

ABSTRACT

‘WHAT IS ABYSMALLY THROUGH YOU’ –
A REREADING OF DAN PAGIS’S ‘AKEVOT’

Yael Tamir

This article joins previous studies addressing various aspects of memory and language in the *oeuvre* of Dan Pagis, continuing the discussion of one of his most important works – the poem ‘Akevot’.

The reading I propose is based on the links created between Pagis’s poem and the piyyut by Yannai appearing in the work’s epigraph, with a focus on the place of the Tower of Babel trope in these two works. In this reading I seek to trace the ways in which Yannai’s poetic building materials, as a poet in the Land of Israel in the fifth and sixth century A.D., are employed by Pagis in writing about the speaker’s fall back to earth.

The poem ‘Akevot’, published in the collection *Gilgul* (1970), will not be examined alongside poems from the same collection, which like ‘Akevot’ address the Holocaust and its symbols explicitly, but rather in the context of the collection *Shahut Me’uheret* (1964), which preceded *Gilgul* and in many ways remained in its shadow. This reading is based on the possibility implied by the poems of *Shahut Me’uheret* – namely, that the Hebrew language is itself the hero of a ‘late return’ (*Shiva Me’uheret*), returning to a reality completely different from that which it left.