

Silent Voices

A HISTORICAL NOTE, TEXT, FURTHER PERFORMANCE SUGGESTIONS

Israeli poet Dan Pagis (1930–1986) was born in a part of Rumania that is now the Ukraine, and spent part of his youth incarcerated in a Nazi concentration camp, from where he fled to what was to become later the State of Israel. Some of Pagis' most powerful poetry (written in Hebrew, his adapted language) reflects on the Holocaust.

His poem *Draft of a Reparation Agreement* offers a unique perspective on the fierce public debate that took place in Israel when the Reparations Agreement between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany was signed and then enacted in the early 1950's. According to the Agreement, Germany was to pay Israel for the costs of resettlement of Jewish refugees after World War II, and to compensate individual Jews for losses in Jewish livelihood and property resulting from Nazi persecution and genocide. Opposition to the agreement came from both ends of the political spectrum in Israel, arguing that accepting reparation payments was the equivalent of forgiving the Nazis for their crimes.

When reading the poem, it is suggested that, right after the drum roll, the title of the poem ("Draft of a Reparations Agreement") be stated as though about to begin a formal ceremony, followed by a reading of the full poem.

Draft of a Reparations Agreement

All right, gentlemen who cry blue murder as always,
nagging miracle-makers,
quiet!
Everything will be returned to its place,
paragraph after paragraph.
The scream back into the throat.
The gold teeth back to the gums.
The terror.
The smoke back to the tin chimney and further on and inside
back to the hollow of the bones,
and already you will be covered with skin and sinews
and you will live,
look, you will have your lives back,
sit in the living room, read the evening paper.
Here you are. Nothing is too late.
As to the yellow star: immediately it will be torn
from your chest
and will emigrate
to the sky.

Poem by Dan Pagis, translated from Hebrew by Stephen Mitchell