Meta-Representation: World-Making Thematized in the Ekphrastic Poetry of Dan Pagis

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Meta-representation in discourse refers to the discourser's explicit or implicit thematizing of representation. Such thematizing may bear on a variety of poetic features and operations. For instance: What objects does one choose to represent or foreground or marginalize or omit altogether? Moving from selection to evaluation, how (un)suitable is a medium or a genre to the challenge of representing the object? And to what extent does that object itself suit the communicative purposes and effects sought? Such questions always arise throughout the author's genetic process, but they sometimes appear in the finished text itself, whether on the surface or in some oblique or dramatized form.

The elegant poetry of the modernist Hebrew poet Dan Pagis (1930-1986) presents an assortment of such meta-representations. His ekphrastic poetry has a special claim to an interest in this regard. Ekphrasis, as defined by Yacobi based on Sternberg's theory of quotation, is an intermedial quotation that transfers a visual image (a painting, a sculpture, a photograph) to language. Since one discourse here re-presents what has already been directly represented in another discourse, ekphrasis is an exemplar of meta-representation. This intermedial transfer and doubling throws yet more light on the issue of world-making, far more than does any reference to the world in either of the media, the verbal or the visual, on its own.

In turn, Pagis offers an instructive case in point. His ekphrastic poems mix the dramatization of representational problems with open commentary. Furthermore, they often do so from unusual, estranging viewpoints that compound and thematize the meta-representational issues. My article will focus on the question of (un)success in world-making and will explore it through a set of poems that play variations on the theme.

Introduction

The speaker-poet of "Le-mish'al Sifruti" ("For a Literary Survey," Pagis 1991: 308; Pagis 1989: 85;[1] hereafter: "Survey") starts by echoing a preceding question: "You ask how do I write?," yet he ignores the interest in his creative process implied by such a question. Instead, he reveals a secret ("But let this remain between us") about the mechanics of his writing: How he uses onion juice to prepare "excellent secret ink." Once dried, the "colorless" juice "doesn't leave any mark [or sign]" on the page. The interviewee teasingly ends the prose poem with a rhetorical question: "Who would suspect, in face of the pure page, that something is written on it?"

The onion-written white page, like other clean slates in Pagis's poetry, alerts us to some information that is not available to the reader. Such concealment is part of the poet's hide-

and-seek game with his readers (Yacobi 1988a: 100ff.). Among the challenges involved, Pagis's empty spaces (above all, white spaces, like the pages here, but also snow, walls, tablets) signal the absence of certain information concerning past events and/or of some text that presumably represents such events. For example, the empty page in "A Small Poetics" (228; M: 81) and "The Story" (243; M: 115), the snow and the photograph of it in "Bridgehead Photograph" (248-9; M: 96-7), the white ceiling in "Silent Movie" (222; M: 86), the wall in "Genealogy" (167), or the tablet in "A Moment in the Louvre" (169-70; M: 63), all signal such absence.[2] As to the repair of this absence, while the protagonists of the poems in question either puzzle out the white space or attempt to project some kind of signs onto it, the reader is always left in the dark. The speaker of "Survey" even admits that he deliberately suppresses the text. Revealing the secret of his technique at the same time as he continues to keep the text invisible, he turns the refusal to communicate into the poem's central interest. In other words, by specifying his meta-representational choice between disclosure and concealment, he illustrates our theme.

Meta-representation belongs to another discourse level than representation: The two differ in the way any image differs from the object it renders, except that now both are of a higher order than usual. Normal *first-order representation* involves a more or less detailed reference in some medium to some world, historical or fictive, or to a part thereof. For instance, a character sketch, a description of a face or a place, or a photograph of a sunset – each represents some world-item. On the other hand, *meta-representation* in discourse refers to a representation like any of these and so thematizes it, makes an issue of it. Such thematizing can bear on a variety of represented features and representational operations. For instance, the meta-representer can highlight the parts of whatever object (character, place, sunset) the representer chooses (or chose) to foreground, as against those backgrounded. And among the latter, which parts have been condensed, marginalized, or elided altogether? Again, concerning ontology, what is the balance here between the real and the fictive? And in either of these cases, the meta-representer is also liable to draw notice to questions bearing on the techniques used. Or, turning from selection to evaluation, does the given medium or genre or device suit the represented object? As significantly, to what extent is the representation of some object(s) suitable for whatever communicative goals and effects the text pursues?

Such questions arise throughout the genetic process when a would-be communicator envisages and produces a representation, often by trial and error. Likewise, the question often arises in the mind of the audience, when interpreting and evaluating the finished product. But they may also be incorporated, elaborated, or thematized in the finished text itself. There, the questions may appear not only in some oblique or dramatized form but even on the surface, as in "Survey": Evading the meta-representational interest expressed in his writing habits, the poet discloses, instead, the secret of the invisible ink.

The centrality and significance of this theme for Pagis are inferable from its rich manifestations in his poetry. To begin with, witness the comments on it that surface in poems focused on other subjects and themes. For example, in "A Guided Tour" (103), a dramatic monologue about Jerusalem, we encounter two local meta-representational qualifications. The monologist, an old guide, reviews the cityscape in the early 1960s, with the so-called David Tower looming on the Jordanian side of the border. He explains to a group of tourists that, in contrast to all burial pits that "come and go" – the many generations that have disappeared without a trace – "the tomb of David my father / Was invented [literally, fictionalized] and has remained. It is the last gate / to a city of fiction." The speaker thereby evokes the elusive character of Jerusalem, where fictional narratives attach to genuine monuments, and the line between authentic history and established mythology, or wishful thinking, is blurred. What exactly do names like "David's Tomb" represent? This is a meta-representational question of ontology coming from the representer himself. The representational fuzziness of the poem grows when the old guide calls King David "my father," and we realize that, while denying the authenticity of the tomb, he claims to be David's son, as if he were ontologically hovering between the present tour in the early 1960s and the ancient biblical past.[3] By yoking together monument and misnomer, reality and fiction, past and present, single and twofold existence, descriptive representation and a meta-descriptive evaluation, the speaker captures the multifold, almost hallucinatory effect produced by the city of Jerusalem on both inhabitants and visitors.

Similarly, in "Will Retires from the Theater," (75-6; translated and analyzed in Yacobi 1988a: 99-101), Pagis draws a comparison between William Shakespeare and his celebrated fictive characters. The playwright "forced too large a life" on his "ghosts," who must undergo their ordeals in repeated theatrical performances, but then he chose to retire from the theater, "evoking what remains / Of these frothy times / In placidity, from the secure rows / Of beer mugs." The fact that Shakespeare's quiet retirement enables him "to save [his] soul / From this eternity in a decent way" suggests a meta-representational paradox: How can ordinary life be compared at all with the overlarge life fictionalized and staged in his dramas? Are not the two incommensurate regarding ontology, intensity, and magnitude, all at once?

Left unresolved, this paradox resonates in some of the allusive, and especially the ekphrastic, poems discussed below. At the same time, it exemplifies Pagis's elegant, self-distancing, enigmatic poetics, which defies taxonomic pigeonholing.[4] Consider in this light the meta-representational twist at the end of Pagis's poem "Epilogue to Robinson Crusoe" (73; M: 131). Back in England, we hear, Crusoe "lived / With the pipe of his stories and talked … talked and talked / About an island that has not been counted as part of history." Unlike Shakespeare, with his career and retirement, Crusoe and his life on the island (as well as the "Epilogue" itself, for that matter) are fictional, just like the dramatist's overlarge "ghosts." How, then,

would this island possibly count as "history"? And why point out that it does not, and with terminal emphasis at that? Or, maybe, this final incongruity contrasts Crusoe's own audience (for whom the island belongs to the real world, along with the teller and themselves) to that of Pagis (in whose eyes the island remains fictional, despite Crusoe's obsessive talk about it). Additional thematizing of the reality/fiction nexus appears in "Silent Movie" (222; M: 86) and "Witness Anew" (79; both analyzed in Yacobi 2016). The silent movie summarized in the first poem and the "grey-and-white" one evoked in the second join the cinema to the other discourse types (poetry, novel, theater, guide's speech), whose representations we find questioned (or re-presented) and complicated here.

By the same token, the fact that this ontic play relates here to a variety of objects (the misnamed tower, Crusoe's island, Shakespeare's *dramatis personae*, as against his own retired self) and topics (the ravages of time, fictive vs. real life, the loneliness of the returner), further testifies to the scope of Pagis's interest in meta-representation. Yet, this scope has been unduly limited to his traumatic past in WWII. This regrettable limitation traces back to a variety of factors, including the dominance of transience and memory among Pagisian themes: The over-strong linkage between the poems and the historical poet in the memoir of his widow, Ada Pagis (1995); the sudden appearance of the impressive Holocaust poems in his third book (*Gilgul/Transformation*, 1970: 19-36; Pagis 1991: 134-46; M: 27-41); and general trends in present-day literary criticism, such as the immense interest in trauma generally, and Holocaust trauma in particular. As a result, scholars discussing these poems have either ignored the meta-representational issue altogether or associated its manifestations with the author's personal past – above all, his experience during the Holocaust – without sufficiently grounding this reference in the poems themselves, to say the least.[5]

I intend to show how and why such a limited view is refuted by a group of texts that dramatize and problematize meta-representational situations (e.g., a fictional artist's attempt to image something in the world.). The forces behind Pagis's poetry are much more diverse and intricate than any particular set of experiences, however central to the author's inner life. Since we focus specifically on the intersection between world-making and ekphrasis, the analyses below will demonstrate how his interest in representation on all levels manifests this principle in an exemplary fashion. Moreover, Pagis's anti-confessional manner, which culminates in the large number and variety of his fictive personae,[6] should caution us against any exclusive linkage between the poet's biographical past and his meta-representational practice. Not surprisingly, therefore, the meta-representational theme surfaces within the fictive arena itself, from the perspective of fictive agents. Moreover, as we will see, these are often not only unusual but also puzzling and possibly unreliable mediators, such that their distance from the poet redoubles along with the problematics of world-making and sense-

making. Even the interviewed poet of "Survey," who "confesses" that his poems are written in onion-ink, reads like another fictional mask, if only because his literal hide-and-seek game with the audience would appear to be a metaphor for that of his creator.[7]

Meta-Representation, Representation, Re-Presentation, and Ekphrasis

Within the Pagisian poems that are directly concerned with (meta-)representation, the ekphrastic ones are a particularly interesting and instructive case in point.[8] Following Meir Sternberg's theory of quotation (1982; 1991), I define 'ekphrasis' as an intermedial quotation that transfers a visual image (a painting, a sculpture, a photograph) to language. In all quotational transfers, across the arts as well as within the same medium, "representational (or mimetic) relations are established … between two discourse events" (Sternberg 1991: 63). So, the quoted original assumes the form of discourse *within* discourse, a part within a new whole, an *inset* within a *frame*. A quotation (ekphrastic or otherwise) thus "entails a communicative subordination of the part to the whole that encloses it … involve[ing] a distinctive point of view: a perspectival montage between quoter and quotee" (Sternberg 1991: 64-5. For more on the varieties of ekphrasis, see Yacobi 1995; 2002; 2004; 2013, and further references there.)

This has a manifold bearing on our subject. An ekphrastic quotation, though it evokes and controls another world-oriented ('mimetic') discourse, is *not* a type of meta-representation, because it does not necessarily aim at making an issue of that discourse, the way the poet in "Survey" treats his invisible writing or the old guide presents the mythology of Jerusalem. Instead, ekphrasis makes a distinctive kind of representation: a verbal (e.g., literary) *re*-presentation of a visual (e.g., painterly; or, as in "A Silent Movie" - cinematic; or, as in "Acrobatics," even gymnastic) representation of some world-item (e.g., a person, a landscape, an occurrence). Ekphrasis thereby entails second-degree representation; a discourse in one medium re-presents what has already been directly represented in another discourse and another medium. Ekphrastic quoting or transfer, therefore, may foreground meta-representational issues.

It is not only that, like any representation, such re-presentation must involve the higher-order dilemmas and choices I have already established as universal (what to include, what to exclude, what to detail, what to condense, in what order, from what mind or mouth, and so forth). The juxtaposition of two media in intermedial transfer brings out the problematics of representation much more richly and intricately than does the account given of some world-object in either of the media, the verbal or the visual, on its own. Among other problems, ekphrastic re-presentation always raises that of matching: To what extent is the visual object translatable, or adequately translated here, into the verbal medium?

As Lessing has claimed in *The Laocoön* (1963[1766]), medium/object harmony, or symmetry, plays a crucial role here. The spatial medium naturally represents spatial objects (e.g., a figure, a landscape) but makes it difficult for the visual artist, such as the painter, to render temporal processes, the dynamics of action. Inversely, due to the temporality of the verbal medium, action is harmoniously representable there – in effect, narratable – while describing the spatial (e.g., visual) world of coexisting objects and features becomes problematic.[9]

Throughout representation, then, the harmonious contrasts with the disharmonious option or performance, symmetry with asymmetry; and of the two, the latter evidently foregrounds the issues of meta-representation. So ekphrasis, as an intermedial transfer between opposed discourses, is an exemplary case of this asymmetry. For ekphrasis re-presents (quotes) along a time sequence a spatial object originally represented in a spatial medium, and thereby forces the painting's visual/visual harmony (for example) into a verbal/visual disharmony in additional regards as well, especially the nature of the respective (iconic vs. arbitrary) signs. Nowhere else do we encounter such compounded problematics of world-making, except in the reverse intermedial or interart transfer of verbal action to visual space.

If ekphrasis foregrounds meta-representation, its practice in Pagis's writing is of special interest. His ekphrastic poems not only dramatize representational problems but also openly comment on them from unusual and estranging viewpoints, so that meta-representation becomes a frequent theme there. More specifically, these poems both show and tell the success or (mostly) the failure of representation. So, they raise the still larger meta-question of accord or discord between reality and its mimesis or between the signified and the signifier. The various guises assumed by this question and the diversity of answers it receives in Pagis's work will be the focus of my paper. I will start with complete failures of representation, then juxtapose them with possibilities of success, and end with intermediate cases: Hovering between success and failure, these enable an inclusive treatment of the complex theme. Throughout, while the explicit judgment of the *dramatis personae* (speakers, heroes) is always suspect and sometimes unreliable, the final verdict is always a reading hypothesis.

Failures of Re(-)Presentation

Ekphrastic re-presentations, like first-order representation, often attempt to capture and fix some object in their language. Here they encounter a major impediment that is central to Pagis's worldview and thematics, namely, the failure of all media to control the fluidity, transience, mutability of life in all its forms.[10] The verbal re-presentation of visual images is a paradigm case in this respect, as well: How, if at all, to fix the unfixable? Indeed, the static quality of visual art, which heavily constrains its ability to represent temporal change and opposes it to the power of the verbal medium – in literary art, above all – is exactly why Pagis favors ekphrasis.

Take, for instance, "*Ha-portret*" ("The Portrait," hereafter: "Portrait"), spoken by a painter at work. His attempt to verbalize a specific act of portraiture ends with the admission that he cannot finish the portrait owing to the drastic and fantastic metamorphosis undergone by the object of representation from one moment to another (158):

הַפּוֹרְטְרֵט
הַיֶּלֶד
אֵינֶנּוּ יוֹשֵׁב בִּמְנוּחָה,
קָשֶׁה לִי לִתְפֹּס אֶת קַו לְחָיָיו.
אֲנִי רוֹשֵׁם קַו אֶחָד
וְקִמְטֵי פָּנָיו מִתְרַבִּים,
אֲנִי טוֹבֵל מִכְחוֹל
וּשְׂפָתָיו מִתְעַקְּמוֹת, שְׂעָרוֹ מַלְבִּין,
עוֹרוֹ הַמַּכְחִיל מִתְקַלֵּף מֵעַל עַצְמוֹתָיו. אֵינֶנּוּ.
הַזָּקֵן אֵינֶנּוּ וַאֲנִי
אָנָה אֲנִי בָּא.

The Portrait
The child
Is not sitting still.
It is hard for me to catch the line of his cheeks.
I draw one line
And the wrinkles on his face multiply;
I dip a brush
And his lips curl up, his hair whitens,
His skin, turning blue, peels from his bones. He is gone.
The old man is gone. And I,
Whither shall I go?

Pagis's original technique of 'telescoping' unrealistically combines here three different time sequences, those of real life, of (pictorial) representation, and of (ekphrastic) re-presentation. (1) In the first of the three, the sitter does not sit still: The child supposed to be portrayed transforms beyond recognition, let alone graphic fixture, in an accelerated process of aging, dying, and decomposing. This goes forward simultaneously with (2) the attempted portrait-painting, and with (3) the painter's complaint in his ekphrastic role that his attempt repeatedly fails, because it is impossible to keep up with the swift changes in (1): "I draw one line / And the wrinkles on his face multiply; / I dip a brush / And his lips curl up, his hair whitens, / His skin, turning blue, peels from his bones." Each painterly act meets with the same obstacle until the sitter vanishes altogether, and the poem ends with a final admission of defeat: "The old man is gone. And I / Whither shall I go?" (This is a pointed allusion to a canonical precedent in first-order reality: Reuben's despairing cry when confronted with the disappearance of the young Joseph in Gen 37:29.) Ekphrasis thus meta-represents the failure of art to arrest the inexorable flux of life.[11]

Art, I say, not just the usual kind that falls short in "Portrait." Lessing's differentiation between the arts suggests that, in contrast to the staticness of the spatial art of painting, literature's time medium enables it to keep up with the dynamics of any represented action. But other Pagisian ekphrastic poems bring to light fundamental problems of representation that cross the lines of medium, including the question of representable or re-presentable events.

Thus, in another of his ekphrastic poems, "*Rega' Ba-luver*" ("A moment at the Louvre," 169-70; M: 63; hereafter: "Louvre"), Pagis widens the meta-representational theme beyond the visual media. A comparison with "Portrait" on this point reveals a set of meaningful analogies, positive, negative, and, taken together, mixed or complex. The poem again unfolds an internal monologue of a creator of ekphrasis, now one re-presenting the statue of the *Scribe accroupi* (scribe squatting) in the Louvre (lines 2-6):[12]

> Inside a glass case is waiting for me
> (I am already late) the quick scribe of Pharaoh.
> Seated cross-legged,
> Wholly attentive
> He is looking at me with white eyes.

Further, the ekphrastic image of this statue, along this verbal sequence and in later references, does not assume the common descriptive, hence asymmetrical, form: a spatial object re-presented in a linear medium. Instead, we newly encounter the simultaneous lines of development traced in "Portrait." Here, speaking of the ekphrasis runs parallel to the action that takes place before, during, and after the speaker's "urgent appointment" with the "quick scribe of Pharaoh."

Unlike "Portrait," however, this ekphrastic creator is a sheer verbal re-presenter, not at all doubling as a pictorial representer – or, in other words, a literary artist, presumably a poet, looking for inspiration in the Mecca for art (one can hardly write a novel at the Louvre.) He does not even set out to create an ekphrasis, but only produces it as a necessary antecedent to his literary business with the scribe: to the imagined plot of dictation. What he wants is to write ("dictate") a poem in the great museum.

Across the differences, however, from "Portrait," in medium and art form as well as intention, the result is the same. He fails, and we newly witness an artist's frustration in the course of an abortive process of genesis: So abortive this time, that the intended discourse never even starts. Unlike the Pagis poem before us, the one that the speaker wishes to compose at the Louvre remains unspoken (undictated, as it were, in the imaginary plot). The scribe is "waiting," but see lines 16-20:

> What shall I order him to do.
> He sees

My silence,
He engraves it
On a clean slate.

No poetic words are engraved, because none have been uttered. The action dramatizes, and the meta-representation thematizes, a sheer zero-degree of writing.

As to the obstacle, a comparison with "Portrait" reveals yet another difference. Now it is the would-be maker himself, rather than his object, whose transience is to blame for the failure. If anything, his object – as opposed even to the quickly vanishing, yet for a while existing sitter – remains unknown, because its representation never materializes. To bring home the point, along with the difference from "Portrait" in this regard as well, these minuses are strikingly dramatized within the poem's world itself (lines 14-15, 21-22):

He is burnt clay,
I am clay that is more and more hardening.
[…]
I glance at the clock, am more and more erased
From the glass, from his face.

The ancient statue of the scribe expects a dictation, as it were, yet encounters a persistent silence instead: The speaker's growing sense of his mutability leaves him wordless when it comes to the practice of verbal art.

In both "Portrait" and "Louvre" the protagonist's failure of representation is complete, and these failures are not only dramatized but also explicitly judged. For the would-be creators follow each stage of their representational or re-presentational attempt with a meta-representational assessment. Their texts thus alternate between factual description and negative meta-representational self-evaluation. The respective negatives, moreover, trace back to a single existential cause. In both texts, the project miscarries due to the unalterable fact of transience: that of the model in the first; that of the would-be author in the second.

Other re(-)presentational failures in Pagis are attributed to other causes. For instance, to an extreme (indeed, an impossibly rigorous) criterion of image/object similarity, as in "*Ha-ḥinukḥ Le-bekhi*" ("Teaching to Cry," 300). There, a crying statue located on a tombstone is criticized by the protagonist for not shedding tears. But then, the overzealous critic fails to the same extent. Using the Stanislavsky acting technique in an attempt to teach the statue how to shed tears, the self-appointed instructor admits that he "did not manage to illustrate for it [the statue] even one tear." "Where did I go wrong?" he finally wonders, "I have reflected on it for years on end, with a lowered head, like a statue of an imagined crier." Ironically, the speaker's own long-standing posture mirrors, in its immobility as well as tearlessness, the stone effigy that he re-presented and derided at the beginning.

At the same time, the location of the statue in a cemetery again associates the re- and meta-representations with death, as if transience frustrates all artistic world-making (literary, pictorial, ekphrastic) in the sublunary state of nature. Bearing this recurrent motif in mind, let us now turn to some of Pagis's poems of representational success.

Re(-)Presentational Success

אַקְרוֹבָּטִיקָה

מַכָּה רִאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁל תֹּף – וְהוּא פְּקַעַת אֲוִיר, גַּפָּיו לְכָל עֵבֶר, הוּא מִתְעָרְבֵּל, יוֹרֵד בְּקֶשֶׁת גְּדוֹלָה, נוֹחֵת עַל קְצֵה אֶצְבָּעוֹ. יָפֶה מְאֹד, אֲבָל כְּבָר רָאִינוּ.

מַכָּה שְׁנִיָּה שֶׁל תֹּף – וְהוּא כַּדּוּר מְרַחֵף בֵּין שִׁבְעָה כַּדּוּרִים, בּוֹעֵט וְנִבְעָט, יוֹרֵד בְּקֶשֶׁת גְּדוֹלָה, תּוֹפֵס אֶת כֻּלָּם עַל אַפּוֹ. יָפֶה מְאֹד, אֲבָל כְּבָר רָאִינוּ.

פִּתְאֹם לְלֹא כָּל הֲכָנָה, לְפֶתַע פִּתְאֹם, רַגְלָיו עוֹמְדוֹת עַל קַרְשֵׁי הַבָּמָה, וּמֵעַל לְרַגְלָיו – אַגְנוֹ, בִּטְנוֹ, חָזֵהוּ, כְּתֵפָיו, צַוָּארוֹ, וּלְמַעְלָה פָּנָיו הַפּוֹנוֹת בְּשַׁלְוָה אֶל הַחשֶׁךְ. זֹאת אָמָנוּת שֶׁאֵין לְמַעְלָה מִמֶּנָּה..

Acrobatics

A first drumbeat – and he's a coil of air, his limbs every which way, he whirls, descends in a wide arc, lands on a fingertip. Very nice, but already seen.

A second drumbeat – and he's a ball floating among seven balls, kicking and kicked, descends in a wide arc, catches them all on his nose. Very nice, but already seen.

Suddenly without preparation, all of a sudden, his legs stand on the boards of the stage, and above his legs – his pelvis, his stomach, his chest, his shoulders, his neck, and higher up his face turned serenely toward the darkness. There is no higher art than this.

The prose poem "*Aqrobatiqah*" ("Acrobatics," 264) refers to a performance art, one that requires extraordinary bodily skills while pursuing limited representational goals, to embody an impressive spectacle of human gymnastic ability. Yet, the poem's surprise ending shows this art revolutionized in a manner that widens its representational scope and deepens its meaningfulness. But whetherhether the performing acrobat follows or breaks his art's conventions, he is invariably successful, if only because he accomplishes whatever he sets out to do. In this sense, at least, the meta-representational judgment of the acrobatics remains positive all along, from all the viewpoints implied in the poem. Unlike the failed painter in "Portrait" and the would-be writer in "Louvre," with their agonized inner monologues, here the (wordless) performance does take place in front of the intended audience. It does so, repeatedly, across all variations in the performance, and even re-presented to us as such by one viewer, the poem's ekphrastic speaker.

Further, there the monologists express their frustration throughout the creative process, so the final outcome and the announcement of defeat are expected. Here, by contrast, unexpectedness runs through the poem, affecting a variety of observers, and enjoying a double motivation. For one thing, the story of artistic action (or omission) that we encountered in both "Portrait" and "Louvre" recurs not only in another art form but also from

another viewpoint, that of a vocal beholder rather than the artist as a silent self-narrator. The acrobat's performance is conveyed ("re-presented") and evaluated by this beholder in simultaneous narration: Like a sportscaster, he observes the spectacle as it develops and gives a blow-by-blow account of this development from start to finish. Accordingly, the observer cannot foretell any part of any acrobatic exercise before the event, let alone the success or otherwise of the whole exercise, not even whether the acrobat will complete it without accident. Indeed, he himself finds the last exercise totally unexpected from the start; witness his iterated reference to its abruptness.

As for us readers, we experience one surprise after another in following the ekphrasis of the performance, especially due to the incongruity of each acrobatic exercise as described with the observing describer's judgment of it at the end. The re-presentation, in short, does not lead up to the final evaluation. During each of the first two exercises, the acrobat displays extraordinary physical ability and technique, verging on the improbable. So, the ekphrastic re-presentation multiplies apparent overstatements. For example, the one exercise ends with the gymnast landing "on a fingertip" and the other with his catching all the balls "on his nose"; or consider the figures of speech at the respective beginnings: "he's a coil of air" and "he's a ball floating among seven balls." The exercises thus demonstrate a near-incredible triumph over gravity and human limitation, even increasingly so – as the examples just cited suggest – as well as cumulatively. In short, the first paragraph's breathtaking, literally spectacular, exercise is at once followed by an achievement even more astonishing, regardless of what the performance exactly represents (its own virtuosity, say).

Hence, the unexpectedness of the disparaging comment – "Very nice, but already seen" – with which the speaker shrugs off each of the acrobatic acts he has first observed. Further, the poem underlines this damning with faint praise – and so heightens our surprise – in a number of ways. One is its verbatim repetition, though the acrobat would appear to go from strength to strength. Another is its formal location, at the end of the respective paragraphs. Still another consists of the basis of the speaker's judgment: What he finds wanting is not the quality of these two acrobatic exercises, but their originality. Given the near-superhuman quality of the feats as just rendered by the judge himself, how can they possibly warrant such an indifferent *déjà-vu* response? Not to mention one iterated and conspicuously placed. To take even the first exercise, is it credible that past acrobats have already managed to land on a fingertip, without breaking it? This incongruity with the achievement on view makes the ekphrastic speaker's judgment questionable, at best overdemanding, and accordingly unexpected in normative terms.

This is quite a re-presentational lapse. In meta-representational terms, the picture drawn in paragraphs 1-2 grows more disharmonious and accordingly more surprising as well as intricate. This arises from the twofold perspectival contrast that repeats itself along each of

the paragraphs. As each unrolls, there emerges a clash within the ekphrastic re-presenter's own viewpoint: between his sequent judgments of physical accomplishment and artistic unoriginality, the one clearly implied and the other explicit ("already seen"). At the same time, the reader endorses the former judgment while unpredictably driven to question the latter when sprung on us toward the end of each paragraph.

But there follows the biggest surprise of all in that it bears on the ekphrasis as well as on the re-presented performance and overtakes the hitherto indifferent beholder along with us ever-appreciative readers. For to crown our surprise, the ekphrastic speaker himself is flabbergasted by the third exercise, so much so that his earlier formal style gives place to a verbose, repetitive, stammering expression of an abrupt and fundamental change in the performance: "Suddenly without preparation, all of a sudden." Three initial exclamation marks, and no wonder. For, instead of performing yet another feat of agility and motor coordination, as expected by everyone, for better or worse, the acrobat now simply stands "on the boards of the stage … his face turned serenely toward the darkness." From the perspective of any audience – the one he faces included – a motionless acrobat is an embodied oxymoron, particularly following his recent maneuvers and contortions.

The polarity between energetic movement and complete rest, or arrest, is emphasized by the shift in the world-items enumerated, from bodily actions to body parts: "legs … pelvis … stomach … chest … shoulders … neck … face." Moreover, the order of this report, ascending from legs to face, brings out the acrobat's total, statue-like, coordinated motionlessness. In addition, it also culminates in the most expressive part of humans, the face, and picks out, of all things, the direction of the acrobat's gaze, "turned serenely to the darkness." This piles novelty on novelty, one surprising change on another. Both the fact that he chooses to face something, and the object of his choice, imply a mental attitude that is altogether absent (indeed irrelevant) during the previous exercises; and "serenely" (the only modifier in the poem) even offers an insideview of the acrobat.

But what does the choice to face the darkness intend to express? In physical terms, it simply means that the acrobat on the lighted stage faces the audience without seeing them. However, both immobility and darkness have an immemorial association with death, counterpointed by the earlier super-acrobatics in the light. The acrobat's posture, therefore, also invites a metaphorical reading, whereby he represents something to the audience faced. Turning "serenely toward the darkness" would appear to signify the acceptance of death as the inevitable end of our frenzied movement on earth. Hamlet's "Readiness is all" and Macbeth on how one "struts and frets his hour on the stage, and then is heard no more": these Shakespearean allusions spring to mind in context.

Moreover, the speaker, having been amazed by the acrobat's "sudden" posture, then arrives at this exact understanding of it. And his ekphrasis conveys his insight to us between the lines, re-presenting what the artist on stage wordlessly and even motionlessly represents to *his* audience. In the speaker's eyes, it is this silent message about ultimate reality that turns the acrobat into a genuine and original artist, one who has transformed acrobatics from a bodily performance that generates a spectacle and low thrills to one charged with deep meaning. Hence, his final superlative evaluation, or, considering the earlier *déjà-vu* judgments, revaluation: "There is no higher art than this."[13] In the Hebrew original, his normative meta-comment literally reads: "There is nothing above" this art. So, the preposition "above" echoes back to its two foregoing, body-centered occurrences ("above his legs" and then, in the original, "and above, his face") in the final paragraph. This trio encapsulates a thematic unity in variety: The physical and the normative artistic representational accomplishments merge, at last, in everyone's view.

The poem "*Ha-hatqanah*" ("The construction" 232) deals with the success of a very different artistic activity and one yet to be performed, but again involving an extraordinary kind of representation that is re-presented by way of ekphrasis. So, the discourse plays yet another variation on the meta-representational theme (232):

הַהַתְקָנָה
אֶת מַסֵּכַת הַמָּוֶת מַתְקִינִים
מִנֶּגָטִיב שֶׁל הַפָּנִים.
עִם צֵאת הַנְּשָׁמָה, אַתָּה עוֹטֵף
אֶת הַפָּנִים בְּחֹמֶר רַךְ
וּמְקַלֵּף לְאַט׃
כָּךְ תְּקַבֵּל גֻּמָּה גְּדוֹלָה, וּבָהּ
בְּמָקוֹם הָאַף, חוֹר,
בְּמָקוֹם הָאַרֻּבּוֹת, גַּבְשׁוּשִׁיּוֹת.
אַתָּה יוֹצֵק תְּמִסָּה שֶׁל גֶּבֶס פְּנִימָה,
מַמְתִּין שֶׁתִּתְקָרֵשׁ,
מַפְרִיד, מֵסִיר׃ בַּפּוֹזִיטִיב חוֹזֵר
הָאַף לִבְלֹט, הָאַרֻּבּוֹת לִשְׁקֹעַ.
עַכְשָׁו אַתָּה נוֹטֵל אֶת פְּנֵי הַגֶּבֶס
וּמְכַסֶּה בָּהֶם אֶת בְּשַׂר פָּנֶיךָ
וְחַי.

The Construction
The death mask is constructed
From a negative of the face.
When the soul has departed, you enfold
The face with soft clay
And peel it off slowly:
Thus, you will get a large cavity, in which,
Instead of a nose, there's a hole,
Instead of the eye sockets, bulges.

You pour a plaster solution inside,
Wait for it to congeal,
Separate, remove: in the positive,
The nose protrudes again, the eye sockets sink.
Now you take the plaster face
And cover the flesh of your face with it
And live.

Before the advent of photography, death masks offered the most accurate representation of a person's face at the end, an authentic visual memento. "Construction," however, does not re-present an existing death mask, but, as its title and opening line imply, the poem instructs the addressee how to prepare one. As a set of directives, this poem is an ekphrasis of a possible future construction: To be precise, we now encounter a modalized, because prescribed, artistic activity, rather than, as in all the examples discussed so far, a categorical one.[14] Here lies the difference between quoting speech about how to create a death mask and about the actual creation of a portrait, for example, as an act being performed now. Generically, the former is comparable to a recipe, the latter to a record of fact. Further widening his spectrum of world-making and commentary on it, Pagis accordingly experiments here with a re-presentation of a (posthumous) representation that has not (yet?) occurred, but is prefigured, directed, and commended.

In structure and style, this poem is modeled on a user's manual.[15] Indeed, the poem was once titled "How to Construct." After a generalized explanation that "The death mask is constructed / From a negative of the face," there ensue detailed instructions, addressed – so we naturally assume at this point – to any interested student or would-be practitioner. As often in such manuals, the directives assume the form of action verbs in the present tense and the second person – "you enfold … peel off … pour … wait," and so on – that serve as imperatives in softer language. Thereby the addresser guides the student's actions from the first to the last stage of constructing a death mask. Briefly, one first prepares "a negative of the face," where "you will get a large cavity, in which / Instead of a nose, there's a hole, / Instead of the eye sockets, bulges"; then "in the positive / The nose protrudes again, the eye sockets sink." All as expected, more or less, by a reader familiar with the process.

But now, just as at the end of "Acrobatics," comes the radical surprise. After the how-to scenario duly moves from the "negative" to the "positive," and with it to the finished death mask, you would expect the instructor to stop there. But, as though not content with the successful production or product envisaged, he proceeds, instead, to specify how the mask is to be used; and more astonishingly yet, used by the constructor himself as a self-mask. Still less does the foregoing series of directives prepare us for the one sprung in the final verb:

Now you take the plaster face
And cover the flesh of your face with it
And live.

Even the cardinal surprise overtaking us in the final lines of "Acrobatics" pales beside this "And live." The unpredictable (indeed, given a death mask, counter-predictable) last directive forces a basic repatterning of all that has come before, including the speech situation. The speaker, it now obviously emerges, is not an ordinary instructor but has only pretended to be one (as if he had assumed a mask so far) for good artistic reason. By shuttering the first, false impression just before the end, he can unfold his own sequel to, and original interest in, this process of construction, with strong effect. Inversely, the addressee of the how-to scenario, we now gather, is not an aspiring artist or anyone else interested in constructing death masks for others, but someone newly deceased, just after "the soul has departed," who is now learning how to prepare his own death mask.[16] This violent surprise also leads to another, even bigger one, concerning the poem's ontology. The represented world, as a whole, changes in retrospect: from the realism of a living person constructing a death mask as a memento of the departed to the fantasy of the dead constructing their own death mask as a means for resurrection.

The ending, then, compounds surprises. What exactly does the fantasy sprung on us involve? For example, does it envisage the possibility, or even represent the actuality, of the self's eternal life through self-made death masks, constructed after each demise?[17] What does it mean for the dead to return to life with the newly made "plaster face" covering "the flesh of your face"? The key to the poem, I would argue, is transformation. The addressed "you," the speech situation as a whole, and the represented world, all transform into otherworldliness. But the latter two do so only along the discourse and in the reader's mind, where they change ontologies all of a sudden: That which, for the first twelve lines, appeared to be a realistic frame of reference, surprisingly turns into fantasy in the three closing lines. On the other hand, the addressee also transforms literally, within the fictive reality itself, along the event sequence – from a dead to a living existent – as literally as Gregor Samsa does from a human into an insect in *The Metamorphosis*.

Unlike Kafka's one-off tale, however, this poem is a notable variation on Pagis's theme of transformation, metamorphosis, "*Gilgul*" (Yacobi 1988b, 1996). Pagis often dramatizes – sometimes more, and sometimes less, explicitly – how a deceased entity of one generation is transformed into a new living existent (human, animal, or even vegetable) in the next generation. For example, "*Ha-maḥzor*" ("The Cycle," 96; M: 38) instructs the "sluggard" to observe the ants underground and see how, having been buried, everyone turns into food for animals (ants) and plants. "Learn your ways," this blunt directive concludes, to make sure that the lazy addressee (and the reader) gets the universal point. But most relevant to

"Construction" is a group of Pagisian poems that, like it, focus on the metamorphic two-in-one: the transformative relations of (dis)continuity and (dis)similarity between the dead and the living self, or in our how-to scenario, between past and future identities. Among the analogues within this distinctive subset, I can now only glance at a few significant instances:

> -- The last note that Pagis adds to "*Ha-matzor*" ("Siege," 220; M: 15) is a quotation from the Apocrypha: "'Then the land shall give back the dead which it receives today for safekeeping, and nothing at all shall be changed in their appearance.' (The Book of Baruch 5:2)."
>
> -- In "*Ha-taglit*" ("Discovery," 87), an intergalactic traveler asks himself: "Whom have you been living till now? And how did you know / To unload your foreign self?
>
> -- In "*Halalit*" ("Spaceship," 131; M: 24), the astronaut senses that "time has come to an end" and describes his final actions: "I am preparing myself, / Who is preparing myself" to move "Into my body and onward." (In the Hebrew original, the verb for "prepare oneself," *le-hatkin*, is identical to that translated here as "construct")
>
> -- Most poignant is the ending of the poem "*Kvar Hayiti Be-Terem Ani*" "I Have Already Been Before" or literally, "I Have Already Been Before I Am" (120). The speaker says there, "Already, I am not / – I was a distant summer – and, at this moment / when I have to see the other light, I shall be / what I shall be. Already, I cannot remember."

Even without a detailed analysis, one can see the distinctive theme of "Construction" equally running through these passages, where the dead relates to the living self into which it has metamorphosed. Taken together, they throw light on the scenario and purpose of the death mask – including the turning point in the enigmatic final lines – not least by way of contrast within the family. Thus, in most of the four analogues, we encounter subjects bewildered about their identity and identity change. The cosmic traveler in "Discovery" asks himself questions about his selves – the present ("you") and the earlier ("unload[ed] … foreign") one – which must presumably remain unanswered. The astronaut in "Spaceship" wavers between the categorical "I am preparing myself" for movement "into my body" and the doubtful, even incoherent "who is preparing myself." And in "I Have Already Been Before," the speaking-I knows that "Already, I am not" and "Already, I cannot remember," but remains totally ignorant about his future self: "I shall be / What I shall be," with a bitterly ironic allusion to God's mysterious self-naming amid omniscience (Ex 3:14). He is therefore caught between two epistemic negatives. In "Construction," on the other hand, the speaker who directs the mask-making is in total control, surprising his own addressee as well as the readers, and presumably all-knowing about the whats and the whys of the envisaged transformative process.

Moreover, because the astronaut and the last speaker are ignorant about the futures as well as the pasts, their autobiography lacks closure, so that we cannot even be sure that these

transformations will come off. “Construction,” however, not only duly concludes, in two stages, but also (fore)tells a story of progressive accomplishment that recalls “Acrobatics.” In the first stage of the how-to scenario (lines 1-12), the death mask is successfully constructed. But the follow-up (in lines 13-15), where the wearer of the death mask will come back to life, outdoes even the climactic success in “Acrobatics”: that of raising (in a way transforming) acrobatics from a spectacle of physical virtuosity to a meaningful art of representation. But even this great accomplishment does not equal resurrection, let alone the transformation of a death mask into a life mask.

Here we come to the heart of the matter, which earlier readings of the poem have neglected to confront, let alone explain. I refer to the transformative relations as enacted in the last lines: “the plaster face” of the mask covering “the flesh of your face” which is supposed to bring one back to life. The relations envisaged here are unusually innovative, even for Pagis, not least because they are charged with meta-representational significance. As I indicated, transformation entails by nature both persistence and change. Some continuity/similarity between the dead original and the living successor must be accompanied by some discontinuity/dissimilarity. But nowhere is the continuity so maximal and the discontinuity so minimal as here. The continuity is maximal, since it reaches the extreme of (near-)identity. The dead man comes to life in his own body and with (almost) the same face. This transformation seems to echo the revival of the dead in the Book of Baruch, where “nothing at all shall be changed in their appearance.” Except that nothing modulates here into almost nothing. The difference between the dead and the newly-living self remains minimal and, to the uninformed observer, invisible. It lies in the difference between the old flesh-and-blood face and its exact, iconic representation by the plaster face, that masks, replaces, and to the naked eye, constitutes it, as if the facial image were the real thing.[18]

Intermediate Cases: Between Failure and Success

In “*Battim*” (“Houses” 229), the focus shifts to a machine, but one that, like the human makers in the poems above, refers to the world: namely, a seismograph. To strengthen the family likeness, the poem begins and ends by calling the specialized machine “the pen,” hinting at writing and drawing.[19] Moreover, since Hebrew lacks neuter (pro)nouns, all the references to “the pen” or the “instrument” in the original humanize it through the masculine pronoun “he.” So do the semantic choices to invest it with a mind that “tries … likes.”

As a recording device, this “pen … instrument” attempts a (seismo)graphic representation of the earth’s instability; and its products (visible movements, wave-like signs), therefore lend themselves in turn to re-presentation via ekphrasis. With a difference, as always (229):

בָּתִּים
בִּקְצֵה הַדַּף מְרַטֵּט
הָעֵט, סֵיסְמוֹגְרָף, וּמְנַסֶּה
לְצַיֵּר בְּקַוִּים דַּקִּים וְחַדֵּי זָוִיּוֹת
אֶת רְעִידַת הָרִצְפָּה.

הָרְעִידָה גּוֹבֶרֶת. הַזָּוִיּוֹת חַדּוֹת יוֹתֵר.
אֲבָל הַמַּכְשִׁיר הַזֶּה הִתְיַשֵּׁן,
הוּא אֵינוֹ מְצַיֵּר אֲפִלּוּ אֶת קְצֵה הָאֱמֶת,
שֶׁהַשֻּׁלְחָן נִתָּץ לְרִסְיסִים,
הַבַּיִת קוֹרֵס,
הָאֲדָמָה נִפְעֶרֶת תַּחְתָּיו.

בַּדְּמָמָה הַבָּאָה אַחַר כָּךְ, בֵּין חֻרָבוֹת,
פָּטוּר הָעֵט מִכָּל חוֹבוֹתָיו.
הוּא מְשַׂרְבֵּט עַל הַדַּף כִּרְצוֹנוֹ,
קוֹשֵׁר כִּלְאַחַר יָד זָוִית לְזָוִית,
מַפְגִּישׁ אֶת כָּל הַקּוּרִים בַּמֶּרְכָּז,
תָּכְנִית אָב
לְבֵית עַכָּבִישׁ.

Houses
At the edge of the page the pen,
A seismograph, quivers and tries
To draw in thin and acute-angled lines
The quaking of the floor.

The quaking increases. The angles are more acute.
But this instrument has become obsolete,
It does not draw even the edge of the truth:
That the table is being smashed into pieces,
The house is collapsing,
The earth is yawning below it.

In the silence that follows, among the ruins,
The pen is released from all its duties.
It scrawls on the page as it likes,
Connects, offhandedly, angle to angle,
Brings together all the threads at the center,
A master plan
For a spider’s house.

Like the hero of “Acrobatics,” “the pen, a seismograph” engages in a three-stage performance, and one again traced as it develops by an undramatized re-presenter in three stanzas. Yet, predictably by now, there also emerge some marked differences. Unlike the acrobat’s typical art, as indeed performed in the first two stages of “Acrobatics,” the seismograph’s performance is supposed to be essentially, even critically, representational throughout, and we find it judged as such by the ekphrastic speaker. Judged, for better *or* worse. The recording pen, that is, does not go from strength to strength or even from one success to another, but proves to have a checkered career. In the opening stanza, faced with moderate instability, the pen faithfully records “the quaking of the floor” in its own quivering graphic movement. It “tries,” and presumably manages, to capture an unstable reality “in fine and acute-angled lines.”

In this, the seismograph contrasts with the total failures of the graphic artist in “Portrait” and the poet in “Louvre.” Of these two, the contrast to the painter is even sharper. His graphic medium is akin to that of the seismograph, which is pointedly said to “draw,” thus clinching both the family likeness and the operational difference to its unsuccessful mate. Further, what the seismograph “draws” at this stage is precisely the movement of the object that eludes the painter.

At the same time, the success of the recording device is not very impressive, because the representational challenge presented to it here is comparatively low, and in more than one regard at that. Its represented object, “the quaking,” is moderate, not just in vibration but also in spatial extension, “the floor.” And surprisingly so, to the point of improbability; or, if you will, of sheer poetic license. Here, the definitional immense coverage of a seismograph shrinks to proportions analogous, if not to a death mask or the restless child in “Portrait,” then to the stage on which the acrobat performs *his* first movements. While this is unusual for such a recording instrument, the drastic limitation to an undersized represented object (like a floor) makes the recording appear a small success. In the fourth line, indeed, the reader expects “the quaking of” to be followed by “the earth,” so that the appearance of “the floor,” instead, produces a comedown, as well as an original defamiliarization.

In the second stanza, however, the slight quaking intensifies to the limit: “The table is being smashed into pieces / The house is collapsing / The earth is yawning below it.” Now, the seismograph fails to represent anything, just like the poet at the Louvre, except that the latter's failure is personal rather than occupational. Also, it is like the portraitist vis-à-vis the child, though that painter does manage to “draw one line,” while the seismographic pen “does not draw even the edge of the truth.” This exhibits a total breakdown of the medium in face of a mobile object, so much so that the speaker suspects that “this instrument has become obsolete” (a dry joke, perhaps). However that may be, the ekphrastic speaker no longer re-presents in this stanza, but himself provides, in brief, the representation of seismic

disaster to which the seismograph is unequal altogether. In this, the speaker joins the portraitist who, doubling as an ekphrastic speaker, verbalizes his own representational shortfall.

After the catastrophe, however, seismic and seismographic alike, comes a major surprise, as so often occurs toward the end of these ekphrastic poems of success and/or failure. Actually, the surprise is twofold, concerning the pen as a representer and the ekphrastic speaker as its re-presenter.

Let us start with the former. Instead of giving up altogether, the pen finds in the third stanza a sort of old/new occupation by changing its object of representation to one of its own choice and devising. I say 'old/new' because its representational activity is no longer seismographic, though it is still graphic, indeed, painter-like. (The first stanza's reference to it as "the pen, a seismograph" accordingly shrinks into "the pen," which can serve either medium.) Now, "among the ruins," its object and task gone, "the pen is released from all its duties" as tracer of the world's instability, let alone that of the nonexistent floor.[20] So, instead of faithfully recording, or trying to without success, it freely "scrawls on the page as it likes."

Here arises the other major surprise, concerning the ekphrastic speaker's re-presentation of what the pen now draws. Scrawling "as it likes" suggests that the pen, no longer bound by its recording "duties," has come to draw lines at random, purposelessly, even doodling. This suggestion next gains explicit support from the adverb "offhandedly," which describes how the liberated machine "connects … angle to angle." But in the three final lines, with their references to centralizing and planning, this turns out to be a false impression, born of the ekphrastic speaker's unknowing mis-re-presentation of the pen's doings. Since he follows the activities of the seismograph as they take place, he too, like the speaker in "Acrobatics," re-presents in ignorance, or more exactly, in the order of discovery. Neither of them knows what the performing agent has in mind or will do next; and each discovers both things only after the event, in retrospect, to his surprise and, accordingly, our own. In the third paragraph of "Acrobatics," the speaker is flabbergasted when the acrobat stops moving. Here, at the same juncture, the speaker belatedly and gradually perceives the intention(ality) behind the pen's line-drawing after the earthquake, and with it his earlier mis-re-presentation of it, to the point of reversing the truth. Like his mate in the opening paragraphs of "Acrobatics," therefore, he now proves unreliable, but only in terms of knowledge rather than judgment. The reading becomes complicated accordingly. It marks a parallel ordeal of discovery, along which our initial false impression surprisingly turns by degrees into a multifold understanding: of the graphic representation, the ekphrastic re-presentation, and the poem as a whole.

First, with "Brings together all the threads at the center," we realize that, counter to what "as it likes" and "offhandedly" have suggested, all the line-drawing in this stanza is not random

but is intentional, teleological. Then, the disclosure advances from the pen's intentionality to its intention:

> A master plan
> For a spider's house.

This multiplies our surprise in that the ontology of the drawn object changes poles. No longer a recorder, any more than a doodler, the pen now turns into an aesthetic inventor, creating a definite represented object with a definite end in view, all within a fictional world. There, the visual fiction drawn by the pen recreates something like "the house" that existed and vanished in the previous stanzas.

However, the new, self-made architect has drawn up a plan for "a spider's house": an achievement of sorts, certainly relative to the paralysis in the second stanza. But does it count as a genuine success, one comparable to the acrobat's at his best or even at his second best? The answer remains equivocal. "A spider's house" implies a fragility reminiscent of the real house that collapsed in the earthquake, as though the pen cannot even fictionalize a stable building. This negative judgment draws support from the pinpoint allusion to the phrase in Job 8:14-15 on the godless man: "His certitude is a spider's house. He leans against his house, but it will not stand" (my translation). Still, does the pen put its trust in the spider's house it has drawn or, based on its bitter experience of houses, the reverse? In the latter case, the implicit judgment of it reverses accordingly.

It all depends on the pen's intent, but we cannot tell whether it drew a fictional substitute for the lost house or a fictional image of the house's precariousness. The equivocation deepens because we cannot tell where the value-laden "spider's house" comes from, either. Does this phrase (as well as "the threads" in the foregoing line) belong to the ekphrastic speaker, who chose it as a referring term in order to expose the pen's delusion or, by reference to Job, its baseless trust? Or does the negative designation of the house as a fragile thing originate in the pen's own mind and the ekphrastic speaker only re-presents it with approval? The ambiguous, possibly divided view of the last representational performance here stands opposed, then, to its univocal validation by everyone concerned in "Acrobatics," and, *a fortiori* to the successful metamorphosis celebrated throughout "Construction."

At a more general level, all this invites a reading of the pen as a *parable for the artist*. I started this analysis by saying that, while the ekphrastic poems considered so far deal with human representers, here the focus shifts to a machine. As the text unfolds, however, the analogy between the two progressively grows. The poem starts and finishes by designating the recording machine not as a "seismograph" – its specific technical name – but as "the pen," a well-known synecdoche for a writer or poet.[21] Throughout the poem, moreover, the references to this pen variously suggest a human artistic representer at work. Observe, for

example, how in every stanza the machine is presented as drawing or scrawling where you would expect an appropriate, more technical term for such an automatic procedure – like recording – so that its commissions and omissions read as metaphorical, and generalizable to those kindred activities. To much the same effect, the text gives us insideviews of the pen, as if it had a mind of its own, one with a will, commitments, intentions, and even goals. Thus, the varied mind-readings: "Tries to draw … released from all its duties … scrawls … as it likes" – all, of course, even less applicable to a machine than the drawing and scrawling with which they combine in these phrases, so as to reinforce the figurative, humanizing implications. And the human-like, artist-like teleology revealed in the inside views also governs the seismograph's exterior action, especially: "Connects … brings together … master plan" – all both goal-directed and striving for unity. Even the gap left about the source of the judgment "a spider's house" (ambiguous between the graphic representer and the ekphrastic re-presenter) concerns intentionality and may imply a shared unfavorable judgment of such a fragile thing.

The figurative reading of the pen as a human artist also gains strength from larger indicators. Ontologically, there is its abandonment of factual recording for the representation of fiction, the artist's domain. Thematically, all along the pen confronts the master force of Pagis's world and worldview, namely, mutability of all kinds, including the death-to-life transformation through the mask, as well as the ordinary reverse movement. Compared with such transformation, an earthquake is also an extreme kind of change, but a realistic one. Moreover, it is a synecdoche for a sudden, destructive change of immense proportions. It may therefore symbolize the Holocaust, but "Houses" does nothing to justify this particular reading, which is excessively and sometimes automatically favored in scholarly discussions of Pagis.[22] On the contrary, the poem limits the scope of "the quaking" to "the floor" and the destruction to things, "table … house," exclusive of humans. So, the mutability here remains drastic but irreducible to any specific phenomenon, let alone a historical event. As such, it even extends to the fictionalized "spider's house," both proverbially and allusively destructible in a moment.

The multiple grounds for this reading thus establish the probability of associating the pen with the artistic protagonists who are challenged, and often defeated, by life's transience in the other ekphrastic poems, so I will accordingly refer to it now as "he." Even so, the recurrent multiple variety in unity (representational, re-presentational, meta-representational) exhibits itself afresh. The painter, the acrobat, the death-mask constructor, and the poet at the Louvre, all belong to specific arts or forms of imagining the world; and this even includes the pen in its literal role, as a seismograph. Generalizing any of them into "the Artist" (like the trendy thematizing of Pagis's poems by appeal to the Holocaust) is accordingly resisted by the text of the poems other than "Houses," or at least restricted to abstraction and vagueness.

("Portrait," for example, is readable as a poem about the artist paralyzed by mutability. Yet the reading would not be anchored in any of the textual details – the child, the specific transformation – and so would explain nothing.) In the pen's symbolic or synecdochic capacity as an artist figure, however, he eludes this restrictive specification. In particular, the language chosen by the ekphrasis to tell about his activity equivocates between verbal and visual art. Hence, the very reference to him as a "pen." Or, the alternating glances at the respective arts ("page … draw in thin and acute-angled lines. // It does not draw even … // scrawls on the page … connects … angle to angle"). This is why I previously called the pen, and the poem as a whole, "a parable for the artist." This is also why the poem raises, among other questions, a new meta-representational issue: How to translate a literal into a figurative, and a particular into a general re(-)presentation.

Once the pen has been humanized and generalized into this new figure, the whats, hows, and whys of his representation follow clearly enough, by reference to the particular seismographic plot previously discussed. A brief re-plotting on a higher level, and in more inclusive terms, will therefore now suffice. Within our expanding gallery of (un)successful representers of the world on the move, the pen occupies an intermediate or ambiguous position, his activity being neither as spectacular as the acrobat's nor as hopeless as the portraitist's. It falls into three stages, as in some other ekphrastic poems, but the final stage marks a new line of development, both unexpected and unresolved.

In the metaphorical plot, the first stanza reports an attempt "To draw … / The quaking of the floor." On a more general level, this covers any moderate bid for representing change in the world. Note several significant facts: The vibration is limited to "quaking" (as distinct from the collapse in the next stanza) and the scope to "the floor" (unusually for an earthquake). These features are equally representable in other semiotic or artistic systems, definitely including literature, as their ekphrastic re-presentation itself testifies. Their moderateness can also find equivalents (substitutes, alternatives) in terms other than the low intensity and the reduced scale of the motion here. In other words, these features readily translate into synecdoches for a represented object of modest proportion. As such, they make it possible for the artist to capture something of life's mutability, while implying a mediocre achievement, "at the edge of the page."

The next stanza underlines all this by way of contrast. When "the quaking increases" to a full-scale earthquake and the artist's accessible mini-object is destroyed, he fails to represent anything at all. Only the ekphrastic re-presenter now performs, combining description with judgment of the blank left on the page. In face of disaster, the artist cannot "draw even the edge of the truth," as if he were an "obsolete" recording machine. Again, the particular objects and measures of the abortive representation – the table smashed into pieces, the house collapsing, the yawning earth below it– are as synecdochic as their counterparts in the

first stanza ("quaking … floor"). They are similarly re-presented in the literary ekphrasis, now as minuses instead of pluses, and similarly replaceable with other tokens of disaster (or of metamorphosis in general) beyond the reach of art; say, the child turning into a corpse while being drawn in "Portrait," to the painter's frustration.

The third stanza of "Houses" re-presents yet another shift in the representation of the artistic pen, but it does so gradually and at first misleadingly, because the re-presenter himself misunderstands what happens. He fails, in turn, to render the change in *his* (second-order) object – the artist's activity – so that the stanza reflects his process of discovery, going from unreliable to reliable ekphrasis, and motivates our own through it. These processes run together with the artist's developing activity as (mis)understood by the beholder.

This re-presenter initially assumes that with the artist's represented object having gone forever, he feels he is released from all representational duties and "scrawls on the page" at will: engaging in mere doodling or, within verbal art, automatic writing. And we readers, having no other source of information, go astray as well. Next, the re-presenter also mistakes what proves to be the artist's composition (of lines, angles, or, elsewhere, words) for "offhanded," meaningless connections of angles (as opposed to the angles that duly record and signify the quaking in the first stanza). Only then does the maker of ekphrasis come to realize that the artist has not given up his calling, not even his mimetic drive. Instead, he "brings together all the threads at the center / A master plan / For a spider's house."

To the observer's surprise, and ours, the developing activity has been intentional, representational, and goal-directed all along, just like the first stanza's recording, but, as usual, with a major variation. Discouraged (or perhaps enlightened) by his total failure in the second stanza, the artist has shifted from factual documentary all the way to fictional representation, equally open to all arts (as suggested by the dual reference of "pen," for example). Indeed, this polar shift of ontology reopens not just the possibility of success but of success in symbolizing or commemorating the real house (destroyed in the earthquake) through the invented house (which is safe from destruction).

More generally, does fiction transcend, in effect vanquish, mutability by ensuring the indestructibility of whatever it represents, and so of whatever the representation refers to in real life? The poem's answer, though delayed to the last, is decidedly negative, with "A spider's house" literally serving as a punch*line*. (A positive equivalent would be "And live," as in "Construction"). The only question is, from whose mouth or mind is this strong "No" coming? Does "a spider's house" belong to the ekphrastic speaker alone, as opposed to the artist who naively (like his predecessor in Job) puts his trust in this house of fiction? Or does the crucial phrase originate in the artist himself and the ekphrastic voice only re-presents it,

so that both alike know the sad truth? As already detailed earlier in my analysis of this perspectival montage, the discourse leaves an ambiguous answer.

Now for the last case-in-point, arguably the least expected of all (304-5):

קְלַסִּיקוֹן
עַל רֹאשׁ הַיַּעַר הַזֶּה מִשְׁתָּרֵעַ
רַק הוּא, הָרוֹגֵעַ, הַקַּר: הָרָקִיעַ.
בְּלֵב הַיַּעַר הַזֶּה מִסְתַּתֵּר
רַק הַיַּעַר הָרֵיק.

כֵּיצַד? בַּחוּץ, בָּעוֹלָם, קוֹרֶה
שֶׁמֵּרֹב עֵצִים אֵין רוֹאִים אֶת הַיַּעַר.
לֹא כָּאן. בַּיַּעַר הַזֶּה אֵין עֵצִים.
הוּא עָקָר, הוּא יַעַר טָהוֹר כָּל-כֵּלּוֹ.

מַה סּוֹעֵר בּוֹ, אִם כֵּן,
בְּבֹקֶר צַח שֶׁל אוֹקְטוֹבֶּר?
הוּא נִכְסָף לִהְיוֹת
בֶּן-חֲלוֹף.
הוֹ, לִהְיוֹת מְפֻצָּל לְעֵצִים,
חָשׂוּף לַסּוּפָה,
כָּל עֵץ לְעַצְמוֹ,
כָּל עָנָף, כָּל פֶּתַע-פִּתְאֹם לְעַצְמוֹ
וּפִטְרָיָה בַּת-יוֹם,
וְדוּכִיפַת בַּת-רֶגַע –

אַךְ מִיָּד הוּא חוֹזֵר בּוֹ, נִכְלָם שֶׁחָלַם,
וּכְקֹדֶם הוּא קְלַסִּי, שָׁלֵם וּמֻשְׁלָם:
לֹא יָמוּשׁ, לֹא יָמוּת, לֹא יִחְיֶה לְעוֹלָם.

A Classic
Over the top of this forest, only it extends,
Calm, cool: the sky.
At the heart of this forest hides
Only the empty forest.

How so? Outside, in the world, it happens
That one cannot see the forest for the trees.
Not here. In this forest, there are no trees.
It is barren, it is a pure forest altogether.

What, then, is turbulent within it,
On a clear October morning?
It yearns to be
Transient.
Oh, to be divided into trees,

Exposed to the storm,
Every tree on its own,
Every bough, every all-of-a-sudden on its own
And a day-old mushroom,
And a moment-old hoopoe –

But at once it backtracks, ashamed of having dreamt,
And as before, it is classic, whole and perfect:
Never to move, to die, to live, ever.

"*Qlasiqon*" ("A classic") is about a painting of a forest. But its pictorial object, hence also the ekphrastic re-presentation of it, emerge only by degrees, and even so, never quite explicitly. This is perhaps why Sandbank (1988: 103-4; 2001[1993]: 106-7) totally misses the second-order, pictorial existence of the forest: He mistakes it for "the external world" as opposed to "the world of the poem." With this, he also misses Pagis's art of disclosure: the typical hide-and-seek game, played even on the meta-level of the text. Constructively speaking, the emergence of the true ontology, the forest's, and the poem's, goes as follows:

The title already refers in a general manner to an artwork, without specifying either its medium or its object. Is it a verbal or a visual work, for example?[23] In either case, what is it about? Yet, at the beginning of the poem itself, the reference hovers between this artwork and immediate reality, and so between ekphrasis and landscape poetry. The initial description of the represented object in the opening stanza as "this forest" over which there "extends, / Calm, cool: the sky" may well proceed to specify the titular "classic" – by force of continuity – but not necessarily. It is still applicable, instead, to a real-life, first-order visible existent, as in nature poetry, leaving the text's opening merely descriptive rather than ekphrastic. Yet, whatever the mode of existence and the type of discourse involved here, the next lines spring on us the mind-boggling paradox of an "empty," treeless "forest."

The second stanza then makes sense of the first, precisely by referring this contradiction to the titular artwork, and thereby also repairing the poem's continuity from the title onward as a specification of that artwork. We now find visible life explicitly polarized with its visual mimesis. While a forest within the real "world" out there abounds in trees – so much so that it proverbially becomes invisible as such – a classic picture of a forest has "no trees" because it fuses them into a single, indivisible, "pure" whole (and in this sense "empty," as the first stanza put it). So, the poem transfers this picture from the visual to the verbal medium, and emerges as an ekphrastic re-presentation of a classic painting of a forest.

In this light, let us take a closer look at the dynamics of the poem as a whole. The first two lines would seem to provide an ekphrastic description of a conventional realistic landscape painting: a forest with a calm and cool sky above it. Hence the surprise, and what's more, the

unresolved surprise, of the immediate sequel (lines 3-4). How, in a classic painting of a forest, is the forest "empty," with all the trees missing, invisible, as it were? And even so, why is this absence said to "hide," of all places, "at the heart of this forest"? These lines accordingly appear to fall into both ontological impossibilities and textual inconsistencies with the opening lines, so that they hardly make any sense, and with them the entire stanza.

Indeed, the second stanza begins by voicing the puzzled reader's question. "How so?" The ekphrastic speaker, however, does not share the reader's puzzlement but immediately proceeds to resolve it, through an explicit invidious comparison of the represented object with the representing pictorial image. He contrasts the real thing, "outside, in the world," where "it happens / That one cannot see the forest for the trees," with the picture made of this living thing "here," where one cannot see the trees for the forest, so to speak. Or, as the speaker himself puts it, "In this forest, there are no trees. / It is barren, it is a pure forest altogether." In this ekphrastic re-presentation (or, counting the initial ekphrasis, re-re-presentation) lies the answer to the "How so?" query about the first stanza. It explains the paradoxical reference to the forest visible on the canvas as "empty." Interestingly, the explanation of this impossible-looking minus consists of three further negatives: one explicit and two implied, or grammatical ("no trees") and semantic ("barren … pure").

Coming on top of the first stanza's equivocal reference, hovering between an artwork and the immediate world, this reveals "A classic" as a lesson in meta-representation par excellence. It suggests a reversal of the prevalent valuation and hierarchy of art as superior to life, because of its coherence, selectivity, and integrity. "I saw clumsy Life again at her stupid work," as Henry James (1962[1934]: 121) responded to the true story that he later composed into *The Spoils of Poynton*. In Pagis's poem "A Classic," however, the artistic unity that has traditionally counted as a distinctive plus becomes a multiple minus, since it deprives the forest of its individual trees and with it of genuine existence. Even purity turns negative in view of the price at which it comes.

In retrospect, we also understand why the emptiness, and by strong implication all the other value-laden minuses, lie "at the heart of this forest." Given the contrast first drawn between a real and a pictorial forest, this phrase no longer reads as a locative (equivalent to "in the middle of"), but as an idiomatic metaphor for centrality or priority (equivalent to "the most important thing about"). All the negative features, accordingly, are in no way secondary, let alone marginal or accidental (e.g., shortfalls confined to this specific painting). Rather, they constitute and compromise the whole of art as such. Representation turns out to be as inferior to the represented object as the "empty" is to the full, the "barren" to the fruitful, the "pure" to the rich or inclusive, and so, in effect, a lifeless misrepresentation. Another big meta-representational surprise, no doubt, even within Pagis's unconventional work.

The third stanza newly relates this striking, even iconoclastic negation to Pagis's key theme of mutability, but again with a difference from other ekphrastic poems considered here. If anything, this new thematic variation continues to boast more novelty and meta-representational pointedness than usual. Unlike the life-to-death transformation of the sitter that eludes the artist in "Portrait," for example, it is not the mutability of the re-presented object that is responsible for the emptiness of the forest, but, quite the contrary, its *im*mutability and what it implies.

More unexpectedly yet, we learn from the third stanza that this immutability is exactly what troubles the forest itself "on a clear October morning." In these poems, even if otherwise as different as "Acrobatics" and "Houses," the third stanza has often turned out to be the locus of surprise. Here, the multiple surprises concern the subjectivizing of a nonhuman entity, one that exists within a pictorial world at that.[24] It is therefore worth unpacking and tracing.

In the third stanza, the ekphrasis shifts without warning from an outside to an inside view of the forest, or more precisely, from a re-presentation of the forest as rendered in a classic landscape painting to the painted forest's mindscape. This reveals an unexpected desire for mutability, against the very idea of classicism. So, the surprise extends from the (perspectivized) re-presentational manner to the (interior) re-presented matter. Or, better, it is represented for a change – interpolated by the ekphrasis itself – for how would a painting, far less a classic, render secret existence, let alone that of a nonhuman mind or heart? (In "Houses," similarly, the ekphrastic speaker represents for our eyes the total destruction that the seismograph *fails* to record.) Moreover, this ekphrastic interpolation carries with it yet another surprising development. To show the forest from within, the speaker can no longer be the sheer observer of the preceding stanzas but reveals himself as an omniscient mind-reader. A manifold perspectival shift, or disclosure, accordingly ensues from the twisted telling.

All these changes in midcourse come without warning; but they emerge gradually, nevertheless. The opening reference to the forest as "turbulent" is equivocal: It equally fits a painted landscape (in a storm) and a subjective mindscape (in turmoil). This reference, having appeared in the form of a question, the answer runs, by degrees, to the end of the stanza. Thus, the next two lines not only resolve the ambiguity but also deepen the subjectivity, by way of an explicit summary insideview: The painted forest "yearns to be / Transient," like a real one. Given this insideview, the first stanza's "At the heart of this forest hides / Only the empty forest" assumes yet another, subjective meaning in retrospect. It feels empty at heart, in the heart now revealed as yearning for life(likeness). What appeared to be a dead metaphor, "the heart of the forest," comes to life in every sense, both emotional and semantic.

Inversely, this yearning for transience means that the forest on canvas doubles as self-critic. It judges the painting, and by implication the art of painting to be a failure – inevitably so, because an immutable, lifeless, vacuous representation of reality – just as the ekphrastic speaker did in the preceding stanzas. Compare this harmony between judgment and self-judgment with the unsuccessful artistic representers encountered above, who arrive at a perception of their failure late, toward the end of the mimetic process. Thus the painter in "Portrait," whose internal monologue ends with the despairing cry "The old man is gone," or the seismographic recorder-turned-fictionist in "Houses," or the poet in "Louvre," who does not plainly acknowledge the silence that has overtaken him, until the scribe "engraves" it. Hence the ironic distance that is long maintained between the implied ekphrastic poet or ekphrastic speaker and these protagonists. In "Classic," however, the speaker's ironic distance from the pictorial representation in the first two stanzas belatedly turns out to criticize the painter and the art responsible for the shortfall, not the product that willy-nilly betrays it. On the contrary, the distance from the latter reverses, with hindsight, into agreement and empathy with the quoted pictorial subject that acknowledges and laments its inherent shortfall – precisely the shortfall ironized earlier. And the hopelessness of the forest's yearning for life(likeness) reinforces the sympathy for it.

At the next and last stage, the insideview develops into free indirect thought, complete with its notorious rule-breaking ("freedom") and reality effect:

> Oh, to be divided into trees,
> Exposed to the storm,
> Every tree on its own,
> Every bough, every all-of-a-sudden on its own
> And a day-old mushroom,
> And a minute-old hoopoe –

Briefly, this free indirect discourse here starts with the exclamatory, emotive "Oh" that introduces a stream of wishful thinking that flows to the end of the stanza. As befits a modern stream of consciousness, moreover, this six-line flow piles disorder on disorder, heightening the emotivity, the realism, and the empathy of the "freely" represented yearning. Note, for example, that these lines do not form a complete, grammatical sentence. Furthermore, their disorder mounts as the thought they represent unrolls: The concluding references to the mushroom and the hoopoe are even left dangling. And so does the entire insideview, which ends in mid-sentence, as signaled by the terminal dash. These multiple disorders of the language embody (or iconize, in semiotic parlance) the "turbulent" heart with which the insideview began. As concerns the broken syntax all along the discourse sequence, then, this recalls the best free indirect mind-readings in prose fiction, with an impact to match.

At the same time, the forest's wishful thinking is freely quoted in detail, thus spelling out the earlier cursory mentions of "turbulence" and "yearn[ing]" within the subject. Among the major discoveries that ensue, we now find out the extent of the perspectival agreement between the graphic forest and the ekphrastic speaker. In both awareness and judgment, this principled agreement reaches even further than suggested by the earlier phases of the insideview. There, the forest only yearns for the transience missing in pictorial art, while here it redraws the whole contrast between art and life, drawn by the ekphrasis in the opening stanzas. In this subjective redrawing, the earlier contrast even gains particularity, liveliness, and the benefit of inside knowledge: first-hand experience and testimony.

The yearning for transience newly arises in the references to "a day-old mushroom, / And a moment-old hoopoe." Again, the painted forest's awareness of what becoming transient means – the loss of the artistic immortality promised to a classic – does not deter it from craving that state. Nor does the threatened exposure "to the storm," or in other words, to outer turbulence. These detailed wishes reveal the full extent of the contrast to the painter in "Portrait" or to the poet in "Louvre," even at *their* most self-critical state, for they would wish for the exact opposite. They blame life's mutability for their failure to produce art, rather than blaming its absence in art for art's general failure to represent, never mind enter, life.

But what also surfaces at this juncture, now from the forest's own viewpoint, are the rest of the criticisms voiced in the speaker's ekphrasis. One of these concerns what the picture omits, which was earlier indicated by the negative "empty" and "no trees." This sense of absence recurs in the third stanza's last lines, and once again, with a vengeance. The previous abstract negatives, regarding trees alone, now gain both concreteness and extension of scope. As redescribed here, the painting includes no "mushroom" (itself a synecdoche for vegetation at large), either, nor "hoopoe" (which stands for birds and animals, generally).

Another echoing self-criticism has to do with the main point of contrast drawn at the time: the individuality of the trees in real life as against the unity of the forest in visual representation, with the trees grown indistinguishable and invisible, to the loss of life or even lifelikeness. This irreconcilable polarity is now evoked, more specifically and insistently than ever, in the forest's harping on the wish "to be divided into trees … Every tree on its own, / Every bough … on its own." With the hard elaboration typical of this free indirect discourse, even boughs and all other mutable ("all-of-a-sudden") existents fused together in the painting cry out for individuation. The cognitive and evaluative agreement between the first two stanzas and the third, between the outside and the inside views of the painted forest, between objective and wishful re-presentation, could hardly go further. A perfect meeting of minds, as it were.

Nevertheless, like the mushroom and the hoopoe just designated, this yearning for reality does not last long:

אַךְ מִיָּד הוּא חוֹזֵר בּוֹ, נִכְלָם שֶׁחָלַם,
וּכְקוֹדֶם הוּא קְלַסִּי, שָׁלֵם וּמֻשְׁלָם:
לֹא יָמוּשׁ, לֹא יָמוּת, לֹא יִחְיֶה לְעוֹלָם.

But at once it backtracks, ashamed of having dreamt,
And as before it is classic, whole and perfect:
Never to move, to die, to live, ever.

The final stanza reverses the insideview just offered in the third and then circles back to the first. Bracktracking in a double sense, and in two stages, from internals to externals.

Initially, this final stanza continues the preceding one by starting where it has ended, with an insideview of the painted forest, but reverses everything else in it, including the how as well as the what of the subject's thought. The earlier free indirect account of the yearning, notable for its minute particularity and living disorder, gives place to a one-line summary of a recantation with shame "of having dreamt." Unlike Shakespeare, who does "Retire from the Theater" (75-6) in order "to save his soul" from the "eternity" that he forced on his theatrical "ghosts," the pictorial forest, animated and quoted here, accepts its eternity after all. This subjective reversal of the third stanza is immediately followed by a doubling back to the opening stanzas' objective re-presentation of the "classic" as such. The repetition typically comes with verbal variation, culminating in a string of negatives: a motionless, deathless, lifeless perfection is the state into which the forest relapses by its own choice.

Moreover, these negatives find a reflex (echo, icon) in the stanza's poetic language and arrangement. The reversal of the insideview from disorder into order even sharpens in the objective sequel and in the stanza at large. In the Hebrew original, the prosody suddenly turns here classic. Rhyme ("*she-halam* … *u-mushlam* … *le-olam*") appears for the first time. So does meter, four anapests per line. Transformed into such marked regularity, the prosody itself expresses the artificiality of a "whole and perfect" representation. In a classic, realism is indeed only a dream.

Notes

[1] Throughout, page numbers refer to Pagis's *Collected Poems* (1991) and at: https://www.kibutz-poalim.co.il/page_55763 All translations into English are my own. For poems mentioned in passing, there are two references: the first to the page in the Hebrew text and the second – signified by M – to the translation by Mitchell (in Pagis's *Selected Poetry* 1989).

[2] For an analysis of the repeated cover-ups, see Yacobi (2011: 201-22). For a reading of "The Story," See Goodblatt (2020); and on "Bridgehead Photograph," see Bram (2017: 62-7).

[3] For an analysis of this further existential complication, see Yacobi (1988a: 101-3).

[4] On Pagis's marginalization *vis-à-vis* the dominant late-modernist *Dor Ha-medinah* (State Generation) group of Zach, Amichai, Avidan, and others, see Gluzman (2016: 117-25), with earlier references.

[5] For instance, Sandbank radicalizes this approach in a series of three articles (1988; 2001[1993]; 2016). He claims that, owing to Pagis's terrible memories of the Holocaust, most of his poems convey the poet's longing for silence and emptiness, a longing that does not constitute a symbolist motif but exposes "a battered personality" (2001[1993]: 112). (For specific applications of this preconceived idea to the meta-representational poems see notes 11, 13 and 22 below.) Likewise, Oppenheimer (2016: 21, 28) claims that the Holocaust poems in Pagis's *Transformation* (1970) share poetic and experiential features with the other poems in this book. And this supposedly shows that "nothing in the personality of the poet as survivor of the Holocaust or in his work is independent of this trauma." (See also note 22 below.) Even Bram's (2017, e.g., 53ff), study of Pagis's poems about photographs – and in effect about a distanced, second-order reality – pulls them back to the author's own story and traumatic past. (See also note 8 below.)

[6] His fictional mediators include a snake (148; M: 47), the Tower of Babel (88; M: 132), a left hand (272), an emerald (150-52; M: 58-60), among other bizarre "persons" and perspectives. Against the prevalence of an autobiographical persona in lyrical poetry, then, Pagis's poetics insistently, even thematically, maintains a distance between the author and his poetic speakers, observers, characters – whether fictional, historical, mythological, or symbolic.

[7] Also relevant is the fact that Pagis's scholarly work on medieval Hebrew poetry explicitly discusses our theme. For instance, Pagis (1993: 77-80) shows how the fictional (sometimes even fantastic) represented worlds of rhymed Hebrew tales of the period incorporate historical persons, the author among them, briefly comparing the resulting ontic mixture with the more sophisticated tradition inaugurated by Cervantes.

[8] My work on ekphrasis in Pagis ranges from Yacobi 1976, especially the analysis of "Leafing through an Album" (ibid.: 19-21) to Yacobi 2002 on the photograph in "*Ein Leben*." On my general theory of ekphrasis, see below. The topic of photographic ekphrasis has since been taken up in Bram (2012; 2017), yet without the recurrent meta-representational implications.

[9] For a more comprehensive and flexible account of these medium/object (a)symmetries, based on the Proteus Principle, see Sternberg (1981; 1999; 2010), all with earlier references.

[10] As demonstrated in Yacobi (e.g.,1976; 1988a; 1988b; 1996; 2016), Pagis's poetry centers in time and its assorted processes, with special regard to three M's: metamorphosis, mutability, and memory. Particularly relevant to our concerns here is "Ekphrasis in the service of time: The case of Dan Pagis" (Yacobi 2002).

[11] Sandbank (2016: 16), in effect, does away with this ekphrasis. In his analysis, the poem only appears to describe "a failed attempt to draw a child's portrait." For though "the child in the picture gets old [sic], in the Dorian Gray manner," it is actually dead "from the beginning of the poem." Among other weaknesses, this analogy to the notorious ekphrasis in Oscar Wild's novel betrays an ontic confusion: the transforming sitter in the world gets

mixed up with the visual image transforming on the canvas, the represented object with its representation. The child, being dead from the start plainly contradicts the text.

[12] An image of this statue is at: https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010006582

[13] Contrast Sandbank's (2016: 18) improbable claim that the acrobat serenely facing the dark represents Pagis's ideal of the wordless poet. But a gulf separates the two arts, not least the literal wordlessness of the acrobat's medium and the metaphor of the wordless author. Further, given his silent medium, the acrobat utters no word during the two earlier exercises, either. So why not read the poet into their energetic maneuvers in bright light? Another instance, this, of Sandbank's arbitrary thematizing.

[14] For a detailed review and subgrouping of this polarity, see Sternberg (2008) on what he calls *If-plots*.

[15] As noted in Kartun-Blum (1988: 118-21).

[16] Compare Pagis's macabre humor in an earlier poem about one "still a new dead, inexperienced" ("The Continuation," 94).

[17] Earlier attempts to make sense of the fantastic developments include Kartun-Blum (1988: 113-22) on "Death as Life's Preserver"; Hirschfeld (1996: 101) on the death mask as an artwork that will immortalize the artist; and Dekoven Ezrahi (2016: 137-40) on its creation as a "preservation of matter." These are suggestive readings, yet none persuasively explains what happens to whom at whose hands and why – least of all in the three final, crucial lines, which are glossed over as a rule.

[18] What confirms this reading of the poem is Pagis's comic version of a death mask, cited and analyzed in Naishtat's lecture on "A Comic Strip by Dan Pagis," (in a session dedicated to Pagis in the WUJS 18th conference).

[19] In this context, note Pagis's fascination with writing techniques and instruments. The onion-ink in "Survey" and the dictation to the "statue of Pharaoh's scribe" in "Louvre" are among the bizarre instances. In "One Writes" (315; M: 52-3), the speaker is a prideful Montblanc fountain pen and the speech comic. This pen confesses it has written "words of either evasion or frankness, a half-truth here and there, or a truth and a half," and disparages upstarts like the "Bik-stick," the typewriter, and, worst of all, the "word processor," with its "fake" memory. Yet, it predicts, they all will "be forgotten, like all writers, and like me."

[20] "Released from all its duties" may even read as an allusive euphemism for 'dead', as a seismograph, at least. The allusion is to the traditional address to the just-buried person at the end of the Jewish funeral service, releasing the deceased from all earthly ties. In this sense, the recording machine is likewise dead and buried, so to speak, except that it comes back to life, as it were, in another role.

[21] See the comment on "One writes" in note 19 above.

[22] Sandbank (2016: 15) identifies "Houses" as one of Pagis's variations of mimetic bankruptcy, caused by the "horrifying contents [Holocaust memories] that flood" the poet. When the pen's mimetic efforts fail, this symbol of the poet is left to scrawl only a fragile "spider's house." (See also his 2001[1993]: 111-12). But Sandbank's categorical assertion of the pen's mimetic failure is directly contradicted by the first stanza, which re-presents a modest success; and, since he misses the pen's switch to pictoriality in the last stanza, this assertion also contradicts itself. If the pen manages to represent a "house" – if only a spider's – then its "mimetic efforts' do *not* always "fail," after all. Nor does Sandbank reckon with how the poem discourages his jump to the Holocaust (e.g., its confinement to a single house and to nonhumans). The last objection, as well as that concerning the

disregard for the ultimate fictionalizing, also apply to other reductions of the poem to the Holocaust. Thus Oppenheimer's (2016: 53-4) far-fetched claims that, though the seismograph technically reproduces the shock waves, it "misses the [human] truth"; and "the choice of the spider's web" in the picture is meant to attack "the tendency to establish a narrative of private and national repair [*tiqun*] with a view to suppressing the traumatic loss." Karti Shemtov (2016:243-45) does not link this poem to the Holocaust. In total disregard of the ekphrasis, however, she conflates the represented reality (the destruction of the house) with the re-presented painting (spider web) and a meta-poetic theme: "The truth that eludes the obsolete instrument is the destruction of the physical house that is at the same time the annihilation of the poetic stanza [house in Hebrew]," leading to a freer prosody (244).

[23] This, and the whole ensuing analysis, holds even if you prefer the alternative translation of the title ("*Qlasiqon*" in the Hebrew original) translated as "A classicist," rather than "A classic."

[24] Like the seismograph in "Houses," the painted forest is referred to in the original Hebrew by the humanizing pronoun "he."

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