

"Written in Pencil and Sealed in the Railway Car"  
by Dan Pagis

September 10, 1998

- 1) What is the background? Do they know their final destination?
- 2) What happened? Why did she stop writing?
- 3) What is the underlying nervousness of the poem?
- 4) Why is a woman the protector? Shouldn't her husband protect her?
- 5) Why is the poem torn or unfinished? Where is the rest of it?

"Hagar's Last Night in Abraham's House"  
by Itsik Manger

September 15, 1998

- 1) What are the significance of the gifts in the poem?
- 2) Why does Hagar speak to "dear mother" as she speaks of love?
- 3) Where is G-d in this poem?
- 4) When does the poem take place?
- 5) What is the role of smoke in the poem?

Assignment for September 17, 1998

Outline:

- I. Form as part of the poet's message
  - A. "Message in Pencil and Sealed in the Railway Car"
    1. She did not write the title. The message is staccato, or very short. Title, on the other hand, has a rhythm to it.
    2. Only 23 words, but some words are repeated: "Notice me!"
  - B. "Hagar's Last Night in Abraham's House"
    1. Poem follows folksong form:
      - a. All stanzas look the same
      - b. Rhyme scheme (2nd and 4th lines rhyme)
      - c. 4-line stanzas
      - d. "Love triangle": 3 characters
      - e. Dialogue pushes the ballad forward
      - f. All repetitions: 3 times
    2. Circular form: Begins and ends with kitchen; this is the "woman's world". "Copper pan and love of man:" her dream and her aspiration
- II. Use of the Bible
  - A. "Written in Pencil and Sealed in the Railway Car"
    1. Characters are from the story of Genesis and the modern words "don't fit." Pencil is clearly modern and are made of lead, a symbol of technology.
    2. Parent/Child relationship
  - B. "Hagar's Last Night in Abraham's House"
    1. "The measure of creativity is your ability to uncover the secrets that are already in the Torah."
    2. Crisis of faith/modernity/throwing off mitzvot, but the power of the Bible is not diminished.
    3. Manger's Bible poems: Midrash Itsik: all foreground and no background

4. Question of inheritance and birthright: RIVALRY; Manger doesn't care about this, only about the behavior of the patriarchs and matriarchs.
5. Sarah's jealousy is where Manger chose to pick up the story..
6. Midrash: Midrash; mock-epic; folk element
7. Servant/Master relationship
8. Images/Words that don't fit the Bible:
  - a. Bastard
  - b. Train
  - c. Kitchen

### III. View of Past vs. View of Present

- A. "Written in Pencil and Sealed in the Railway Car"
  1. What is the background? Do they know their final destination?
  2. Why did she stop writing? How did they come to be there?
  3. Transport
  4. What happened to the promise of resurrection? Who is going to survive?
  5. Time
    - a. First person narrative
    - b. Historical time
    - c. Universal time
    - d. Future
  6. To convey madness: takes poem over space and over time: 4th Dimension.
- B. "Hagar's Last Night in Abraham's House"
  1. All foreground/No background
  2. Begins in the kitchen in the present
  3. Reminisces: takes out her hope chest; remembers the moments they shared (recreates setting); generalization and folk wisdom; "bastard" child; then returns to present

Assignment for September 24, 1998

Abraham Shlonsky:

People/History/Land

A. References to the Family:

- Line 1;15: "Mother"--the generic "mother," common to Yiddish folk-poetry; reference to the Matriarchs
- Line 8: "son" Abraham--son of the land (Zionist)
- Line 10: "father"--relationship of Jewish people to the land

B. References to the Liturgy:

- Line 3: "Prayer shawl"---
- Lines 4;5: Phylacteries/Phylactery straps--The square houses perched on the hills are like phylactery boxes worn on the head, and the roads gliding into the valley like the phylactery straps; the land is now a worshipper standing at his morning prayer--personification of the land
- Line 6: "prays"--Shacharit: town in praying
- Line 9: "hymn-writer" (poet)
- Line 11: "prayer"
- Line 14: "Hallelujah!"--evoking the psalmist: David/Hallel/P'sukay d'Zimrah
- Line 1;15: "coat of many colors"--Biblical reference [Genesis 37:3]

-Relationship b/t the land and the people: Hard physical labor  
-Relationship b/t G-d and the land

October 1, 1998

"From My Mother's Home"  
by Lea Goldberg

I. Differences between the granddaughter and the grandmother

- A. "And I, her pale granddaughter, who does not resemble her:" physical appearance
- B. Hebrew words include two meanings: "does not look like" and "is not like"
- C. Grandmother, unlike the speaker and her mother, "epitomizes the beauty of the tradition."
- D. Speaker never had a living grandmother...died prematurely
- E. Grandmother was a "mother of a mother"

II. Other Oppositions / Contrasts

- A. "Pale" vs. "Pink-cheeked"
- B. Age/Generations/Tradition
- C. Memory: Speaker's mother did not remember, only the grandfather did.
- D. Mirror is losing shine--is being lost.
- E. Mirror is like a lake--hidden treasures/self-reflective
- F. Granddaughter feels alienated by the ornate mirror/she is a plain girl.
- G. Grandmother takes pleasure in her physical appearance.
- H. Wig is traditional, but grandmother is not.

III. What does the last line mean?

- A. Perhaps each successive generation only remembers the grandmother's beauty which they see in themselves. Beauty is inherited even if memories are lost.
- B. She becomes actualized/ends on an up-beat note/spiritual qualities

October 8, 1998

"The Times My Father Died"  
by Yehudah Amihai

Story from the son's point of view:

I. Child

- A. Story begins as speaker remembers his father on Yom Kippur.
- B. "It's a good thing sons don't see their fathers at war"--still speaks as a child.
- C. "He died when they came to arrest him for throwing into the garbage the Nazi pin I had found.... That was a childhood's end." The speaker was forced to grow up and could no longer be a child.
- D. Still speaks as a child: "cloaking his face with his hands so as not to let me see it striped bare." Protecting child.

II. Adult

- A. "In the evening I too my wife to see a movie." Speaker has a wife and becomes active himself; not just an observer.
- B. Self-Analysis: "Perhaps I had just remembered that his forehead had once touched the ground on Yom Kippur."
- C. "My wife called the doctor." Speaker and wife are now protecting parents.
- D. Self-Analysis/Human Analysis: "We have only a few facial expressions..."
- E. "I let my beard grow in mourning." Child is old enough to mourn; beard is a symbol of maturity.

III. After Child's Death

- A. "Every few steps I would turn around to look at him, then run on toward the stream of traffic....But I didn't know if he was still alive." Speaker speaks from a different world.

October 15, 1998

"To My Land" by Rachel Bluwstein

I did not sing to you, my land  
I did not glorify your name  
In the pillage of battles  
Just a tree--my hands did tend  
On the banks of the Jordan  
Just a path--my feet have conquered  
On the surface of fields.

Alas, I was very poor--  
This my mother knew,  
Alas, I was very poor  
The offering of your daughter  
Only the sound of the trumpeting of joy  
On the day that the light glows  
Only hidden weeping  
On your poverty.

October 22, 1998

"Good Night, World"  
by Jacob Glatstein

I. Why is he going back?

A. He is going back "at my own command--" He is in control and comfortable; he can look back at this dirty place because this will always be his home. "With my proud gait--" shows confidence.

II. What is this place?

A. This place is a world of "gloomy life" without modern technology. He is comfortable in his own home. This primitive and dark place is exclusive, but his own and Jewish. Value is placed on things that no one else wants.

October 27-29, 1998

AVRAHAM SUTZKEVER

Questions:

1. How did Sutzkever compose a poem in a coffin?!
2. Why does Sutzkever begin with a state of motion?
3. Why did the translator use the word "blind"?
4. Why did Sutzkever use festive images like "dazzling" and "party"?
5. How can Sutzkever write a poem like this with the rhythm of a ballad?

November 3, 1998

"The Silver Tray" by Natan Alterman

Questions:

1. Who are the girl and boy?
2. What is the silver tray?
3. Why are they silent?
4. Are they wounded mortally?
5. What kind of "ceremony" is it?



November 10, 1998

"Bertha" by Aharon Appelfeld

His World

1. "Worlds unknown"/travel
2. Gifts for Bertha
3. Burden
4. Guilt
5. Future/hope
6. Humor/riddles
7. Memory: liberation
8. Jerusalem
9. Nature
10. Money
11. Pity
12. Mitzi: wife
13. Sleep/dreams/hibernates
14. Movies
15. Decisions
16. Protector/guardian/owner

Her World

- "Life remained unchanged"
- Gifts from Max
- Loyalty
- Illness
- Vulnerable
- Feminine intuition
- Imagination/artificial
- Kitchen
- Nature
- "a princess, a devil, a gypsy"
- Illness
- Indifference
- Institution
- Knitting
- Questions
- Weak/child

November 12, 1998

"Erlkonig" by Goethe and  
"Abraham Takes Isaac to the Sacrifice" by Itzik Manger

Questions:

1. Why does Goethe use a homosexual undertone?
2. What is Erlking?
3. Why can't the child be saved?
4. Manger: Why does the poet identify himself?
5. What is the "black team's harness"?

November 17, 1998

Amir Gilboa: "Yitzhak"

Characters

1. me/dreamer
2. Father
3. Isaac

Time

1. Early in the morning
2. Lunchtime
3. Night (nightmare)

Place

1. In the forest
2. (In a dream)

November 19-24, 1998

"The Way of the Wind" by Amos Oz

Questions?

1. What does Gideon's fall represent? (Lack of control, romantic self-abandonment?)
2. Did he have to die?
3. Did he sacrifice himself on the wire?
4. Why didn't anyone save him?
5. Was it worth it just to be noticed or to be macho?
6. Why is his nickname "Pinocchio"?

December 3, 1998

"G-d Has Pity on Kindergarten Children" by Yehuda Amichai

Questions:

1. Why do the children need G-d's pity?
2. Are the parents turning back into the status of children?
3. What are coins of mercy or "coins of charity"?
4. Does the "first-aid station" represent G-d or human mercy?
5. Who is the third stanza describing? (Those who are not a child or a lover.)