

Rina Dudai, Literary Scholar

In 1942, some of my father's family were already in the Theresienstadt ghetto. From there they were moved to the family camp at Auschwitz, and in 1944 my grandmother and two of my uncles were murdered there. My young uncle Michael – twelve years-old at the time – survived because he was selected to be one of the hundred children serving Mengele as runners in Auschwitz. Michael survived the war and lived for many years in London, and in later years came to Israel and died here at a good old age. A short while after his death, after the appearance of a death notice in the Jewish Chronicle, his son received a mysterious email from the Czech Republic, from a woman called Helena Krushka. My cousin had never heard of her.

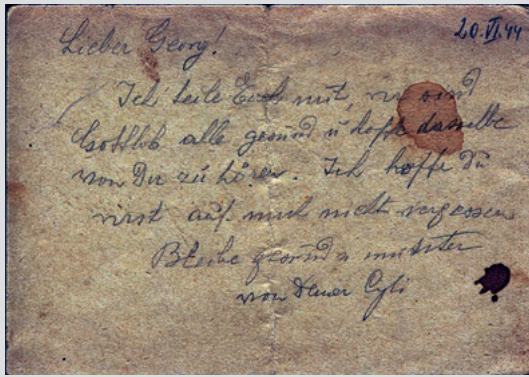


Fig. 1: Postcard from Tsila Honigwachs, Auschwitz, 1944

She said that she had a postcard from my grandmother Tsila, written right before she was sent to the gas chambers. It turned out that Helena Krushka's first husband, also killed in the Holocaust, was a close friend of my Uncle Leo (one of my two uncles who died at Auschwitz), and had worked with him as a doctor in the hospital in Theresienstadt. Helena, who survived the war, had kept the postcard all those years, and now, at ninety, wanted to return it to our family. The postcard was posted on June 20, 1944, three weeks before my grandmother Tsila was sent to the gas chambers. It is written in German and says: "Dear Gerry, I am happy to tell you that we are all, thank God, healthy, and I hope to hear the same from you. I hope you won't forget me. Be well, Yours, Cyli." Most of these postcards were composed identically. The prisoners were ordered to write them before their deaths, to deceive those still in the Theresienstadt ghetto before their dispatch to Auschwitz. But in one line of her own my grandmother refused the fixed form, and it cries out from the text: "I hope you won't forget me."

Today, when many survivors have already died, we are left with various forms of documentation about that terrible period, whether as authoritative accounts of the experience or artistic renditions of it. We become memory-bearers, charged with the task of processing it further, for coming generations. It is so important how these precious materials are dealt with and transmitted, so that the memory not be stained with the pornography of atrocity, not become infected by all kinds of evil enchantments, and will be passed on in a way that allows for depth and complexity, staying true to memory in its open and more concealed aspects.

Rina Dudai

A Secret Sealed: Between the Researcher's Riddle and the Poet's in Pagis' Work

The Secret as a Basic Building Block of Pagis' Poetry

"In every poem of Dan's," says Aharon Appelfeld of his good friend, Dan Pagis, "there's this secret. There are those for whom the riddle of their lives is of the essence. With them, death comes and adds a further riddle."¹ Pagis's work, Appelfeld tells us, is an attempt to talk about the offenses and fears, about the hidden faces of horror, folded into the unseen layers of his writing. Gershon Shaked chooses the metaphor of a pure crystal to describe Pagis:

When I try to think about Dan Pagis the poet, the writer, what first comes to my mind is a pure crystal. His life, oeuvre, world always looked to me like crystals. Below the surface flow lava currents of pain. Beneath time, which was frozen and transformed into a classical poem, were days of flame, terrible historical and biographical memories, and only freezing the tensions allowed him to live with them. Under the transparency of the crystal an opaque enigma could be seen, so concentrated that the crystal became transparent. All that remains is the pure crystal.²

Indeed, what Pagis wrote about David Fogel's poems surely applies well to himself – for his poetry isn't straightforward, doesn't give a factual account; "the key is lost; or to be more precise, has never been there."³

Pagis was born in Radowitz, Bukovina in 1930. Four years later his father separated from the family and went alone to Palestine, and in that same period Dan was orphaned from his mother. With the outbreak of war, he was transferred with his grandfather and grandmother to a labour camp in Transnistria, a time in his life that he would from then on keep sealed inside. After the war he came to Palestine, was educated on Kibbutz Merhavia and in Gat, studied at the Kibbutz Seminar and got involved in teaching. In 1949 he published his first poems. Some years later he began his studies in literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusa-

1 Appelfeld, Aharon. (1987). "The Last Lucidity," *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature* 10–11, [Hebrew] 11.

2 Shaked, Gershon. (1991). "Discovering Wounds without Seeing Blood," *Iton* vol. 77 no. 22, 138–9.

3 Pagis, Dan. "Introduction," in David Fogel, *Collected Poems*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 60.

lem, and went on to become a lecturer there in medieval literature, in the department of Hebrew literature. Pagis died in 1986.

In interviews, Pagis related that for many years he had tried to avoid the Holocaust and didn't dare talk about his feelings or about the connection between his poems and his personal biography. He confessed that only after perhaps twenty years, the time came when the Holocaust experience began to pay off its debt, and he couldn't not but write about it.⁴

As a researcher of medieval literature Pagis published many studies.⁵ He emended the poems of Levi Ibn al-Taban, edited David Yellin's *Theory of Sephardic Poetry*, adding an introduction and bibliography, and brought to completion the work of Chaim Brady in publishing the poems of Moses Ibn Ezra. He published studies, in which he presented the theory of Sephardic poetry as formulated by Ibn Ezra,⁶ including a panoramic view of the spirit of the age in *Innovation and Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy*.⁷ In his last book, *On a Secret Sealed*,⁸ he focused on theoretical aspects of the genre of the riddle, and included an important chapter on the literary riddle. His career as a published poet began in 1949, and he went on to publish books, among them – *The Shadow Dial* (1959), *Late Leisure* (1964), *Transformation* (1970), *Brain* (1975), *Double Exposure* (1982), and a collection of his last poems and prose pieces (1987).⁹ In an anthology of articles published after his death¹⁰ Appelfeld described all six poetry books as “the essence and evidence of the struggle he waged with terror,” and describes Pagis as a master craftsman at revealing and concealing the struggle to bring horror to light.

In this chapter I want to explore the connection between Pagis' writing as an academic researcher of medieval poetry, and Pagis the poet, whose writing is a response to the foundational experience of his life: the catastrophe of the Holocaust.

The enquiry will proceed utilizing the prism of the poetic device of the riddle.

4 Barghash, Rahel. (1984; 1986). “Conversation with Dan Pagis” [Hebrew], *Hadoar*, 15–17.

5 After his death, Pagis' articles were collected in a book edited by Ezra Fleischer: Dan Pagis, *Poetry Aptly Explained: Studies and Essays on Medieval Poetry* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993).

6 Pagis, Dan. (1970). *Secular Poetry and Poetic Theory: Moses Ibn Ezra and His Contemporaries* [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik.

7 Pagis, Dan. (1976). *Innovation and Tradition in Hebrew Secular Poetry: Spain and Italy*, Tel Aviv: Keter.

8 Pagis, Dan. (1986). *A Secret Sealed: Hebrew Baroque Emblem-Riddles from Italy and Holland*, Jerusalem: Magnes.

9 Pagis, Dan. (1991). *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], Bnei Brak and Jerusalem: Hakibutz Hameuchad and Mosad Bialik.

10 Anthology of Articles in Memory of Dan Pagis, *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature*. (1987-8), [Hebrew] 10–11.

In his research on medieval poetry Pagis focuses primarily on the place of poetic convention, and on the fictional status of the poem, examining the notion that "The poem's best is its lie."

His book on Ibn Ezra, as well as *Innovation and Tradition*, emphasize the importance of poetic tools and devices, showing their contribution in constructing the meaning of the poem. Pagis stresses a sense of certainty, confidence and belief in the power of poetic tools to give expression to any meaning. Pagis's research into medieval poetic convention aims to understand more general poetic principles through the window of that time.

In his book *Secular Poetry and Poetic Theory* Pagis makes a link between metaphor and the riddle. His claim is that good riddles contain good metaphors, because these two figures actually have similar qualities.¹¹ In a lecture Pagis gave at the Hebrew University, in May 1986, he argued that the literary riddle had run its course and was disappearing, and with it interest in its theorization. Despite this, Pagis didn't abandon his project of understanding the mechanisms of riddles, which relate to strategies of bridging gaps, or lacunae. He claimed that composer of a riddle is required to employ a strategy of ellipsis, of gaps, so as to hint at his/her subject while also encoding it. Meanwhile the addressee's strategy is to bridge the gaps so as to expose the subject. Furthermore, in solving the riddle, the addressee is required to show the keys to its undoing. In his view, the device of the riddle provides a starting point for a broader discussion of absence, and about the tension between absence and existence. Every riddle should establish a balance between obscurity, coding and encryption, and clarity, along with clues to releasing what is encrypted. If the riddle leans too far towards obscurity and encryption, the addressee will be unable to reach a solution, and conversely, if the riddle is overly clear, it will be obvious. Thus, a good riddle has to have an essentially equal tension between encryption and decipherability. The literary riddle has only one solution, intended by its composer, and when it is solved the riddle as such ceases to exist. Pagis indicates the process undergone by the reader in solving the riddle, in which one becomes more receptive, allowing a new and fresh view of the contemplated object.

In his book *A Secret Sealed* Pagis makes a distinction between a typical/clear or true riddle, and an unclear/atypical, bogus riddle:¹² a clear, true riddle is a challenging question requiring one to declare its solution, which is immanent in the question. The solution is a logical conclusion arising from hints contained in the question. The question and the declaration of its solution are both basic to the

¹¹ *Secular Poetry*, 55.

¹² *A Secret Sealed*, 36.

game, with a reward associated with winning and a penalty with losing. The unclear/atypical, bogus riddle, by contrast, permits no solution through recourse to hints contained in it. It is a challenging question on a subject known only to the questioner, and sometimes there is no one in possession of a solution; it is an enigmatic question in an invented universe lacking the key to its solution.¹³

Perhaps the moment when the book came out – not long before Pagis' death – is not coincidental: it seems that researching medieval poetry gave Pagis a safe zone, from which he could grapple with riddles in a way that was critical, corroborated, enjoyable, and above all controlled: solving the riddle is to dissolve it, with a concomitant yield of pleasure for the one finding the solution (and perhaps also Pagis the researcher). The basic situation of the classic riddle is one of mastery in problem solving, and to research riddles is to a great extent to experience control of the unfamiliar, the strange and the incomprehensible. Perhaps studying the riddle of the distant Middle Ages and Renaissance was for Pagis to be in a protected space of investigation, a safety net from the experience of the trauma of the Holocaust; someone who knows how to create a typical riddle also knows its solution.

However, in his poetry, Pagis used the apparatus of the riddle as a work tool to penetrate the spaces and absences of trauma.¹⁴ It seems that it was precisely the enigmatic, unclear riddles that served Pagis as a foundational device, bearing that riddle he could not solve even forty years after the experience of trauma, as it emerges at the end of his poem "The Story":

Right after this came
the end: an empty page.

Forty years now have gone by.
Still leaning above that empty page,
I do not have the strength
to close the book.¹⁵

In the end, after all the riddles, a blank page remains to which one must listen, respecting its silence.

¹³ See Hazan-Rokem, Galit and Shulman, David. (1996). *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes*, New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁴ See Sidra DeKoven, Ezrachi. (2016). "The Poem as an Air Bubble in the World, and Like Its Reflection: Rereading Pagis' 'Wind from Variable Directions' alongside Kohelet," *Studies and Documents* [Hebrew], Hanan Haver (ed), Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 146–7; Oppenheimer, Yochai. (2016). "To Measure the Dead Space": Trauma and Poetics in the Poetry of Dan Pagis," *Studies and Documents* [Hebrew], Hanan Haver (ed), Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 29–59.

¹⁵ Pagis, Dan. (trans. Stephen Mitchell). (1981) *Points of Departure, Collected Poems*, JPS, [Hebrew], 243.

Pagis seeks to preserve the split, that doubleness in his psyche/soul:

They [his book of research into the riddle, and a book of his poetry] are very different. And I want them to be different. I don't want one thing to elide with another [. . .] it's a kind of schizophrenia. A split. And like those who go to a good psychiatrist – one has to pay for both. And I pay – for each one – with my blood and marrow [. . .] the two areas inside [. . .] it isn't that they are just different, they are opposed.¹⁶

Asked in an interview with Ilana Zuckerman about the publication of the two books, the academic work on the riddle *A Secret Sealed* and his book of poems *Double Exposure (milim nirdafot)*, he said: “my research is very disciplined; I am not predisposed to essay writing. On the contrary – it is completely dry, systematic, full of technical matters.” It seemed to Pagis that academic research and poetry were two essentially different fields of knowledge, with each field demanding a different kind of psychic organization. And yet despite Pagis' declaration that these two domains, the academic and the poetic, are different and even opposed, it seems to me that there are possibilities of reciprocal relations between them, the bridge being his biography. At the heart of the discussion will be two conceptual systems: that system of concepts dictated, in poetic language, by the riddle, and alongside it, concepts belonging to the theory of trauma. I would argue that in Pagis, the riddle both as a poetic device and as existential situation, draws on and is nourished by the experience of the trauma of the Holocaust, and makes its way in dialogue with Pagis the man. Trauma as an existential foundation of an undeciphered riddle comes to light as an essential thread over years, both on an academic-theoretical path and a poetic one, and breaks out in full strength at the end of his life.

The riddle reflected in his poetry

From childhood Pagis bore the burden of a formative experience which he never disclosed to anyone, including his wife, Ada Pagis, who eventually wrote that only towards the end of his life did he largely remove the masks he had constructed, so that he could know himself better:

Some years were hidden from me, especially the time when they sent him away to Transnistria, and I had to live with them being a secret [. . .] because he wasn't prepared to formulate it [. . .] he stubbornly silenced it until the end of his life [. . .] for most of his life,

¹⁶ From an interview with Ilana Zuckerman in 1983. It was published in 1991 in *Iton*, vol. 77 [Hebrew], 22–23.

self-concealment was an existential need [. . .] his poetry was like Charon's ferry, leading us back and forth between the land of the living and, [. . .] the dead, for the experience of trauma was the wellspring and formative force of his life.¹⁷

According to Freud and the subsequent psychoanalytic tradition, trauma as an event has a total quality, where the subject is intensely afraid, feels helpless, out of control, and fears obliteration. It is an experience which fundamentally disturbs the subject's psychic equilibrium. The mind's defense mechanisms cannot deflect or regulate the profusion of stimuli flooding it, and as a consequence the subject cannot respond to them appropriately.

At the heart of the traumatic experience is a "something," formulated by Lyotard in the concept of the "differend", by Agamben as a "lacuna" and LaCapra as "excess," something which evades any representation. Trauma is then the occurrence of a terrible event, whose terribleness cannot be represented in language or other symbolic system; every attempt by the subject to represent the event, even for him or herself, is bound to fail. As Primo Levi put it: "Those who have [touched bottom], and who have seen the face of the Gorgon, did not return, or returned wordless."¹⁸ The story of the witness who survived is haunted by the muteness associated with the trauma. How can one give appropriate representation to that trauma which has no expression, to that lacuna? How, in the story of the survivor, can the enigma or secret of his or her trauma be represented?

I argue that, in his research into medieval poetry and the history of the riddle in Italy and Holland, Pagis derived safety, certainty and power from the very preoccupation with that genre. This scholarly preoccupation with the distant genre of the medieval and Renaissance riddle seems to have been a protected space for Pagis, the scholar. Nevertheless, an understanding of the apparatus of the riddle became for Pagis, the poet, a work tool for penetrating, in his poems, the experience of trauma. A poetic form for expressing terror while staying alive, as he put it. In the domain of poetry Pagis used the device of the riddle to penetrate that "excess," that "lacuna," of trauma. The discourse of the riddle is a paradigm for Pagis' poetic work, as he uses it to try to approach and capture the unrepresentable actuality of trauma, that unseen essence. But at the same time he takes the risk that the riddle will remain a riddle, or in the straightforward words appearing with the title of the book about the riddle: "if one lingers over a secret sealed / he will learn, from what is sealed, to keep it sealed."¹⁹

17 Pagis, Ada. (1995). *Sudden Heart*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 10.

18 Levi, Primo. (1988). *The Drowned and the Saved*, London: Michael Joseph.

19 Pagis, Dan. (1986). *A Secret Sealed: Hebrew Baroque Emblem-Riddles from Italy and Holland*, [Hebrew] Jerusalem: Magnes, 189.

As I will show in the following examples, the riddle is present in Pagis' poetry from the very beginning of his poetic journey, in various forms.²⁰ In the first example we will initially put aside the title of the poem, and relate to the poem as a kind of riddle asking "who am I?".²¹

The sand is swift, overflowing,
burrowing inside itself, searching
for remnants, tombstones, ancestors'
bones.
I never understood this hunger
for the past. I
am a series of instants,
shed my skin with ease,
forget,
outsmart myself.
In all this desert only I can guess
who was who."²²

The poem is called "Snake." Lacking the title, we wonder throughout the poem who this "I" is. The full solution of the riddle is in the title, and it leads to its undoing. In fact, we can argue that this poem is directly concerned with the form of a riddle: it is a verbal picture in which there is in parallel the movement of some object in space and time. In the first picture the speaker observes an "overflowing" movement in the desert sand, "burrowing inside itself, searching." The search goes through a transformation, beginning in space, with synecdochic representations of a whole breaking up,²³ colors becoming the tones of annihilation – "remnants, tombstones, ancestors' / bones," to a search for a lost time: "I never understood this hunger / for the past." The swift sand doesn't perform the search; it stands for the traces of the unseen image of the snake below the surface.

²⁰ In this article I do not intend to examine Pagis' poetic biography in the context of the riddle. On that matter, see the wide-ranging article, Yacobi, Tamar "The Cryptic in the Late Poetics of Dan Pagis," in *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature* 24 [Hebrew], 181–222. My aim is to show how a common thread passes between Pagis' scientific work and his poetry, and is woven by the psychic work, using the form of the riddle, of facing the catastrophic experience of the Holocaust.

²¹ For a detailed analysis of the poem, see Dudai, Rina "Forgotten, Remembered, Forgotten: Forgetting and Memory in Processing Holocaust Trauma in Poetic Language," *Pages in Holocaust Research* vol. 23, [Hebrew] 109–132.

²² Pagis, Dan. (trans. Stephen Mitchell) (1981). *Points of Departure*, Philadelphia: JPS, 61; *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], 148.

²³ Synecdoche is a literary device in which the part stands for the whole, the specific the general, the individual the plurality – or vice versa.

The poem displays a bogus riddle: the solution is no solution: although it is clear that it concerns a snake, the solution to the snake's questions isn't conveyed to the reader, or even to the snake, and by the end of the poem we are left with an unanswered question, which isn't even indicated by a question mark: "who was who." The riddle becomes a metaphor for an existential situation of disappearance. The movement of sand traces an absent character, about which one can learn only from its past, which the character searches for. The character lives in two parallel realities: one involving an infinite search for its past; and the other living in the present of "a series of instants," shedding its skin with ease, outsmarting itself (in an intertextual echo of the serpent in Eden: "Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the beasts of the field") and busy with conjecture.

Hunger for the past is the hunger to recover the lost present of the source of the trauma, that empty time which made an impact but isn't remembered. The wish to search for the past is aimed at incorporating it into linear-historical time, thus redeeming the trauma from the plane of its secret. The more the past is not found, the more the trauma works as the compulsion to an eternal present. The experience of void can't be represented; it escapes all meaning. Everyday life, however, "a series of instants," does not unfold on that timeless traumatic plane outside of consciousness. For the snake all that is left is to hypothesize about "who was who."

Another of Pagis' riddles asks "where?":

I hid in the room, but forgot where.
 I'm not in the closet.
 And not behind the curtain.
 Nor in the great fortress between the table legs.
 The mirror is empty of me.
 For a moment it seems to me that I am in the picture on the wall.
 One day, if someone comes and calls me
 I'll answer and I'll know: here I am.²⁴

The question displayed here opens a narrative of hide and seek, also echoing the "where are you?" in the conversation of God and Adam following Adam's first transgression. In Pagis' poetic narrative, a feeling of survivor guilt and shame emerges, recontextualized as a derivative of the story of the Garden of Eden. The main point I want to highlight in this poem is the presence of the other as essential to the poem's speaker's return to a real existence.

24 Pagis, Dan. (trans. Shoshana Olidort). "Where," *Curated* website, <https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/poems-dan-pagis>; *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], 244.

Traumatic experience is indelibly bound up with an awakening of the sense of an "I". An extreme feeling of powerlessness accompanies the subject confronted by terror and the possibility of personal extinction. One of the most severe effects of traumatic situations is the disappearance or radical reduction of the person while alive.²⁵ An echo of this can be heard in this poem-disguised-as-a-riddle, in which the "I" is hidden away, and the one who can restore him to his existence is the other who calls to him. The condition of nullification of the "I" intensifies from moment to moment. The search for the "I" begins in concrete reality, and then at a certain stage passes into the fictional reality of the mirror and the picture on the wall, and yet in these spaces too, he is not to be found. This is particularly evident in the mirror-search, which gives rise to the riddle of the mirror in medieval poetry. The mirror allows one to see oneself in a place where one isn't, but the speaker of this poem sees that "the mirror is empty of me." The empty reflection is a projection of the traumatic kernel, a negation of what is, emptiness, the lack deep at the heart of the source of the trauma. Extricating oneself from this place is by no means certain. It is represented as possible – if someone will come and call to him; and if he then answers and comes to know himself, in the dialogical enunciation of "here I am."

If the first poem represents the subject's disappearance, effected by the apparatus of the riddle about an animal, and the second poem represents the emergence from disappearance by means of a riddle of hiddenness, which finally becomes a possible dialogue with one's fellow, the following poem examines the nucleus of the trauma of emptiness from an entirely different place:

Brain, pleased, surveys his centers;
 a center for speech, a center for lies,
 a center for memory
 (seventy clocks, at least, each keeping its own time),
 a special center for pain—
 Who is speaking please? Who's there?
 Suddenly he hears the astounding news:
 There is a hidden circle somewhere
 whose center is everywhere
 and whose circumference is nowhere;
 a center which is so near
 that he will never
 be able
 to see it.²⁶

²⁵ Goldberg, Amos. (2012). *Trauma in the First Person*, Or Yehuda: Dvir and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 131–155.

²⁶ Pagis, *Points of Departure*, 121–2; *Collected Poems* [Hebrew], 199.

The main point here is the discovery of “a hidden circle somewhere”: a systematic search of the organism reveals the brain – a search which each time penetrates to a deeper center, beyond speech, beyond lies (poetic language), beyond the centers of memory and pain – to something sensorially new: the existence and centrality of a vanished circle. The poet adopts the mystical-kabbalistic form of a center which is “everywhere / and whose circumference is nowhere,” and represents it not as an all-embracing reality, but as an all-embracing nothingness.²⁷ The central point of the circle is not seen, and I identify it to be the “differend,” the “lacuna,” and the “excess” at the root of trauma, its kernel. It is what leaves its impression, though evading all signification, Lacan’s “Real” – a kind of existence for itself, whole and unrepresentable. In meeting the real, all apparatuses of mediation collapse, so that the subject “will never / be able / to see it.”

I will conclude with a poem published in 1987, after Pagis’ death:

For a Literary Survey

You ask me how I write. I’ll tell you, but let this be confidential. I take a ripe onion, squeeze it, dip the pen into the juice, and write. It makes excellent invisible ink: the onion juice is colorless (like the tears the onion causes), and after it dries it doesn’t leave any mark. The page again appears as pure as it was. Only if it’s brought close to the fire will the writing be revealed, at first hesitantly, a letter here, a letter there, and finally, as it should be, each and every sentence. There’s just one problem. No one knows the secret power of the fire, and who would suspect that the pure page has anything written on it?

In this narrative poem Pagis relates to writing in language appropriate to a secret; it is a riddle which will never be revealed because the keys to its undoing are not known. The poem doesn’t let on the secret and the riddle has no solution. The poem is dynamic, and there are moments when it seems that the solution is close at hand. For although the writing tool is based on secrets (invisible ink and colorless onion juice, similar to tears) and the empty page, it could still be that the solution can be discovered by bringing the page close to fire. Here the secret of writing is hypothetically and progressively brought into presence: “at first hesitantly, a letter here, a letter there, and finally, as it should be, each and every sentence.” But the epiphany turns out to be fantasy, for “no one knows” the secret. The

²⁷ See my extended analysis of the poem in my article “Forgotten, Remembered, Forgotten” [in Hebrew]; Hirschfeld, Ariel. (1986–7) “Writing a Secret on the Path of Truth’: On the Form of Meaning in Dan Pagis’ ‘Twelve Faces of the Emerald,’” *Jerusalem Research into Hebrew Literature*, vol. 10 [Hebrew], 137–151.

empty page is thus seen to be pure, unblemished by writing.²⁸ But one way or another the poem was written. Both the fire and the mirror, from earlier in the poem, are overt symbols of destruction – the mirror, whether bearing a reflection or not, is an ancient symbol of death, as seen in the custom of covering mirrors at the *shiva*; and fire, which alone can restore the writing on the translucent page, and expose its absence.²⁹

In a post-catastrophe world, the artist is required to spend time in a place of unsolvable riddles, of silences and unknown depths. The form of the riddle in Pagis' world became a place more open to all kinds of hearing the other, hearing words before they are spoken, of pain and tears hidden from view, which strive to make, as Paul Celan put it, a "breathturn."³⁰

The article is based on my lecture at the NAPH annual conference in Montreal in 2008.

²⁸ Yacobi discusses, in a detailed analysis of the poem, whether the riddle in Pagis' late poems is continuous with the earlier work, or a new development. "Crypticism in Dan Pagis' Late Poetry," 187–8.

²⁹ I am grateful to Michal Govrin for bringing this to my attention.

³⁰ Celan, Paul. (trans. Pierre Joris). (2014). *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux.