of success. With questionable, at best lower-order reliability at the truth-witnessing end now joined to mounting unresponsiveness, isn't testimonial communication today another foredoomed dream?

3. An Alternative Strategy of Communication: Pagis's Poetics as Targeted on the Holocaust

This unhappy comedown in powers, prospects, even publics, logically marks an advance—or regress—toward the poetics of silence. Levi's last book would appear to support and justify in late retrospect Dan Pagis's refusal all along to give a personal, factual account of what "really" happened there. Instead, Pagis opted for an oblique poetic discourse of testimony. Judging by his practice, he may well have intuited beforehand the various problems latent in the claim of history telling made by a survivor, rather than having to discover them the hard way. They are even reflected in the apparent mimesis of testimony with which the poem bearing that name greets us—readable as an indirect metatestimonial comment. Later, the comment unmistakably surfaced on public record and accounts for the silence broken (or, rather, modulated into fictional utterance) in a set of poems, "Testimony" among them. As their writer explained in an interview given shortly after the appearance of the relevant volume, *Transformation* (*Gilgul*, 1970), for years he had believed that the Holocaust defied literary expression "because the reality exceeded human bounds, reality overcame the letters" (quoted in Ada Pagis 1995: 89). Or elsewhere, psychologically, "I tried to ignore the years of concentration camps, the Second World War. . . . Not only did I not write about the Shoah, but I tried to ignore the subject." Then, following the trial of Adolf Eichmann and the sight of a replica of his own childhood home in his uncle's apartment in New York, he changed his mind. "Only after about twenty years, when the subject began collecting its debt from me, I couldn't not write about it" (Pagis 1986: 15; my translation).

However, the change of mind about the possibility of writing never included joining the ranks of straightforward fact-tellers and facing all the obstacles attached to the enterprise. On the contrary, he avoided those

obstacles in favor of an alternative, if not opposed, strategy. Even when repaying the debt to the subject, “I could not write about it directly” (ibid.). As we shall see, the Hebrew poet carefully distances the Holocaust narrative through a coordinated set of devices, notably fictionalizing (participants, viewers, speakers included) and the dramatization of a silence. My argument is that this strategy not only enables him to tell the untellable, retell what has often been told already; it also transforms the (re)telling into a novel and thought-provoking communicative experience, with strong implications for testimonial rhetoric and reliability.

Eight poems represent Pagis’s artistic perspective on the Holocaust as such.¹² A section entitled “Sealed Railway-Car” in his third book, *Transformation* (1970: 21–27; also in Pagis 1991: 134–40), includes seven short poems: “Europe, Late,” “Written in a Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car,” “The Roll Call,” “Testimony,” “Another Testimony,” “Instructions for Stealing the Border,” and “Draft of a Reparations Agreement.” The eighth and much longer poem “Footprints” appears there in a section of its own (Pagis 1970: 31–36, 1991: 141–46).¹³ To appreciate the uniqueness of these poems in his oeuvre—beginning with their imagined realities, down to the speech events—it is important to observe that in a few late poems Pagis does insert bits and pieces from his real life. Not that these late writings tell us very much about the historical person and past. Indeed, unlike the *Transformation* cycle, only two of them contain events from the Holocaust, and without particular (let alone sustained) relevance to testimonial literature and rhetoric at that.

Thus, in “Denial” (Pagis 1991: 276), the speaker glances back at a short-sighted “uncle” whose glasses were snatched by “them” before “he was taken.” The “uncle” is never identified, nor is the mini-episode blown up or dialogized or presented as testimony. Moreover, Pagis camouflages the tale by introducing it as a figurative vehicle to a tenor: “the smaller riots [pogroms]” are for me “like that uncle who was short-sighted . . .” rather than using the uncle’s fate to illustrate or even simply applying it to his case. As a matter of fact, the simile’s explicit point of comparison itself involves nonessential details. Grotesquely so, because it analogizes the speaker’s

12. In what follows, I outline how Pagis eventually brings his art of poetry to bear on this painful and tricky domain. Those interested in the larger poetics, or in further exploring the Holocaust connection within its framework, may want to consult my earlier work on the poet, e.g., Yacobi 1996 (with further references there), 2001–2002.

13. Most of these were translated by Stephen Mitchell (Pagis 1989: 29–41). For an analysis of the whole group, in the context of *Transformation*, see Sokoloff 1984. On “Written in a Pencil,” see DeKoven Ezrahi 1990: 343–45, 1992: 271–72 and passim; Felstiner 2003. On “Draft,” see Yacobi 1976: 33–35, 1988: 111–13; DeKoven Ezrahi 1990: 345–47. On “Footprints,” see DeKoven Ezrahi 1990: 352–55; Yacobi 1990: 123–25.

shortsighted memory (which cannot see that past “sharply”) to the past victim’s literal “short-sightedness,” followed by a digression into narrative: the snatched glasses, the uncle’s wonder “but why?,” his groping to the snatchers’ amusement before they took him away. And “of course, there is no comparison here.” The poem, in other words, is far more concerned with the tricks played on memory by time (e.g., the mechanisms of “Denial”) than with testifying about the Holocaust proper as experienced and remembered. On a more personal note, in “The Souvenir” (ibid.: 262; English translation 1989: 9) the obviously autobiographical speaker tells how, forty years after he had been driven from his hometown, he saw a “snapshot” of it. Beyond the understatement, “The town where I was born, Radautz in the district of Bukovina, ejected me when I was ten years old,” we never learn how and why he was driven out. The prose poem focuses, instead, on the present “reunion,” via the photograph, and moves at the end toward free associations.

In both poems, Pagis assumes that his readers are familiar with the general historical context and will easily set his own story within it; but the details brought to light remain too meager and marginal for witnessing.¹⁴ In contrast to these real yet scattered fragments of Holocaust memory, the group of poems from *Transformation* not only opt for fictional representation—or metamorphosis, in accordance with the volume’s title—often pushing it to the limit of the otherworldly. Within their remote invented frameworks, anything like documentation is still less in evidence—whether camouflaged personal references or hard particulars of time, setting, identity, let alone terror and agony. These hallmarks of survivor memoirs are conspicuously absent even, or above all, in disguise; and, again, on artistic principle. “For at first the details may horrify / But in the end they are tedious” (“Autobiography,” Pagis 1991: 165; English translation 1989: 5). Yet nor do these poems fragment their images of Holocaust. Even if read as a set, they multiply unities: their variations on the theme go with a temporal continuity of events and a poetic art oriented to testimonial rhetoric.

As regards the happenings in the imagined world, their continuity indeed stops short of an ongoing plot or a common protagonist, except for the victims in general. But a sort of a narrative line does run through the “Sealed Railway-Car” section: it opens with a poem about the complacency of the victims-to-be on the verge of catastrophe, proceeds to the catastrophe in the happening or as witnessed, and finishes with the debate on reparation agreements. As for nonsequential unity, the variations played on the Holo-

14. The later Pagis was much more informative about his life in interviews (e.g., Genossar 1983: 33) than in the text of “Souvenir.”

caust theme here extend from the matter to the manner, in the service of a dominant communicative goal.

For our purposes, a set of common denominators are at the heart of this strategy. Enough emphasis has already been laid on the selective principle, whereby the fiction itself avoids references to specific Holocaust events—as opposed to a handful of symbolic world-items, like “smoke” and/or “boots.” Standing for an otherwise untold catastrophe, such recurrent key items also enter into the dense and subtle poetic composition, with its rhetorical, notably testimonial end. And what I mean here by “poetic” is not just artistic but poetry-specific. Among literary kinds, poetry best motivates the drastically selective reference to the world, while best lending itself to multilevel and interlevel enrichment, by way of compensation, as it were.

This needs to be stressed for two reasons. The more general, or generic, one has already arisen during the comparison with Primo Levi, namely: the tendency to view prose rather than poetry as the natural medium of testimony, which itself springs from the yet deeper tendency to equate the testimonial with the factual and the documentary. The generic bias, however, also intersects here with one immediately related to our corpus. For many readers, Pagis’s art and with it his communication look simple, transparent, undistanced: the poetry’s felt effectiveness gets mistaken for plain directness.

Thus, Naomi Sokoloff (1984: 218, also 217, 219, 222, 227) doubtless appreciates “the importance of communication” in the Holocaust poems and the “request for the reader’s response and reaction.” Yet in complimenting his “simplicity of diction and directness of address” (ibid.: 220), she limits her reading to the discourse surface, missing (as we shall see) not only the distancing and doubling effect of fictionality but also the intricate play of irony, subtext, and related hidden complexities. Again, without flattening the poetry, Geoffrey Hartman (1996) attributes its impact to its relative accessibility. Noting the linkage between two intertextual clues in Pagis’s “Testimony” (1991: 137; English translation 1989: 33), Hartman (1996: 55) compares the poet with Celan: “Even a less opaque artist, like Dan Pagis, can use dense literary allusions to create something strong and inimitable.” Strength of impact now allegedly correlates some opacity. But what does “opaque” mean? If something like what Primo Levi denounces as “obscure,” then the relativized comparison with Celan may have a point for better or worse (if only apropos the set of Holocaust poems). Even so, this moderated opacity will not by itself—and in Pagis does not—exclude complexity, obliquity, ambiguity, economy, zigzag development any more than it will the density acknowledged by Hartman or less value-laden poetic fea-

tures. On the contrary, we observe Pagis's strategy drawing together these resources of high art. He both layers and linearizes the text of the poem, so that a first impression of "simplicity of diction and directness of address" (in Sokoloff's phrase) is followed by our gradual realization of the underlying poetic and communicative antipole, disguised opacity itself included.¹⁵

Equally important—and likewise to be closely traced in the readings below—Pagis dovetails this poetic-rhetorical structuring with the turn toward fictionalizing the world: setups, characters, (discourse) events, linkages, plot movements, time at large.

Among a host of examples, we encounter there impossible participants: dead, nonexistent, mythological figures, like the angel of death, or a "feigned man" instructed how to transform into a non-Jewish, blue-eyed other. The latter instance, advising an unearthly entity to metamorphose, exemplifies a peculiar and protean rule of imaginative crossing. Thereby, the communication (speaker, addressee, message) we immediately encounter is no less fictionalized than the world in which it proceeds. This not only redoubles but compounds the options for distancing, estrangement, or sheer maneuvering available to the poet's implicit ("silent") communication with his own audience in the extrafictional frame. Where Primo Levi and others have encountered incredulous objections in rendering the Holocaust as it was, Pagis weaves, radicalizes, and multiplies his own fantasy within a bolder, or at any rate more devious, approach to the survivor's witnessing and credibility.

So a twofold dialogic process (inset and framing, inset versus framing) variously unrolls in the "Sealed Railway-Car" poems, most often under the guise of dramatic monologue with some antirealistic elements or crosses. The invitation to metamorphosis or the entire setup of our exemplar, "Testimony," would be cases in point; while the message left by Eve in "a sealed railway-car" offers a written equivalent. Yet extraordinary discourses get enacted even without recourse to the supernatural, as when the soothing assurance that "here it will never happen" is cut short in midsentence by the outbreak of war ("Europe, Late"). Or the shock effect may arise from the zigzag processing of the discourse as well as from the imagined reality itself. Consider the modest proposal with which the section ends. The speaker pretends to advocate a "Draft of a Reparations Agreement." But his ensuing fantastic proposal to reverse the movement of time and existence (so that "you" victims "will still be living" at the juncture before Final Solu-

15. Elsewhere, Geoffrey Hartman (1992: 334) nostalgically recalls "an art of obliquity" that may have been swept away by the *Shoah*. Arguably, the Pagisian poetics of indirection is a new variant of such art that came out of the same destruction.

tion) uncovers his impossible audience, his ironic mask, and his true intent to invalidate all manners of reparation.¹⁶

As notable are the bids for dialogic fullness, even amid antirealism and ostensibly one-way utterance. In each poem, the speaker addresses a specific audience, with the occasion possibly marked by unique (if tacit and less than exact) space-time coordinates. The flirtatious promise to a lady on “the promenade” that “it is early, early” is thus juxtaposed with the ominous title, “Europe, Late,” and the given chronological date (“thirty nine and a half”). The dramatism of the dialogue scenes is enhanced, for example, when the first two monologues are cut abruptly or when a speaker clashes with his audience, the way the proposer of resurrection does with a crowd of alleged troublemakers. And there, as in two other poems, the speech event gains yet further dramatization from the echoing of the interlocutor’s part in the exchange (“Draft of a Reparations Agreement,” “Europe, Late,” “Testimony”).

This brief illustration from the group at issue is enough to refute afresh—now in world-creating terms—the claim about its “simplicity of diction and directness of address.” The very fictionalizing of reality makes the address to us oblique, mediate, distanced rather than direct, because the poet then communicates with his reader only through the other(worldly) existence and movement interposed between them. How much more so when the address itself is fictionalized too along the lines just exemplified. As a result, not only does our removal from the poet (or the poetic frame) widen and tangle. The “diction” can no longer remain “simple” either, because it has been projected into the fiction: it expresses one voice while implying another, each with its own dialogic partner to match.

Accordingly, this body of texts also undercuts DeKoven Ezrahi’s (1992: 271) general statement about Pagisian poetics: “The conversation is entirely a social one between reader and text. There are no lyrical subjects or objects, no significant addresses to an other within the poems themselves . . . no real search for the dialogic moment.” Instead, these poems typically represent an overt dialogue between fictive speakers and addressees—often unrealistic—so as to motivate the implied author’s dialogue with us readers: here, concerning the Holocaust as experienced, judged, attested. In short, the poetic speech event develops a two-level communication, whereby we catch a glimpse of Pagis’s own viewpoint on the subject that he otherwise avoids.

As concerns testimony, however, the strategy may well look double-edged. From this viewpoint, the threat to the power, the credibility, even

16. For an analysis, see Yacobi 1988: 111–13.

the relevance of the author's implicit discourse about the Holocaust lies not so much in its own artfulness as in the extreme fictionality combined with unspecificity that typify the represented world and discourse world through which he speaks to us. If the thick representations of Auschwitz, communicated with all the mastery of a Primo Levi, failed the test of testimonial credibility and dialogue—in his eyes, at either end—what will thin, unanchored, mediated, otherworldly images of catastrophe achieve? The frame's manifold removal from the inset, then, certainly promotes the latter's autonomy: as (vocal, figural) dialogue within (silent, author/reader) dialogue, poles apart in existence and reference, whereabouts and knowledge. But that removal, it appears, must cut both ways, to the loss of value and impact as an act of witnessing the most unbelievable horrors perpetrated in human history.

So it would indeed cut if Pagis meant to offer just another sustained documentary record of the Holocaust by a survivor with a claim to the narrative whole's truth-likeness, for a change, instead of literal truth. But then his aims are themselves essentially different from the recording tradition, even at its Primo Levi best, and the means adjusted to them. Pagis would, instead, change the very priorities of representation. Thus his shift from the whole unspeakable tale to a telling synecdoche, for example, or from the victimage itself to its tranquil antecedents ("Europe, Late") and controversial aftermath ("Draft of a Reparations Agreement"): in brief, from the standard problematic frontal attack to a defamiliarizing obliquity heightened by the resources of fantasy. Likewise with the shift from victim/victimizer relations as witnessed nowadays by a participant to their earliest precedents in the Abel/Cain affair and, more generally, to their sources in a God-created humankind. By this boldest and most original departure, the target of attack itself ascends, or extends, from earth to heaven, and with it everything else: the indirections, the estrangement of the by now familiar witnessing context and mode, the rationale for the appeal to the otherworldly in the service of testimony.

This entire strategy is best exemplified and further generalized from the two poems that not only carry it to a limit but also thematize the issue of testimony in the process, beginning with their titles. And the titles, as well as the given order within the Holocaust section, also indicate a movement from "Testimony" to "Another Testimony."

4. The Alternative Rhetoric of Testimony at Work

TESTIMONY

No no: they definitely

Were human beings [literally, sons of man/*Adam*]: uniforms, boots.

How to explain. They were created in the image [*tselem*].

I was a shade [*tseel*].

I had another creator.

And He by his grace left nothing in me that would die.

And I fled to Him, rising light, blue,

Pacified, I would even say: apologetic [*mitnatsel*]:

Smoke to smoke omnipotent

That has neither body nor likeness.

(Pagis 1991: 137)¹⁷

A larger dialogue scene containing the given utterance suggests itself in the very first words and imitates a regular witness-auditor interaction. The monologue begins as an objection to an interlocutor's previous statement, perhaps "They must have been inhuman." Emphatic denial is at once followed by counterstatement, "No no: they definitely / Were human beings." So "Testimony" stages, via oblique echoes, an ongoing dialogue in the form of a dramatic monologue. The dialogue, moreover, appears to involve the examination of a witness, whether in an actual courtroom, with war criminals in the dock, or as part of a historical inquiry or debate. In either case, it sounds like a mimesis of a real testimonial exchange, only begun in medias res. And the speaker sounds like a character witness for the defense, now under cross-examination, insisting on "their" humanity.

Soon enough, though, the speaker turns to other matters, with a perceptible shift (if not reversal) of attitude. In the second stanza, he defines his own identity not in all-"human" parallel, but in contrast to the unnamed "them." The third stanza then unfolds a condensed version of an escape tale that, in its turn, proves to be a cover for the indictment of a third, super-human party. Finally, this stanza raises afresh the question of the speaker's identity and, with it, of the very occurrence of a testimony scene.

But a closer look at the first stanza, with its seemingly univocal defense of "them," already reveals there the speaker's (or at least the poet's) rhetorical technique of diversion as a means of subversion. His opening double denial, "No no," seems to underline the ensuing affirmation that "they definitely / Were human beings"; and the adverb "definitely," placed for emphasis at the end of the first, enjambed line, reinforces the counterstate-

17. My translation; compare Mitchell's freer version in Pagis 1989: 33.

ment in advance, just as its colloquial tone does the sense of the witness's voice. Yet no sooner has the affirmation been made than it proves quite hollow, or ironic, since it appeals for support to what is at most, if at all, the lowest common denominator of "human beings" (or, literally, sons of man/*Adam*).¹⁸ Is the irony intended by the speaker himself—as distinct from the implied author behind his back? Or is it directed against the speaker along with those he declares to be human, exposing his unreliability? The immediate sequel would appear to support the hypothesis that, counter to the first impression of the speaker as a witness for the defense, he shares the implied irony.

Consider how he now proceeds. Officially, our witness sounds eager to strengthen his earlier favorable counterstatement, first, by citing illustrative evidence ("uniforms, boots"), then by offering a reason, which grounds the humanity of the accused in their divine origin and analogy ("How to explain. They were created in the image"). Yet these two apparent reinforcements turn out equally unsuitable for the purpose. On scrutiny, either of these supporting arguments betrays a non sequitur, and their failure discredits the witness or, if intended, the claim.

Thus, as is typical of Pagis vis-à-vis the documentary mainstream, the illustrative evidence is remarkably meager. Along with its unspecificity, further, it avoids retrospection on any determinate events that would show "them" in action interpretable as humane: behaving decently to qualify for the name *ben adam* (or *mensch*) in its positive colloquial sense. The speaker, instead, cites two items of dress. In objectivity at least, if not in particularity, he may accordingly appear to be arguing like a "chemist," except that the items selected, uniforms and boots, hardly define or establish humanity. In the Genesis story (to which the discourse immediately goes on to allude, as part of the "explanation" that "proves" the humanity of the accused), the

18. In Hebrew, *adam* is both a generic name for humans and the name of the first God-created man. Either way, the idiom "son of man/*Adam*" (*ben-adam*) thus implies humanity's common descent. The poem's Hebrew original even deepens the hollowness of the idiom via the colloquial idiomatic connotations of "to be a human being," i.e., to behave in a decent manner. Instead of settling for outer traits, easily manifestable by humans as such, the understatement thus proceeds to hint at the moral imperatives which were inhumanly violated by the accused. See a parallel use in "A Modest Reckoning" (also in *Transformation*), which correlates Darwinian evolution with moral decline. There, furthermore, the protagonist's mentor, the gorilla, criticizes the slowly evolving protohuman for his refusal to grow into and accept his role as a human being ("a son of man"). If anything, in the Hebrew original of that poem, "man" (*adam*) rhymes instead with "blood" (*dam*), as if etymologically connected (Pagis 1991: 149, lines 7, 8; English translation ["A Modest Sum"] in Pagis 1989: 46 and analysis in Yacobi 1988: 109). The rhyme *dam/adam*, echoing the pseudo-etymology, reappears in "Another Testimony," lines 3, 7. Contrast Felstiner on "Written in a Pencil" (2003: 222–23): his hypothesis that "Cain son of Adam" there may allude to Ezekiel's phrase would certainly be unwarranted here.

first human was created naked; the urge to hide one's nudity arose later, after the eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge. So the consciousness, followed by the concealment of the "created," natural state of nakedness, signified humanity's first disobedience (Gen. 3:10–11). In the context of creation, then, clothes are associated, rather, with sin and shame. How much more so the specific items of dress cited in evidence: a uniform is a synecdoche for subgroups that encode their apartness from the rest of humanity in their uniform appearance; and in the immediate "Sealed Railway-Car" context, boots mark a predatory species of uniform wearers.¹⁹ All this underlines that the two details, nominally adduced to prove "their" humanity, imply the very opposite.

The next line resumes, indeed sharpens, the incongruity via question and (absent or differently inadequate) answer. The conversational stammer, "How to explain," actually draws our attention—if unalerted before—to the gap left about how and why "uniforms" and "boots" establish humanity. Within the fictive arena, the phrase conveys the speaker's own sense that his addressees in court (however mute) failed to accept or understand his choice of illustrative evidence. But having thus voiced their silent wonder, he does not—and presumably cannot—resolve it. On the rhetorical level, the question helplessly echoing the response of the addressees (who are not "present" in the dramatic monologue except through such echoes) intensifies the realism of the dialogue scene at the same time as it heightens the reader's awareness of the indefensibility of the testimonial details by any logic of explanation.²⁰

Once he realizes (and in effect concedes or, if ironic, emphasizes) that "uniforms, boots" did not do the trick, the speaker shifts his ground. He now finds his claim that they "were human beings" on the oldest and highest authority, namely, "They were created in the image." The allusion to Genesis (1:26, 27) recalls the godlike nature of the entire human race. God's performative act, "Let Us create man [*adam*] in Our image, after Our likeness," was immediately followed by the accomplished fact, "And God

19. Boots, with their loaded signifying function, reappear in "The Roll Call," another poem in the "Sealed Railway-Car" cycle. There, they first identify their wearer, who "stamps with his boots," as a guard in a concentration camp. Next, he is described as "a diligent angel, who worked hard for his promotion" and, "all eyes," is counting the bodies at the "Roll Call." And since in Jewish legend the angel of death looks for his potential victims with a thousand eyes, a macabre montage is created: a zealous Nazi guard promoted, as it were, to the rank of the angel of death (Pagis 1991: 136; English translation 1989: 32).

20. Sokoloff marks the phatic function of this question but—as in other parts of her analysis of the poem—misses its subtle irony. Rather, she (1984: 227) claims that "the implication is that the attempt to explain what happened, in all its difficulty, matters almost as much as the explanation itself."

created man in His image, in the image of God He created him.” Yet this intertextual reference, for all its canonicity and its precise echoing of the key words, does not validate, far less explain the claim either, merely betraying afresh the emptiness of the opening assertion. Throughout human history, even within the Bible itself, humanity’s divine making and image never prevented atrocities—to the unmaking or loss of that image by the perpetrator.²¹ Actually, in “Another Testimony,” this very allusion becomes the ground for the angels’ incriminating testimony: in their admitted capacity as “collaborators,” they “Stand and confess / That you said: Let us create man, / And they said Amen.” So the biblical allusion and the divine origin may seem impressive, yet cannot prove that “they definitely were human beings,” any more than can the earthly and ominous items of dress resulting from the pivotal disobedience to God.

In brief, either the speaker is a fool, or (as with the outrageous proposer in “A Draft of a Reparations Agreement”) the spoken line of incongruities discloses his ironic intent. As the second hypothesis looks more and more probable, we reverse the first impression that he testifies for the defense. Our shifting hypotheses in this regard illustrate how Pagis turns the speaker’s ambiguous characterization to rhetorical use. The constant minute twists, even from one word to another, keep changing our views of the witness’s tone, goal, and (un)reliability. So they involve us ever more deeply in the testimonial process: all along, we therefore act as uneasy (re)interpreters cum (re)evaluators of mind and world, past and present, dramatic and authorial communication, the workings and the underlying problematics of testimony, especially that about the Holocaust.

But the speaker’s very recourse to incongruity raises a more basic doubt concerning the function, motives, and context of the monologue. For, though he observes the forms of spoken testimony (such as answering queries, illustrating points, offering explanations), he violates the rules proper to the truth claims of the speech act on the witness stand. What court would allow such ironic double-talk, such repeated breaches of the conventions of truth telling? Again, if he directs his testimony to a historian, what fact-gatherer would have the patience for this monologist’s games and quibbles, particularly since he hardly cites any facts? From the readers’ viewpoint, the title together with the manner and forms of address encourage us to interpret the speaker as some kind of a witness—and the scene as a mimesis of oral evidence giving, dramatic exchange included—but line 3 undermines our opening hypothesis, without supplying an alternative.

21. This biblical dynamic runs through Sternberg 1998: the main variation on the theme is Egypt’s enslavement of Israel in Exodus, followed by genocide.

Accordingly, as the breach of testimonial decorum climaxes in the allusion to God's image at the end of the first stanza, we are left wondering how the speaker will proceed, between irony and testimony. In the event, he surprises and frustrates us again by changing the subject. This also means that the enigma of the speech situation is left open. Having defined "them" as "human beings . . . created in the image," he now defines himself apart from the human race:

I was a shade [*tselem*].
I had another creator.

In the original Hebrew, the contrastive analogy of created/creator between the origins, hence the natures, of the creatures involved—"they" as against the speaker—gets pinpointed in the sound pattern or partial rhyme *tselem/tselem* ("image" / "shade" in lines 3, 4). At first glance, the shorter word iconically suggests a similarity between the two species, but minus the symbolic accessories of uniforms and boots. The closer we look at the juxtaposition of the two rhyming words, the deeper and richer the contrast they bring out.

Thus, within the text's larger sound pattern, the final /m/ consonant of "tselem" absent in "tsel," ominously echoes back not just to the /m/-rich items of dress (*madim, magafayim* ["uniforms, boots"]) but also to the consonantal repetition that occurs in the alluded-to verses from Genesis (*betselem Elohim* ["in the image of God"]). What the /m/ sound orchestration iconically represents then is the similarity between image and image maker, created and creator—to the exclusion of the /m/-less speaker. He indeed proceeds to define *his* creator in a negative or oppositional manner, "another," with name and positive attributes left unmentioned, "in the shade," as it were.

Further, the contrast extends to the semantics and values latent in the rhyming pair. In Hebrew, the longer word *tselem* also means an idol,²² with associations of primitivism and corporeal presence; while the shorter *tselem* links up with mutability and incorporeality.²³ This harmonizes with the division of species implied here between murderers and victims: those booted, uniformed, comparable, and sacrificing others to their idol, as against those grown disembodied. Or, considering the proverbial desperate wish of the victim to become invisible (carried to an extreme by the panic-stricken voice of the foregoing poem, "The Roll Call": "I erase my shade [*tselem*]), did

22. As, under the Bible's influence, the translated "image" has often come to mean for iconoclasts.

23. See, for instance, Psalms 144:4 and Ecclesiastes 8:13. The title of Pagis's first book is *The Shade Dial*. For "shade" as a frequent metaphor of mutability in his poetics, see Yacobi 1976, 1988.

the speaker's ontological status, as a bodiless shade, perhaps enable him to escape the attention of the murderers?²⁴

At any rate, in asserting that they were created in the image (*be-tselem*), the speaker equates the image maker who created "them" with the God of Genesis. Accordingly, the declaration "I had another creator" is a euphemism for total rejection: If they count as God's and as godlike "human beings," then he would rather dissociate himself from both humanity and its creator.²⁵ Shock effect aside, while the second stanza reveals the speaker as one of the victims and motivates his attitude toward the accused, it shows him also wandering even further from the witness stand and factual testimony toward comparative theology—itsself of an odd, punning kind.

The third stanza indeed cancels out the last traces of a regular situation of testifying. It proceeds to characterize this separate creator vis-à-vis his creature, beginning with the divine assistance granted at the time to the experiencing-I:

And He by his grace left nothing in me that would die.

The very description of the act of "grace" might appear to belie the name as well as the present testimonial framework. Could his creator defend the creature from his persecutors only by killing him in advance? Inversely, if this "other" God left nothing perishable in the speaker, does that grace amount to his eternal coexistence with divinity, beginning with his demise or from creation itself? And if not (or no longer) of this world, again, how does the speaking-I testify?

From the surprise turn of repudiating the God of Genesis and his humans—or "uniform, boots" humanity and *their* God—we thus advance to a greater surprise in face of the alternative relation disclosed within the other world order. Or relations, more exactly, since the disclosure is baffling as well. Short of fantasy with sacrilege, the speaker cannot mean that he was literally created immortal. What, then, is his ontological status at the moment of speaking? Is he alive, or dead, or, most likely, both in a sense: physically dead yet alive in spirit? The real "me," and his creator's "grace," would then lie in a body-free immortality. But if so, how and where and in what capacity can he give evidence after physical death? The report of a "shade" (a witness disembodied prior to the victimage or cremated after

24. By implication from the past tense of "I *was* a shade," now that the danger is over and the criminals are on trial, he no longer exists, or needs to camouflage himself, as a shade. However interpreted, the tense, in its turn, raises the question of his ontological status in the present, an issue that the sequel will duly reopen.

25. Geoffrey Hartman (1996: 55), who comments on the alliteration and allusion, emphasizes the horror rather than the defiance.

his violent death) is of course pure fiction, irrelevant to earthly courtrooms and inquiries.

It is with these queries in mind that we proceed to his tale of escape:

And I fled to Him, rising light, blue,
Pacified, I would even say: apologetic [*mitnatsel*].

Moving still further away from “them”—the topic of the unquoted statement to which his monologue responds—he now turns from self-portrayal to his own story. The telling seems to follow another well-known model: the survivor eager to detail the marvels of escape.²⁶ Except that here the escape is no less puzzling than the escapee. As he begins at the end, with the laconic “And I fled to Him,” all the details remain gapped: the scarcity of facts—even fictive ones—again marks him as a useless, or unusual, witness. Totally ignoring what preceded his miraculous escape—let alone what enabled, facilitated, or threatened it—he concentrates on his experience beyond earthly existence.

Even so, the “facts” divulged in the extraterrestrial sequel are themselves sparse and in need of attentive deciphering at that. By a typical Pagisian irony, the elegant turn of phrase (“rising light, blue”) discloses a harsh piece of evidence via a double message. Prosodically, this part of the line is untranslatable because of the interlinked assonance and consonance: *aliti kalil, cachol* (literally, I rose, very light [i.e., most weightless], blue). Semantically, the verb *aliti* (I rose) relates to the noun *olah*, which is the Bible’s technical term for a burnt offering, while another cognate, *calil* (whole [offering], wholly), is a homophone of *kalil* (very light); and *cachol* (blue) reads like a synecdoche for the smoke mounting to the sky.²⁷ In the context of sacrifice,

26. As discussed, for instance, in Suleiman 1996.

27. See Exodus 29:18 and Leviticus 1:3 for the technical description of *olah* and Deuteronomy 33:10 for a poetic use of *calil* for “whole offering,” gone up in flames. Berel Lang (1990: xxi) notes that the “main connotations of the term [*Holocaust*] derive from the use in the Septuagint of *holokaustoma* (‘totally consumed by fire’)—the Greek translation of the Hebrew *olah*, which designates the type of ritual sacrifice that was to be completely burned.” Lang, though, in rejecting *Holocaust* as an appropriate term for the Nazi genocide of the Jews, forgets this core kill-then-burn analogy and downplays some other likenesses. The term “had none of the properties of a sacrifice except for its design of willful destruction: no intentionality on the part of those ‘sacrificed,’ no sense of loss or of giving by those ‘offering’ the sacrifice, no evocation of a good to be redeemed by the act itself”; and if the Hebrew *Shoah* is better, it is yet “confined to the viewpoint of the victims” (ibid.). Incidentally, Pagis himself avoided this common Hebrew alternative. In the unfinished text on his unresolved relationship with his father, *Abba* [*Father*], he imagines a father who is aware of the son’s objection to it: “you [Dan Pagis] are very angry when the word [*shoah*] is used, you think it’s overexploited” (Pagis 1991: 352; my translation; see also the memoir of Ada Pagis [1995: 89]). The author’s personal distaste may lurk behind the fictive speaker’s nonuse of the word in our poem, but the

then, this interechoing word-group all but names the genocide infamous for its crematoria to undermine the tale's surface of an elegantly phrased happy end. If the words denote "I rose light, blue," their joint connotation is "I rose like (or *as*) a burnt offering that ascends to heaven without leaving a trace."²⁸ In retrospect, this connotation also elucidates and aligns (i.e., exposes) the privilege of deathlessness for which the speaker has just thanked his "other" creator: having enabled my metamorphosis into a whole burnt offering, He really left nothing perishable in me, nothing to impede my flight (and then, my analogy) "to Him." Who has ever traveled lighter?

The "escape" thus translates the speaker into heaven and reveals him as a voice from the Holocaust, an odd survivor indeed. (An exact counterpart would be the disclosure of the protesting audience within "Reparations Agreement.") Under these circumstances, the shade's praise for the grace of God, disembodiment notably included, reverses into the bitter irony of accusation.²⁹

At the same time, on the global level of communication, the escape to heaven finally establishes the best hypothesis about the poem's speech situation: neither a courtroom witness-box nor a historical testimony. The author has fictionally conjured up the ghost of a victim and given him the floor in order to invalidate all earthbound legalisms, procedures, specifics, viewpoints.³⁰ With the floor, moreover, he has been given the authority to invalidate them. Liquidated, turned into smoke, overlooking earthly affairs from high above, he has undergone the worst of the inferno; and so now, as testifying-I, he enjoys the reliability denied by Primo Levi to the "privileged," corporeal survivor—in effect, to everyone else among the witnesses. From his unique vantage point, now as then, he best knows the truth or, at least, the questions most relevant to it. Wherever and however the impossible discourse of and by the burnt offering comes to pass, whoever its impossible addressee, the reference point and the target lie elsewhere than usual in testimony: outside the norm invoked at the beginning, only to be

effective rhetorical solution through the evocation of the two biblical terms is the choice of the sarcastic implied poet.

28. In the English rendering, only the last of the words survives. Yet interestingly, though the least charged and intricate member of the group, *blue* nevertheless preserves the connotation, owing to its twice-conventional, even crosslingual readability: as a synecdochic attribute of both smoke and sky. The survival not of the most original but of the most widely encoded.

29. By comparison, even the Nazi-given "privilege" to which a Primo Levi owed his survival of the concentration camp looks genuine.

30. This negative metatestimonal comment grows even bolder and more pregnant within the real-life context that triggered it. The poem, like the entire cycle in *Transformation* (1970), was written in response to the Eichmann trial, which drove Pagis out of his long, wholesale silence on the Holocaust toward silent authorial communication (Ada Pagis 1995: 89–94).

gradually subverted, dismissed, replaced. The gains, from cumulative defamiliarization and surprise value to deepening emotional and ideological involvement, from linguistic to thematic foregrounding, are in proportion.

Nor, for once, do the framework and the perspective and the story line change in essentials to the end:

Pacified, I would even say: apologetic [*mitnatsel*]:
Smoke to smoke omnipotent
That has neither body nor likeness.

The added hard “facts,” no longer surprisingly, are few: transformed into smoke, the burnt offering has returned to his creator. By now, however, we are better attuned to his ironic ways. Take the rise in line 8 from the mildly incongruous self-qualifier “pacified” to the puzzling correction “apologetic.” Why should a victim of genocide apologize? Further, by explicitly modifying his self-description (“I would even say”), the speaker emphasizes or, in studied innocence, gives away the travesty of justice: the proper recipient of apology gives or feels it, instead. And this overt, upside-down apology at the end recalls the first one, multiply symmetrical to it. As with “How to explain” in line 3—apropos the defensive-sounding description of “them”—the speaker’s illogical self-repair comes into focus.

In the context of this cycle of poems, the urge to apologize betrays the paradoxical kind of shame that has haunted many survivors of the victimage. In *The Drowned and the Saved* (particularly in the chapter entitled “Shame”), Primo Levi explores the diverse reasons for the survivors’ feeling of shame. High among them is their awareness that many better people did not survive. But in our text, it is the dead victim, a *nonsurvivor*, who feels the burden of shame and the need to apologize. Another macabre twist, yet still unmotivated—unless the voice of the living-dead poet himself, a nominal survivor, breaks through here.³¹

This incongruity keeps us looking for a resolution that would fit the speaker himself and the artist behind him. Hints of the wanted closure are to be found in a network specific to poetry as such—one based on sound/sense linkages—and therefore also carrying its wider generic implications vis-à-vis prose.

Within the immediate context of the “Testimony” poem, and as a follow-up to its sound patterning, *mitnatsel*/apologetic (line 8) rhymes with *tsel*/shade (line 4) and echoes *tselem*/image (line 3). A pseudo-etymology is created thereby (what with the end rhyme, the centrality of the words, and

31. Guilt and shame recur elsewhere in Pagis’s poetry, most explicitly in the group of poems entitled “Dossier Number Zero,” where a suspect pleads guilty during his investigation for no visible reason (Pagis 1991: 188–92).

the hissing and relatively rare sound of /ts/), as though the longer and more complex word were a derivative, or composite, of its basic fellows. This launches a quest for yet another interweaving of the putative cognates, another joint sense-making, now focused on the latest arrival.

Thus, as *mitnatsel* belongs to the reflexive verb conjugation (*hitpa-el*), it suggests here an ad hoc new meaning: *mitna-tsel* equals “I turn myself into a shade.” Nor does the verbal irony stop here. For the pseudo-linkage also reverberates into a true etymology: *mitnatsel*, once defamiliarized and sound activated, also calls to mind *nitsal* (was saved) and *nitsol* (survivor), which stem from the same root (N,TS,L). Here the whole contextual interplay ironically tells the manner of the I’s rescue: he was saved only as a shade or by transforming into a shade—another euphemism for extinction by violence.

The poet’s intertextual art newly complicates the wordplay, from a longer perspective. The bizarre change of self-qualifier in *mitnatsel* then reveals another sophisticated use of the rhetoric of sound and meaning, only triggered and thickened via allusion to the source (con)text in the distant past, the other end of history. The modern sense “apologize” encoded in this form of the verb (*hitpa-el* of N,TS,L) is a figurative transfer from its original material signification in Exodus. Now, Exodus is generally significant as the record of the first attempt on the nation’s life in Israel’s annals, one countered at last by a divine deliverance that has become even more proverbial: as such, it invites (back) reference in Holocaust writing. Less famously, though, the book, having opened with the genocide committed by Egypt on Israel, proceeds to tell how the survivors nearly got themselves exterminated en masse in a conflict with heaven. After the sin of the golden calf (made from the golden ornaments that the people of Israel had taken off for that purpose [Exod. 32:2–3]), God threatened the idolatrous people with extinction by fire (“I would consume you” [Exod. 33:5]) as punishment. But then “the Lord ordered the people of Israel: ‘put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what to do with you.’ Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves [*va-yitnatslu*] of their ornaments, from mount Horeb onward” (Exod. 33:5–6). The physical self-divestment symbolized an act of atonement for their guilt, particularly since it reversed their provision of gold ornaments to fashion the calf. Just as the trinkets had earlier gone to the unholy fire to be melted down, so by *va-yitnatslu* the ancient Israelites saved themselves from God’s consuming wrath.

The latter-day dictionary meaning of *apologize* thus preserves the association of atonement. What is an apology if not a kind of atonement? However, the poem’s contextual semantics operates otherwise, against both the updated lexicon and the ongoing load of guilt: it selectively revives and

redirects, instead, the old, allusive sense of *va-yitnatslu*, complete with the original situation. In drawing notice to the bearing of this word on the ascending *mitnatsel* victim, Pagis echoes the ancient sense (strip oneself) rather than the modern “apologize”—again in a macabre key but now to deliberately incongruous effect. For counterpoint, the macabre echoing of the source even newly activates the other side’s “uniforms, boots.” The Holocaust victims, as we know, were forced to strip themselves of everything, from ornament to dress, and finally, in going up the “tin chimneys” (“Draft of a Reparations Agreement” [Pagis 1991: 140, English translation 1989: 35]), they were stripped of life itself and all trace of bodily existence. For what, and whose, terrible offense were *they* atoning? Nor, surely, could they be reconciled (“pacified”) to their lot.

Properly (i.e., poetically) decoded, then, the odd-looking self-corrective “apologetic” marks one of the subtlest choices in this “testimony,” generating a dense pattern of implications, rare even for this poem and poetics. No other single word so encapsulates here the senselessness of the Holocaust vis-à-vis God. Nor could anything be further from “simplicity of diction and directness of address.” The more understated or counterfactual the victim’s self-portrait, the sharper the accusation; the more significance-laden the discourse turns out, the less acceptable the management of the world.

Finally, having described his ascent to heaven, the speaker ends his story together with his separate identity and existence:

Smoke to smoke omnipotent
That has neither body nor likeness.

The Holocaust context thematically motivates the smoke. As a wholly (*kalil/calil*) burnt sacrifice, the victim ascends to a creator who either could not or would not save him from physical destruction on earth. At best, the speaker implies, at this juncture God manifested helplessness rather than omnipotence; at worst, God condoned, perhaps even received, the sacrifice. Not for nothing does the sacrifice find metonymic expression here in its ritual, inhalable product, “smoke,” which officially gives pleasure to the Lord and so re-associates him with the (hi)story leading to the consuming fire below. At the same time, the smoke ascending to smoke merges mortality with immortality in a complex oxymoron. On the one hand, like the twinning of the disembodied, the speaker asserts thereby his reunion with his “omnipotent” creator. On the other hand, not only does smoke symbolize mutability, but the expression “smoke to smoke” evokes God’s curse on Adam and Eve. “You are dust and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19) were the words that afflicted humanity with mortality. This new allusion modifies the victim’s pretended claim to have “another creator.” Uniting

with smoke after his ordeal, he simply disappears without trace from the face of the earth, upward for a change. All as if he returned to dust, only worse by every standard, and counter to the normal implications of the up versus down, as well as of the union with the divine. Those whom God has cursed, including the mass murderers, actually fare better.³²

As for these booted and uniformed murderers, divinely privileged from life to natural (“dust-to-dust”) death, they stand apart not only in the world but also in the text. On reaching the concluding line, it springs to the eye that the speaker never explicitly brings them into his ordeal. Whatever the implied accusation, the surface text runs two parallel, contrastive tales: “they” and their creator as opposed to the “I” and his own. And while either narrative thread unfolds a creator/creature similarity and affair, no spatio-temporal linkage—far less any causal relation—visibly draws together the two species, pairs, tales. Further, if the divide between creators may read like a hyperbole for the rejection of a single divine superpower—continuously ironized in his divine aspects—then the created “human beings” of the start would appear to have been forgotten. It is as if “they” had nothing to do with the speaker’s “flight” to heaven, which just happened in the parallel account. The chiasmic order of telling accentuates the plotless symmetry: their analogy to their God is drawn first and traced all the way back to the moment of creation (“they were created in the image”); his own resemblance to the “other” creator surfaces as late as the moment of evaporation, when “smoke [ascended] to smoke omnipotent.” On earth, much the same interval (positional, intertextual, existential) divides the one’s “uniforms, boots” at the start from the other’s disembodiment, let alone self-divestment in *mitnatsel*. This marked avoidance of anything like actional contact between perpetrators and victim doubtless exhibits afresh Pagis’s art of silence, indirection, and testimony-without-specifics: it is we readers who supply the missing background and causal links to project a coherent tale of Holocaust, otherwise all too familiar. With the same estranging impact, though, the priorities of representation, as given, also foreground the issue deemed most troubling and the party most responsible.

So this art of testimony generates a complicated address, bringing together nuclear Holocaust fact and dramatized fiction, narrative and polemics, sequential discoveries and closely knit analogies, irony and vitriolic anger. Its beginning certainly misleads us into assuming that the speaker responds to earlier speech, within the familiar testimonial situation. Once startled out of this primary impression by his deliberate non sequiturs,

32. For Robert Alter (1981: xiii), Pagis’s irony here is “so comprehensive that it almost includes a note of consolation in its bitter dream of an encounter between wraithlike man and wraithlike God.”

twists, allusions, and wordplay, we begin to discern two alternative threads of coherence: the narrative and the underlying indictment. The tale of persecution and escape is only hinted at through such minimal but pregnant, often reversed clues as boots and smoke. The escape surprisingly leads to heaven, which in turn discloses the anomaly of a dead speaker and a posthumous testimony. The ironic double communication throughout and the various allusive and analogical networks progressively argue a case against God in a manner as unusual as its source and its target. Along both threads, Pagis's is a rhetoric of indirection and defamiliarization, encouraging the reader to follow the silent leads, never giving the full tale or line of argument. This may not please the crowd, standard testimony fans included, but it works in its own poetic way, certainly with a difference.

5. "Another Testimony" as Complementary Variant

In this strategic refocusing and various devices involved, the poem that appears next in the book complements "Testimony." So much so that reading them together brings out elements and patterns latent in either, or unexpected points of contact, along with variants (linguistic, thematic, normative, rhetorical) more salient or foreseeable by now:

ANOTHER TESTIMONY

You [who] are the first and you [who] remain the last,
 If it's beyond you [literally, If you cannot work the wonder] to
 distinguish in law between judgment and judgment [*bein din le-din*]
 Between blood and blood [*bein dam le-dam*],
 Listen to my heart heavy under judgment [*ba-din*], see my affliction.
 Your collaborators, Michael, Gabriel,
 Stand and confess [*omdim u-modim*]
 That you said: Let us create man [*adam*],
 And they said Amen.

(Pagis 1991: 138; my translation)

The generic title, in effect metatitle, "Another Testimony," is already notable for repeating that of the companion piece with an equally thematic variation—in the form of a qualifier that opens a multifold ambiguity. The extra adjective wavers among three meanings at least, which suggest a rising order of testimonial distinctiveness. In the first sense, *another* would denote "one more" or "more of the same": a testimony just additional and essentially similar to those found on public record and/or the one preceding it in the book. A second, intermediate sense would combine likeness with otherness relative to normal practice and/or the Pagisian predecessor: a testimony, yes, but not quite the same as already given, as known by now; a vari-

ant, in short. The third sense opposes the first and upsets the unity/variety balance of the second in pushing the adjective toward the limit of alterity, even polar contrast. The title would then imply the same relation to familiar discourse on the theme as the abrupt mention in “Testimony” of “another creator” (the heart of its own originality) does to the familiar God-centered worldview. Far from *déjà vu*, it then promises, “Another Testimony” is going to communicate a radically new tale, viewpoint, attitude and by means that are uncommon too. (The original Hebrew noun, *edut*, signifies the act or process of witnessing as well as the end product.)

Pagis, as we shall see, harps on this entire scale of difference, freely shifting relations and emphases among the three points or introducing nuances and extensions. Across all shifts, though, the play on the meanings of *another* tends to polarize them. It increasingly negates the minimum in favor of the relative and the maximum difference: every expected likeness to the current generic idea and work of Testimony proves to be nominal, a foil to the twin variants of Pagisian otherness.

Even a quick glance through the text captures something of this relation. The poem again distances itself from the poet’s own history and voice—as from any real-life or realistic occurrence and address—consisting instead of a strange dramatic monologue in three parts. Here too the speaker eludes definition and changes roles; but, against the expectations raised by the title along with the preceding poem—which fulfills them in its peculiar manner—he himself, like the historical poet, never testifies, either. Inversely, the addressee is recognizable from the opening apostrophe (“You are the first and you remain the last”) as none other than God. No longer an object of report “in the third person,” God now assumes the dialogic immediacy of the second. Even so, one might expect that, in the context of Testimony, God would be addressed in his capacity of judge as well as of the omnipotent encountered earlier; but it is less predictable that lines 2–3 would attribute to the supreme judge the difficulties associated with human judicial decision. Line 4, though, apparently reestablishes the traditional man versus God hierarchy, with the speaker admitting his own weakness and begging to be heard. Hence the unexpectedness of the last four lines, where, instead of speaking out in his own person (testifying, confessing, or asking forgiveness), the addresser quotes the angels. And their testimony—a final surprise, including the wordplay on “another” witness—actually avows a “collaboration” with the creator of “man” and so exposes the ultimate cause of all evil among the creatures on earth.

Against the background of the testimonial norm, moreover, this relation between the variants perceptibly extends from the fictionalized, unrealistic, winding speech event to the drastic selectivity in its representation. By

which I mean both what constitutes it as an address and what it itself tells about the reality or the history at issue. Counter to the promise ostensibly found in the recurrent title, the poem is again most reticent, actually driving silence about the world to a new extreme. Nor does it hasten to close, let alone anticipate, the gaps of its own making.

Another cursory glance will do for now. Thus, the dramatic situation is no less sparse than strange, and in fact is made strange, or stranger, by the absence, and at best the postponement, of elementary components. The speaking-I, nameless and featureless, is identifiable as a victim only in mid-poem and from the poetic context while, despite the title, never really giving testimony. The addressee—later, quotee—is knowable as God from the allusion to his powers, if decoded. Nor does he ever voice a response: not even one comparable to the disagreement implicit in “Testimony” or the laconic and formulaic assent “Amen” that he himself elicits from the angels in the quotation. Likewise with the space time, which remains a blank, except for general clues to the time of the utterance and the quoted minidiologue: post-Holocaust and pre-humanity, respectively.

But then, you may think, the genre of testimony does not after all specialize in elaborate narrative frameworks. Its interest understandably lies, rather, in the narrated events, witnessed at the time and communicated afterward with a view to maximum reliability, hence objectivity. Except that the world represented in and through this dramatic monologue is itself hardly better specified than the representing occasion—least of all, the catastrophe supposed to be the object of testimony. Even the few referents we encounter—agents, happenings, creative act—belong to supernature and ancient history. If the first poem at least encodes the genocide in certain synecdochic reality items (“uniforms, boots” for the perpetrator, “smoke” for the victim), the other avoids so much as part-for-whole representation or, for that matter, identification. Nor does it refer to the Nazis even by pronoun (“they”), or apartness, or inferable notorious atrocities. Only the framing context of the “Sealed Railway-Car” cycle and the preceding “Testimony” variant suggest its bearing on the Holocaust.³³ Indeed, “at first

33. On contextual relevance and its application in Holocaust literature, see, for instance, Lang 1990: 136–37 on the use made of the reader’s assumed knowledge of the historical events by the prose fiction of Appelfeld and other novelists. On the other hand, in the belief that poetry cannot effectively represent the genocide, Lang fails to discuss the working of this device there. My argument repairs this omission—and by reference to an apparently unpromising case in point—so as to challenge the wider and even more typical generic divide behind it. If anything, it is poetry that by nature (e.g., size, compression) tends to operate on common knowledge, among other shorthands and obliquities. Yet, across the line of genre, the questions when, how, and to what extent the historical context is relevant defy easy solution. Good examples would be poems like “A Witness Anew,” “In the Laboratory,” “A Modest Account,”

the details may horrify, but in the end they are tedious,” with a vengeance. The anti-documentary principle, and metacomment, could go no further than selectivity that runs to unbroken silence on the witness’s immediate experience.

The principle, however, newly exhibits here its constructive aspect as well. The meagerness of detail, the absence of a narrative thread, the reference heavenward and backward to the very beginning, together with the odd and gapped discourse roles, suggest that the poem’s interest and message reside elsewhere, or higher, than usual: outside human reality per se, beyond living memory, above (or behind) the historical facts of systematic mass murder, let alone of any particular victim’s tale. The alternative source of interest finds further support, as well as full embodiment, in the complex patterning, the interplay of elements and levels, the orchestrated allusive echoes, the arts of implication and rhetoric. Within the overall strategy, now reviewed from the perspective of “another” variant, the bizarre drama and selectiveness are themselves only components in need of a reason. More than ever, everything here depends for its integrity, sense, and effect on the artistic composition: the dependence even includes the repetition with variation between the two poems.

Read together, for example, the two describe (or, in sequence, unfold) a chiasmic pattern. The one begins with the creation of humanity and ends with the creator; the other reverses the order of mention. Further, the chiasm involves an immediate transition between the respective cut-off points: such that the one text’s last lines co-refer with the other’s first line, under various divine names and attributes. Read in the given order, it is as if “Another Testimony” starts by picking up the referent with which “Testimony” concluded:

Smoke to smoke omnipotent
That has neither body nor likeness.

You [who] are the first and you [who] remain the last.

Always provided, needless to say, that one catches the roundabout references, as most of us will surely do. For the implied reader, however, those references will come laden with specific allusive resonance and force. Thereby, the chiasm will gain new significance from the tightened link

and “Autobiography” (Pagis 1991: 79, 128, 149, 165; English translation of the last three in 1989: 20, 46, 5). They all have (or may have) a subtext of Holocaust meaning or relevance, which look comparable to those in the “Testimony” pair. But their generalizations on the human condition do not reduce or assimilate to our theme: quite the opposite, in fact.

between the two poems, via Maimonides' Thirteen Principles of faith, accessibly incorporated in the Jewish prayer book.

The last line of "Testimony" alludes to the third Principle, affirming God's incorporeality, though the wording patterns itself on an in-between codified allusion to that article of faith. As Robert Alter (1981: xiii) notes, the reference is to "a verse from *Yigdal*, the medieval hymn based on Maimonides" which similarly forms part of the daily morning prayer: "He has not the likeness [*dmūt*] of body, nor is he a body," it declares. However, exactly because God's incorporeality is a foundational, antipagan article of faith, it has recurred in so many creeds, places, formulations, echoes of monotheism since the Bible that the allusion here to those key texts might be lost on the reader, if the companion poem did not multiply pinpoint it. To this end, more verbatim, hence unmistakable intertextual reference to the very same sources, chiasmic analogy between the twin poems, sequential continuity of both the echoing and the echoed articles: all join forces. "Testimony" having ended with the third Principle, in *Yigdal* style, the opening words of "Another Testimony" resume the allusion, iterating Maimonides' fourth, with a change in grammatical person: "He is first and He is last."³⁴

The intertextual chain reaction, or concatenation, stretches further. Having been so forcefully pinpointed between the variant endings, the last-line allusion in "Testimony" to the third Principle draws attention in turn to earlier Maimonidean echoes along its sequence. Line 6, "And He by His grace left nothing in me that would die," then sounds like a deliberate mockery of the belief in resurrection ("The dead will He resurrect by His grace," in the *Yigdal* wording). Given deathlessness, isn't this belief redundant, pointless? And the bitter irony of "grace" that the cremated victim has enjoyed may also evoke and overtake the eleventh Principle so as to contradict its law of divine retribution: "[God] rewards the man-of-grace according to his doing; [He] presents the wicked with ill, according to his wickedness." Either "grace" linkage then confronts a ringing declaration with the reality of the Holocaust. As disturbing is a fresh pinpoint tension now surfacing in and through the last line itself. It evokes, we recall, the third Principle, which insists on God's dissimilarity to anything or anyone else. "He has not the likeness [*dmūt*] of body, nor is he a body"; for good measure, the Maimonides original even adds, "and He has no resemblance [*dimyon*] whatsoever." How to reconcile this absolute affirmation of uniqueness, via the denial of any analogue, with God's own speech-act creation of "man after our image, in our likeness [*dmūt*]" (Gen. 1:26), which

34. Interestingly, within the Jewish daily prayer book, the two source texts themselves form a kind of chiasmic relation: there, *Yigdal* is located among the opening hymns, while the Principles make a coda.

is also echoed here (and closes the other poem)? As if to drive home the incongruity, the Principles refer throughout to their incomparable God as “the Creator, blessed be His name.” So a creator with or without a created human analogue? Both, it would appear, following the main thrust of the poem. Arguably, this tension is an allusive reflex of the boldest move of “Testimony”: the forking of the divine/human nexus between the parties to the victimage, with the thematic questions opened by it throughout.

However, the chain reaction thus launched in retrospect, as it were, also operates (or even further extends) the other, prospective way between the chiasmic sequents. “Another Testimony” having foregrounded the network of allusion spread below and along its predecessor, “Testimony” reciprocates and not only by enabling the successor to pick up the allusive thread with greater confidence. It also has a validating (in discourse order, *prevalidating*) effect on what follows, especially on our resolution of the alluder’s heterodox attitude and goal vis-à-vis the credo invoked. To which of the three points on the spectrum of otherness—we may wonder—does his viewpoint exactly belong? The advance guidance, in short, is less source identifying than orientational. By their substance and cumulative weight, the articles of faith already put to the test of Holocaust reality—God’s omnipotence, resurrection of the dead, retributive justice, “grace” at large—encourage a subversive reading of their present, less-univocal equivalents as well.

The opening lines already show the need for such orientation, even though they look more orderly and their allusiveness clearer than the foregoing poem’s. More orderly because, rather than jumping into mid-dialogue (“No no”), they begin at the beginning of the discourse event—and, as it happens, of time and agency too (“You are the first”). But who is this “You,” let alone the completely hidden addressing-I? The former gap, at least, receives immediate closure from both the presumably ongoing reference to heaven and the still firmer, because near-verbatim, intertextual linkage to the Maimonides/*Yigdal* credo. The same field of allusion reverberates afresh, especially the same cluster of unmatched divine attributes prescribed by faith, but is it to the same effect?

As the companion piece ended with God’s “smoke omnipotent” and his incorporeality (“neither body nor likeness”), so here the addressed is first defined in his existence beyond human temporality:

You [who] are the first and you [who] remain the last.

This allusive description clearly (re)identifies the target as God. The terms chosen for the purpose, however, also call to mind the absolute power just evoked, with its antitraditional implications, which earlier played such a

major role in the earlier creator/created analogy and the overall rhetoric of victimage. As the First Cause, God is not just the creator of everything in heaven and on earth, but also is responsible for all that has happened since creation. Nor will he disappear along with created existence (let alone that part made, in effect, by “another”), but will outlive it to “remain the last.”

If the criticism smuggled behind the opening praise in citation is still latent, even uncertain, then it would escape notice altogether on its own, without the advance “Testimony” orientation and the support of what ensues on the same front. But nor does the sequel quite rise to explicitness, citational or normative. The (re)attributed omnipotent omnitemporality is soon followed by a less-overt glance at two other superhuman traits: the creator’s omniscience and his true judgment of all his creatures, equally repeated in numberless biblical and later texts, the Thirteen Principles among them. Here, moreover, we find those traits not simply collocated, in list form, but somehow interrelated with the opening divine attribute. Dynamically and therefore perceptibly so, in fact. What reads like a descriptive affirmation of God’s firstness and lastness, as usual, turns out to be a vocative or apostrophe—to the existent characterized by this privilege—once we reach the comma at the end of the line: “You *who* are first and *who* remains last, / If.” This variant thereby implies some determinate and divergent (“other”) relation among the three features at issue.

In context, the otherness may well lie in their joint ideological problematics. Whereas the source texts harmoniously unify all these traits, our speaker, having premised the addressed Omnipotent’s existence beyond time and responsibility for developments in time, now appears to question his capability as all-knowing, infallible judge:

If it’s beyond you to distinguish in law between judgment and
 judgment [bein din le-din]
 Between blood and blood [bein dam le-dam],
 Listen to my heart heavy under judgment [ba-din], see my affliction.

The questioning of the supreme judge here looks back of course to theological questionings obliquely voiced in the foregoing poem—with their tense faith versus fact intertexts—but not to them alone. (Even the earlier targeting of retributive justice is not enough for it, because too general.) It accordingly establishes itself as such, complete with reference point and shock effect, via yet another allusive web—one centered in its immediate target and even denser than the first line’s affirmation of supernature. In Deuteronomy, Moses instructs the people how and where to obtain legal guidance, by a chain of expertise that originates in heaven: “If it’s beyond

you to distinguish in some matter of law between blood and blood, between judgment and judgment . . . then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God shall choose, and come to the Levitical priests and to the judge who is in office in those days, and inquire; and they shall declare to you the matter of law” (Deut. 17:8–9). A striking resonance, except that the perplexed “you” now reverses identities, from the everyman, common-Israelite bottom all the way to the divine top and initiator of the judicial hierarchy.

Where it concerns the divine, inversely, the Bible’s mention of such “beyondness” assumes a very different form, and so does the poem’s reversal of attitude. *Vis-à-vis* such forms, the questioning here lurks in the shift from the believer’s declarative (or rhetorical) to the current addresser’s conditional (“if”) mode: a change that subverts the original declarer’s meaning along with his praise to the same effect, showing God in a dilemma. To illustrate only from versions (and echoing inversions) that manifest not just the verb for being unequal to the task echoed here but the verb form (*yip-pale*) itself: “Is anything beyond God?” He indignantly exclaims to Abraham (Gen. 18:14). Perhaps our “if” now answers back millennia after. Or consider how this “if” subversively counterpoints Jeremiah’s declaration of faith, “There is nothing beyond you [or your power]” (Jer. 32:17). In short, the intertext crosses the grammar of perplexity originally kept for earthly agents (inquirers, law practitioners) with the state of divinity. Once the categorical statement of the believer turns hypothetical, the envisaged possibility comes to resemble the judicial doubts and dilemmas in human affairs, where any adjudication is liable to elude the judge or even to incur a miscarriage of justice.

The paradox of a doubtful divinity is intensified when the stalemate “between judgment and judgment” rises to the more critical decision “between blood and blood,” matters of life and death. So they remain, whatever the distinction(s) that the phrase suggests to be perplexing to God. It could mean, as in Deuteronomy, the difference “between bloodshed and bloodshed” (in context, the Holocaust as opposed to ordinary homicides); or, following up the earlier poem’s outrageous thrust, “between blood line and blood line” (particularly, humans versus subhuman “others,” with a link to Nazi racism itself); or, worst, the compounded reading.³⁵ And it is indeed the worst construction that will find an exact anchorage in a rhyme that lies even nearer to the heart of the matter than the sound pattern *tselem/mit-*

35. Compare the distinction that troubled Primo Levi: between the “privileged” and unprivileged in the inferno as made by the Nazis themselves. Pagis’s questioner would not appear to have in mind any such “Gray Zone.”

natsel in “Testimony,” namely: the thematic pseudo-etymology *dam/adam*, blood/human.³⁶

In the light of this joint oblique guidance — context, intertext, twin text — the poem’s challenging drift has thus far become ever clearer, despite the miniature and enigmatic surface. It works, we conclude, to unsettle religion’s fundamental norms as well as the genre’s. However, things seem to get entangled — legally, dramatically, and perspectively at once — when the speaker is redefined by self-implication in the main clause that finishes the sentence.

Surfacing for the first time, the “I” keeps his anonymity, but his stance grows more equivocal. The subversive conditional opening implied an unprecedented position of equality, at least, from which the challenger would now seem about to offer a solution to the judge’s dilemma: “*If it’s beyond you*” predicts “*then do this and that.*” Given the poem’s title, moreover, such doing would apparently involve calling someone in testimony, presumably the speaker himself. Instead, there follows the poem’s most cryptic line, whose ambiguity of meaning and tone is especially remarkable in the near-absence of allusive complication. For a change, the “I” speaks in his own voice, from the heart, and not as a figure of speech alone:

Listen to my heart heavy under judgment [ba-din], see my affliction.

The imperative forms “Listen . . . see,” both entailing “you,” continue the address, but not necessarily the I’s relation to the addressee. They may read as a direct sequel to the line of attack traced thus far *or* as a belated corrective to our long (mis)understanding of it, which the poet has timed for another surprise effect. It all depends on the meaning of the heart, “*ha-kasheh ba-din*,” whose elusiveness my translation, “heavy under judgment,” attempts to capture.

If the phrase means, as it literally does, “hard in/with judgment,” then the sentence fulfills here its aggressive promise. The challenger would then command the dubious judge (though superhuman as ever, because omniscient) to “listen” to his heart and “see” the answer: a heart whose undeserved affliction has loaded it with a sense of injustice, hardened it against God, passed negative judgment on the supreme judge himself. In the process, further, the anticipated testimony of the “I” does materialize

36. See note 18 above for a parallel evolutionary, or rather devolutionary, rhyming. Parallel to “Testimony’s” key wordplay, this rhyme also enters here into a larger sound pattern: it gets orchestrated both with “*bein din le-din, bein dam le-dam . . . ba-din*” (all variants of judgment/blood) and with the angelic collaborators’ “*omdim u-modim*” (stand and confess).

somehow: if only in his heart—audible and visible to the privileged target alone—and through the summary references to hardness and affliction. “Another Testimony” than usual, in every regard.

But the phrase can also mean something like “my heart is heavy because facing judgment,” with an inversion all the way to asking for the *benefit* of doubt. “If undecided, then please spare me, you who can hear and see what would escape an earthly judge.” The imperatives then disclose him in the role of a suppliant. No longer an outrageous questioner and self-appointed guide and prospective witness, the speaker stands revealed as himself awaiting judgment and using all the rhetorical means at his disposal to affect it in his favor. Accordingly, his previous imaging of God in a state of human-like indecision now reads as subjective (and unreliable): a hope to induce that state, wishful thinking projected onto reality. Nor would his manner of speaking sound insolent any longer, far less sacrilegious, but definitely and engagingly orthodox, due to the underlying model of petition. I refer to the prayers of the Jewish High Holidays, which appeal to God’s mercy from a position of admitted guilt. In the light of this model, the suppliant emerges as a believer who acts or trades upon a licensed intimacy with his creator and judge, much like a son confronting his father. The very phrase at issue would then persuasively echo a famous hymn, which begins by describing God as “examiner of hearts on the day of judgment (*be-yom din*)” and ends each line with *ba-din*. The second imperative, moreover, reinforces the appeal to interior life by one to a, or the, precedent of deliverance in national history. It evokes God’s telling Moses from the burning bush “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt” (Exod. 3:7)—the land of slavery and earliest genocide—to serve the alluder’s personal needs of self-defense.

On this reading, however, why the need for defense in the first place? What is the sin, who exactly the offender, against whom, and how related to the theme of the “Sealed Railway-Car” group and the “Testimony” mate? We cannot tell, because, oddly for a petitioner, he gives no clue to the acts or agents involved nor adduces real extenuating, much less exonerating circumstances to back up his supposed petition. He argues, rather than gives evidence, in his own favor. Not even the companion poem drove generalization to such reticence. Within the inferred setup of a metaphorical, religious courtroom evoked in prayer, the speaker would accordingly focus on a personal matter, through a rhetoric that dispenses with the facts altogether: the judge in a hypothetical, wishful state of doubt, the self pleading for mercy. So a generic question arises as well. Where and whose is the testimony, presumably on the Holocaust, foreshadowed in the title?

The answer is sprung on us, with a violent shift in tone and roles and subject matter back to the opening, in the final part of the poem:

Your collaborators, Michael, Gabriel,
Stand and confess
That you said: Let us create man,
And they said Amen.

The loaded univalent expression “collaborators” already makes an immediate difference to our reading of the whole, in that it validates the opening’s allusive undertones and resolves the ambiguity just midposed. If the angels are accomplices to a crime, then God is the criminal, and one of the worst kind: the single expression draws together all the foregoing intertexts, contexts, and textual patterns to voice his responsibility for the Nazi atrocities. Correspondingly, the speaker graspable for a moment as a petitioning defendant establishes himself as victim, plaintiff, prosecutor, judge—all with a vengeance—addressing God in our hearing as implicit co-judges.

As usual, however, Pagis still operates on the most general level possible. The gaps as to the event under judgment and who played, or plays, what role are at last resolved, but not with any factual, let alone detailed information—not even from the collaborators who have now turned state’s witness. Standing and confessing everything relevant for the purpose, the archangels finally deliver the “other testimony” promised in the title. And the otherness promised also motivates the various testimonial features, including the unspecificity, in line with Pagis’s art.

Reconsider the bizarre scene, especially the interplay of continuity and startling discontinuity. The speaker continues to address his words to God, though with the firmest switch in their respective traditional positions between object and maker of judgment. Even in the frame surrounding the angels’ testimony, his deictic choices still refer to God as interlocutor (they “confess / That you said . . . / And they said”). And, in all but justice, God remains God, which is indeed the accuser’s (even with the crucial exception dividing him from the apparent mercy seeker’s) premise and point.

The third party enters not only in a different, testifying role, but also on a different level than the immediate speech-event. Having been abruptly introduced as collaborators, rather, the angels come in as the speaker’s quotees, who in turn quote his addressee and target. Yet the rhetoric of quoting and quoting within quoting enables the speaker to prove his case on the highest possible authority. Who would serve better than “Michael, Gabriel,” implicating themselves in a collaboration (“Let us . . . Amen”), to incriminate the Supreme Being as the initiator and actual perpetrator? Who else could incriminate him at all from his own mouth, when in heav-

only isolation and prior to earthly existence at that? The quoted confession, with its own inset quotation, thus looks back to a distinctively superhuman dialogue scene: otherwise unwitnessed, indeed unwitnessable, announcing an otherwise unimaginable performative, here creative, act par excellence. And the crime lies in the very creation of man. Among God's words on the sixth day was the phrase "Let us create man in our image, after our likeness." "Testimony," you will recall, threw the emphasis on the second part of the speech act, the fact that humanity was made in the "image" (*tselem*) of God. Here the focus is on the first part, "Let us create man," via explicit and direct quotation within quotation from the "us," but the second part of course echoes as well, to compound the guilt.

The complementariness between the two variations on the theme finally emerges in terms of the dramatic scene itself. The first begins as a mimesis of testimony by a witness called in defense of war criminals and ends as a Holocaust victim's otherworldly tale that testifies against God, to the rejection of his created world. The second begins as a direct address to the judge in heaven, possibly challenging, possibly self-defensive, and ends with evidence given against him by the most surprising, otherwise otherworldly witnesses, the "collaborators, Michael, Gabriel." In both poems, though, testimony about the Holocaust, having metamorphosed before our eyes on the way to some humanly impossible form, ultimately equals accusing the creator as such.

We can now see how the inverted reference to the same authoritative source in Genesis—which transforms its drive from the most glorious fact on record into the worst accusation—is the strongest bond between the two poems. In "Testimony," this biblical allusion played a central role in opposing victim to murderer: given that the physical murderers were created in the creator's image (*be-tselem*), with behavior to suit, the witness consumed by the resulting fire dissociated himself from such humanity and their God: "I was a shade / I had another creator." In "Another Testimony," the speaker finally reveals the creation of man as the origin of all human suffering, and the angels confess whodunit by direct quotation.

This disclosure is the more unexpected and disturbing because of the conspicuous *non*mention here of the immediate perpetrators of the Holocaust. Inversely, the fact that, in the process, the accuser sounds like a sufferer for his sins, if only equivocally and only for a moment, is as disturbing. It hints at large ethical, psychological, metaphysical, even legal opacities, comparable to "The Gray Zone" between victims and oppressors analyzed by Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved*. "The condition of the offended," says Levi (1988: 44), "does not exclude culpability, which is often objectively serious, but I know of no human tribunal to which one could dele-

gate the judgment.” Pagis, however, does not go into this and related zones, though the otherness of his strategy does imply doubts about the very institution of human witnessing. (Since the entire “Sealed Railway-Car” cycle was written in response to the Eichmann trial and the new wave of interest in Holocaust testimonies that followed it, the poet’s metatestimonial comment may even question the power of data and details to affect those who were not there.) His main business lies elsewhere, on a plane much less open to doubt and ambivalence. With the crime traced as far back as the creation of humanity, “You are the first and you remain the last” becomes the heart of the accusation. As the First Cause, Omnipotent, and image maker at once, God cannot transfer the guilt or even share it outside his heavenly associates. There is no one before or above him; no one to outlast him or serve as the last court of appeal after him. He, who started it all, will survive it all anyway.

“Testimony” began by implying a court scene, which it then unsettled and dematerialized into a metaphor for judgment, with the whereabouts, parties, ends, and accordingly the discourse all estranged. “Another Testimony,” instead, literalizes this metaphor throughout—all the way to overt witnessing at the final phase—staging a continuous, even if zigzag, drama of judgment along much the same defamiliarized lines. In the process, it also actualizes in its own manner—and to a yet greater extent than its variant—some of Primo Levi’s basic testimonial aspirations as described above. By these I do not mean, or not just, the hope and lessons of communication in general, of which enough has been said by now. Nor would I suggest that Levi’s achievement is to be measured by his own harsh standards, or falls below that of Pagis at their respective best. Rather, I would now emphasize the more unearthly drives behind Levi’s testimony, which fail to accord with his own reality-bound, chemist-like ideal of writing: with the survivor’s memoir as a documentary genre, in short.

If Levi felt a moral obligation to convey through testimony the last testament of the dead, to make their voice heard, then Pagis, exactly because he plays by such different rules, can transmit their viewpoint in their own voice within his uncanny fictions of testimony. And if Levi (1988: 149) wants to speak as “a witness in a trial of planetary and epochal dimensions,” then Pagis realizes this form of speech in trial scenes that also implicate divine supernature and agency, which is reportedly in control of the planets and history itself. This discourse of the Holocaust, from voices otherwise silenced, targeting or even addressing God in his most privileged capacities, forces a review of everyone’s relation with Him, and so with everyone

else under Him: the perpetrator, the victim, the survivor, the witness, and all of us who were not there.

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