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## **Eternal Present: Poetic Figuration and Cultural Memory in the Poetry of Yehuda Amichai, Dan Pagis, and Tuvia Rübner**

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# Eternal Present: Poetic Figuration and Cultural Memory in the Poetry of Yehuda Amichai, Dan Pagis, and Tuvia Rübner

Amir Eshel

The world is filled with remembering and forgetting  
like sea and dry land. Sometimes memory  
is the solid ground we stand on,  
sometimes memory is the sea that covers all things  
like the Flood. And forgetting is the dry land that saves, like Ararat.

[ . . . ]

And every person is a dam between past and future.  
When he dies the dam bursts, the past breaks into the future,  
And there is no before or after. All times becomes one time  
like our God: our time is one.  
Blessed be the memory of the dam.<sup>1</sup>

**F**or Yehuda Amichai's devoted readers, these stanzas look very familiar in their unique combination of the profane and the celestial. Indeed, these verses draw an intriguing line by combining the ostensibly divided realms of the sacrilegious and the sanctified in a single gesture. The resemblance of the two stanzas is further highlighted by the similarity of their rhetorical structure—supposition, elaboration, and simile: “The world is. . .”; “And every person is. . .”; “Like the Flood”; “Like our God.” These pointed similes are notably echoed in the repetition of the water metaphoric, both the ancient

symbol of chaos and renewal and the rather modern signifier of the luring unconscious. Amichai's ironic dialectic of memory and oblivion as well as the poem's oscillation between Lethe's charms and Mnemosyne's demanding voice lead finally to the setting of *life as a single moment in eternity*, a rather insignificant marker for these undividable entities—God, Time—for which there is neither “before” nor “after.”

The poem's figuration of “memory” and “time” bears no redemptive seed. Noticeably, the celestial tone of both stanzas is decisively broken by the parodic dictum “Blessed be the memory of the dam.” Not only does the verse scorn the traditional Jewish saying after mentioning a dead person's name—*zikhrono livrakha*—but it also sheds a satirical light on the memory of the dead. In a godless world, it seems, only a metaphor is left from the highest form of divine creation. The poem's inverted quotation thus prevents the reader from being misled by its rather pretentious, protophilosophical, and theological assertions about the nature of “time.” No firm concept of what life and death, past and present are, is being offered. Rather, the poem stages memory vis-à-vis the “time” of oblivion as it appears in the Jewish rhetoric of time. These stanzas concretely illustrate, reflect, and at the same time question the ways in which memory, especially the memory of the dead, is figured in Hebrew, and indeed in Jewish culture.

Throughout the millennia, literature has provided a revealing prism for refracting the consciousness of time in different periods and different cultures. As Paul Ricoeur put it, the symbolic structures and cultural determinants of our temporal experience are reflected in the diversity of the symbolic systems in which this experience was organized through different languages and periods.<sup>2</sup> By portraying “our God” and “our time” as an eternal unity, Amichai's prosaic-sounding rhyme poetically transforms—not without a significant amount of irony—Maimonides' fourth principle of faith: that God is eternal, having neither beginning nor end. This lyrical notion of Jewish time is hardly unusual. Gershom Scholem referred to the Jewish concept of time as the “eternal present” (*ewige Gegenwart*).<sup>3</sup> Even such different thinkers as Abraham Joshua Heschel, Eliezer Schweid, and Alexander Barzel agree that the unity of all temporal modes in the realm of cultural memory—often symbolized by God's eternity—has always been of crucial significance to Jewish civilization.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and Amos Funkenstein have shown how Jewish culture's highly developed awareness of time has always been close at hand in the daily experience of the yearly cycle that structures Jewish liturgy and ritual practice.<sup>5</sup>



The crisis of Jewish identity at the onset of modernity, the rise of Jewish national movements, and especially the Shoah seem to have only deepened the notion that every single event in the past remains a determining factor in the face of the present. Indeed, even more than 50 years after the Shoah, the countless events subsumed by this single name are felt as if they were an indistinguishable part of the present. They figure as a part of what Saul Friedländer brilliantly described as the “psychic presence” of Israeli and Jewish culture.<sup>6</sup> Based on my preliminary reading of Amichai’s poem *Open Closed Open*, I will unfold in what follows the poetic figurations of “eternal present” in the work of Amichai and two other significant Jewish poets of our time, Dan Pagis and Tuvia Rübner. By examining the “eternal present” engraved in their poems, I will suggest that their rhetoric, rather than their themes, releases the recent traumatic past from the bounds of historical reference and thus from the realm of “the past.”

Indeed, many of the poems written by survivors do not simply evoke the Holocaust as a dreadful event in “the past,” but rather the rhetoric of these poems underscores its presence in the realm of the “here” and “now.” Just as Walter Benjamin’s angel is “propelled” into the future while his present sight is focused on the “pile of debris,”<sup>7</sup> the past portrayed in this poetry is evoked from the perspective of poetic presence. Analogous to Benjamin’s notion that the angel’s spatial and temporal viewpoint (“His face is turned toward the past”) reflects the core of Jewish remembrance (*Eingedenken*), the temporal dimension inscribed in this poetry can best be described as *facing* the Shoah. In other words, both the semantic and formal features of these poems are determined by the immediacy of these particular “piles of debris” that can never be eradicated.

This poetry of *facing* the Shoah places itself in the long tradition of Jewish literature of catastrophe, so insightfully described by David Roskies and Alan Mintz.<sup>8</sup> Yet, beyond the thematic measuring of the historical abyss, beyond the imperative lamentation and commemoration of the dead, this poetry’s rhetoric emphasizes continuation and prevalence. By making use of the figurative, syntactic, and temporal singularities of Hebrew, by depicting countless allegories of “fathers” and “sons,” this poetry both reflects the breach in the course of Jewish civilization and underscores this culture’s transhistorical permanence. It is without doubt precisely this poetry’s avoidance of mere representation and lamentation that enables the reader to regard the poem as a unique textual space, one in which “the past” is always close at hand and the dead are never rendered silent.

## The Cut of the Axe

[144]  
Jewish  
Social  
Studies

Dan Pagis was born in 1930 in Radautz (Radauti), a small town about 30 miles away from the city of Czernowitz, the then-vibrant capital of the former Austro-Hungarian province of Bukowina. His father came from Kishinev, Bessarabia, and in addition to Yiddish spoke Russian and Romanian; Dan's mother, Judith Ausländer, belonged to the middle-class German-Jewish milieu of Radautz for which German was the first and only language of culture. Soon after his birth, Pagis's father left the family to establish a new home in Palestine; his wife and son were supposed to follow, but Judith died unexpectedly in 1934 and the four-year-old went to live with his maternal grandparents. Pagis was a curious, introspective child who spent many hours in the immense library of his grandfather, sitting in his leather armchair and reading the German classics. A native German-speaking *fräulein* was responsible for the child's cultivated upbringing, and a private teacher was hired to instruct the child in Hebrew.<sup>9</sup>

The course of Pagis's childhood changed dramatically after German troops invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. On October 12, 1941, the systematic deportation of Jews began from Bukowina across the Bug River to Transnistria. Six thousand Jews from Radautz were sent in overstuffed cattle cars to the Romanian town of Marculesti. The majority of those sent did not survive the journey. A day later the second transport followed, this time to Ataki (Atachi). Many of those who survived this horrifying trip would die in the concentration and forced labor camps of Transnistria. Pagis and his grandparents were also among the deported, but what exactly happened to them remains unknown: Pagis only seldom talked about this period of his life and never gave any concrete details. In an interview published in 1983, he mentioned laconically: "They sent us to a forced labor camp, not to a concentration camp. I wasn't always with my grandparents."<sup>10</sup>

In 1946, Pagis left Bukowina and arrived in Palestine—Erets Yisrael—to meet his father. Since his father had remarried and now lived in a small Tel Aviv apartment, Pagis was sent to Kibbutz Merhavia. There, in the dreamy scenery of the Yizrael valley, he met Tuvia Rübner (1924–), who, like Pagis, only narrowly escaped death by the Nazis and who became his lifelong friend. It was in Merhavia that Pagis decided to change his diasporic first name to Dan, and although German would remain significant to him, he decided never to write in that language again.<sup>11</sup> Under the guidance of Rübner and later on that of the poet and literary critic Leah Goldberg (1911–70), Pagis began to write and publish poems in Hebrew. Yet, it was not until 1959 that his first book

of poems, *Shon ha-tsel* (The Shadow Clock), appeared. This book, a unique achievement of poetic style and structural eloquence, begins with a temporal allegory in the poem *Hod ha-kardom* (The Cut of the Axe):

Once we questioned the wind  
 Like pines before daybreak,  
 With eyelids heavy and hiding  
 Within the rings of the good years.  
 But upon our trunks  
 The axe blade hewed knotholes  
 And we saw.  
 And the sap dripped and solidified.<sup>12</sup>

After the rather conventional scenery of the first four lines, the fifth line—"But upon our trunks"—marks an evident caesura: the two temporal modes of the poem now separate. On the one hand, "once" exists, the time of the good years; on the other hand, the time exists that began with the blow of the axe. The poem is difficult to translate because *Ayin* or *Einayim* in Hebrew means both *knothole* and *eye*. Therefore, the semantics of the Hebrew original oscillate between the different meanings and, at least in one of them, allow for the wounds themselves to see. The bloody tears shed by "our trunks" connote a very particular sap: it drips and solidifies simultaneously. With the blow of the axe, a time metaphorically removed is rendered motionless. And yet, time moves on. By admitting the allegorical dimension of the poem, the reader is confronted with a seemingly solidified past that nonetheless still flows into the present. The wounds received from a devastating blow never stop bleeding.

The often allegorical yet quite figurative temporal tensions in Pagis's early poetry become powerful time riddles in his later work, as Tamar Yacobi has shown.<sup>13</sup> Many of his later poems not only depict a past that would never solidify but also signify a complex aporia of time that does not allow a reading which confines the poetic event to any form of "the past." Indeed, by unfolding these temporal riddles, the poem admits the reader into a textual realm in which times long gone are still present in every metaphor, in every verse. By melding the time modes, these poems break every disjunction between the aesthetically responsive and rhetorically aware, and they depict every event of the private, collective, or mythical history as different realms of the present.

Pagis's way to his later time-riddles was nevertheless a long and difficult one. Like many other Holocaust survivors, he was not able to let his memory surface until the capture of Adolf Eichmann in 1960

and the trial in Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup> However, it was not until 1970, in Pagis's third poetry collection, *Gilgul*, that poems which actually turn to the Shoah were first published.<sup>15</sup> Here, in what is surely the central cycle of this book—*Karon hatum* (Sealed Railcar)—Pagis transforms historically loaded signs into the realm of poetic language, essentially by metaphorizing “time” and thus portraying a Europe torn between the significant insignias of “early” and “late,” continuously facing the decisive caesura in what is commonly called Western civilization. It is thus no wonder that Pagis chose to begin this programmatic cycle with a poem bearing the name *Europe, late*:

Violins float in the sky,  
and a straw hat. I beg your pardon,  
what year is it?  
thirty-nine and a half, still awfully early,  
you can turn off the radio.  
I would like to introduce you to:  
the sea breeze, the life of the party,  
terribly mischievous,  
whirling in a bellskirt, slapping down  
the worried newspapers: tango! tango!  
And the park hums to itself:  
I kiss your dainty hand, madame,  
your hand as soft and elegant  
as a white suede glove. You'll see, madame,  
that everything will be all right,  
just heavenly you wait and see.  
No it could never happen here,  
don't worry so—you'll see—it could<sup>16</sup>

With its title and the question “What year is it?” the poem provides us with a historical context. Indeed, in the course of European history, the middle of 1939 was still early yet, as the title suggests, but also very late. Thus, the tone of flying violins, the music from the city park, and the quotation of Erwin Fritz Rotter's couplet from 1927–28, *Ich küsse Ihre Hand, Madame*, are only preludes to a dramatic ellipsis: “it could never happen here.” Yet, what could never happen? The broken syntax builds toward the aporia of the last three lines. The Hebrew term *le-olam* appears in the sixteenth and eighteenth lines and provides—in the Hebrew original—for two equally justifiable, contradictory readings. First: “it will never happen here, / you will see / here never.” And the second reading: “it will never happen here, / you will see, / here always.” Reading the poem therefore implies consideration of both possible readings, thus leaving the tension between “always” and

“never,” as well as past, present, and the unimaginable future unsuspected.

The poem’s usage of *le-olam* lays bare the palimpsest as a whole. *Le-olam* is the exact biblical term the narrator ascribes to God in describing both the first human crime—the beginning of “human” history—and the danger of the possible *next* crime: “the man is become as one of us, to know good from evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever [*va-hay le-olam*]” (Gen. 3:22) The first fall is the sign for the next fall, for *thirty-nine and a half*. Thus, the poem’s main temporal signifier and symbolic center, *thirty-nine and a half*, does not just paint a mimetic picture of the historical time during the summer weeks of 1939 in Europe. Rather, it is written from its own poetic time, aiming at the multiple readings of all the temporal aspects engraved in *le-olam*. Other than the illusive “it could never happen here,” *thirty-nine and a half* has already occurred in the dawn of mankind, and, like the previous transgression of the unquestionable law, it will never be past. Each reading of the poem is to formulate the presence of a never-gone *thirty-nine and a half*. This marked sign need not be translated into historical references. Rather, it gains significance through the formal structure in which it is embedded. As an allegory, as a palimpsest, this poem implies that, facing the Shoah, it will always remain *late* for European civilization. Late and unmendable for every reader reflecting upon a continent that failed to look at worried newspapers and was thus drawn into catastrophe. Hence, the poem also implies that it is provocatively “late” for every reader entering the textual space in the present, in his or her “here and now.”

The enigmatic oscillation between “early” and “late” of *Europe, late* culminates in the second poem of this cycle, *Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car*, a poem in which Pagis, as Roskies has emphasized, transposes the closing moments of human history back to its beginnings:<sup>17</sup>

here in this carload  
i am eve  
with Abel my son  
if you see my other son  
cain son of man  
tell him that i<sup>18</sup>

The drama of these lines results unmistakably from the poem’s special location in the realm of the “here” (*kan*) and from the immediacy of the present tense, which runs throughout the poem and defines its temporal rhetoric. The writing “here” on the railcar’s wall does not

[147]

*Eternal Present*



Amir Eshel



only bear witness to German railcars transporting Jews to their death in Europe of the 1940s, but, through the immediacy of its temporal rhetoric of “now,” confronts the reader who is *now* facing the script. Thus, the events inscribed in the lines suggest that the poem’s time is by no means confined to a mere mimetic representation of “the past.” Rather, the drama lies in the fact that the transport and the script of memory are to be read in the immediacy of the “here” and “now.” By addressing the reader directly—“if you see”—this script eradicates the temporal and spatial distinction between “inside” and “outside,” between those who are part of the events and those who “just” read about them from the safe distance and comfort usually associated with reading poetry and indulging in aesthetic pleasure. The poem does not let the time of the events and the silenced language of those who no longer speak fade into oblivion. Moreover, the Hebrew original allows the last line of the poem to connect back to the first (*tagidu lo she-ani; kan . . .*) and thus stresses the temporal unity of the events described and the reading process. Through this syntactical feature, the textual realm of this poem both presents the rapture—the broken sentence at the end, the silence engulfing Eve’s message, “tell him that I”—and the fact that all readers can and should regard themselves as involved addressees. By the symbolic reference to the first human family—Eve, Cain, and Abel—the poem further emphasizes the fact that the ethical questions posed by the events are by no means resolved, and it thus demands that the readers keep on deciphering writings such as the ones in the sealed railcar.

To be sure, both the biblical and the symbolic Cain in the poem are signifiers for the survivors. Yet the poem makes use of the entire semantic range emerging from the signifiers Eve, Adam, Cain, and Abel: Cain was in fact son of Adam, yet *ben adam* in Hebrew means a member of the human race and, metaphorically, a civilized human being. Thus, Cain, the cursed murderer and sole descendent of the first human family, marks a civilization whose beginnings and present lies in transgressing its ethical fundamentals. As the sole survivor in Pagis’s poem, Cain also connotes the fact that the survivors are often haunted by the very fact that they survived. By letting Eve refer to her other son as “ben Adam,” the poem brilliantly underlines the fact that human civilization *facing* the Shoah can never turn the page and move on. Cain’s mark and the writing in the railcar are here to stay.

In a later poem, *Autobiography*, published in 1975 in the volume *Moah* (Brain), Pagis returns to what Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi insightfully describes as the “pre-covenantal” biblical myth of the first human family.<sup>19</sup> Unlike poets who figured the Shoah by frequently alluding to

the Judeo-Christian archetype of Isaac's binding, Pagis locates the roots of this civilization's breach in the birth of the secular, sublime "I." However, this birth implied, according to Pagis's poetic iconography, modernity's core—its technological capacities, best proven by the perfection of mass killings:

I died with the first blow and was buried  
among the rocks of the field.  
The raven taught my parents what to do with me.

If my family is famous,  
not a little of the credit goes to me.  
My brother invented murder,  
my parents invented grief,  
I invented silence.

Afterwards the well-known events took place.  
Our inventions were perfected. One thing led to another,  
orders were given. There were those who murdered in  
their own way, grieved in their  
own  
way.

[ . . . ]  
you can die once, twice, even seven times,  
but you can't die a thousand times.  
I can.  
My underground cells reach everywhere.

When Cain began to multiply on the face of the earth,  
I began to multiply in the belly of the earth,  
and my strength has long been greater than his.  
His legions desert him and go over to me,  
and even this is only half a revenge.<sup>20</sup>

Pagis begins Abel's story, as Alan Mintz notes, at the very point where the Bible's narration comes to a halt.<sup>21</sup> Yet the speaking "I" of *Autobiography*, through its polyvalent semantics, also inverts the very course of human life: here, the "I's" biography begins with death and continues toward eternity. By depicting human history as the perfection of *invented* murder, the "I" is speaking through the perspective of a unique consciousness of time and history in which the murdered, though silent, are not subjected to the finitude of life. Rather, this dead "I" subverts any attempt to end its eternal genealogy. Even if it should be killed a thousand different times, this "I" is still able to continue the very essence of its being: namely, the telling, the conveyance of the community's narrative. Thus, even if Cain's descendents, the human

[149]

*Eternal Present*



Amir Eshel

race, spread on the earth's surface, the memory of the crime and hence the guarantee for a different, humane ethics will always remain underneath that surface. Consequently, even if the poem seems to deconstruct the course of history from the perspective of the perfection of crimes against humanity, it hardly aims at deconstructing "the very idea of fixed meaning or coherent fields of reference" and "collective memory," as Ezrahi suggests. The "I" is unmistakably here and is trying its best—with irony, allegory, and sarcasm—to convey a different, judicious notion of human history.<sup>22</sup>

That Pagis's alternative view of human history by no means implies the deconstruction of collective cultural memory is evident from the poem that follows *Autobiography* in the same volume. There, in *Yuhasin*, the "I" testifies to human genealogy from both the perspective of the ultimate crime and the etymological archives of cultural memory:

My son runs to me and says: son.  
I say to my father: listen, son, I.  
My father runs to me and says: father,  
Did you hear? A memorial was erected for us.  
I run to myself and see: There I lie  
As usual, my face to the wall, and write  
With chalk on the white wall  
All their names, so I will not forget  
My own.<sup>23</sup>

In accordance with the aporetic character of time in *Europe, late* and the subversive eternity of the crime inscribed into *Written in Pencil in the Sealed Railway-Car* and *Autobiography*, *Yuhasin* systematically negates every notion of temporal linearity. Here it is the "father" who is approaching the "son," calling him "father," and the "son" who is calling his "father" my "son." These "fathers" and "sons" belong to no specific generation or time. They are all poetic signs in the allegory of the metahistoric and transgenerational chain of continuity best described as Jewish cultural memory. The allegory of the transsubjective, transgenerational chain denotes the reciprocal relation between times far apart and thus emphasizes the continuous conveyance of cultural memory and its core: the never-ending process of "telling" and "hearing."

Not only can this process be traced on the semantic level but it is also recognizable throughout the poem's formal features, through the alliteration—in the hardly translatable Hebrew original—of the verbs *shma* (listen, hear) and *shamata* (did you listen/hear) and the noun *shem* (name). Without using any form of ceremonial speech on the



importance of memory, Pagis's rhetoric fuses the "name," "names" (the nonlinear genealogy of all generations), and the process of "telling" and "hearing," thereby tracing the space of cultural memory in the narration of the community's past and its reflection in liturgy (the poem's "shma" unmistakably evokes *shma Yisrael*). That *Yuhasin* is an allegory of cultural memory's eternal present is further highlighted in the barely translatable idiom "hūkam lanū zekher Vashem" in the fourth line. Here Pagis masterly interweaves modern poetry with the language of the Bible.

As Funkenstein has observed, Jewish cultural memory is based on the fact that, during the infancy of the Hebrew language, no distinction could be made between personal and collective memory.<sup>24</sup> The nouns *zikaron* (memory) and *zekher* (the memory of) incorporated both the subjective—memory as a mental act—and the objective and thus communal. The Bible uses the same root (z. kh. r.; zain, khaf, reish) to connote memory in the realms of both the "personal" and the "collective": "Yet did not the chief butler remember [*ve-lo zakhar*] Joseph, but forgot him" (Gen. 40:23), and "This is my name forever, and this is my memorial [*zikhri*] unto all generations" (Exod. 17:14). As Funkenstein notes, memory is synonymous with "name" and "letter," and both are, through their etymological relationship, indistinguishable from the masculine gender (*zakhar*). Pagis's *Yuhasin* turns to the archives of Jewish cultural memory in order to evoke the latest collective catastrophe—"hūkam lanū zekher Vashem" alludes to the memorial site of Yad Vashem—and, by unfolding the meaning of *zekher* through the relationship "father"- "son," to assert the continuity. With the paradoxical writing of the names in chalk on a white wall, *Yuhasin* takes into account the boundaries and illusions of every form of memorialization. Every material site of memory is a white wall on which the descendents can only write with chalk. Memory's only site might be realized in the void left by the murdered. Yet, even if this is the case, even if the script remains unreadable, the writing, telling, and drawing—all of which are forms of mediation of a community's continuity—remain the guarantee for not failing to remember, for not losing one's own name.

## Winds of Long Time

Six years older than Pagis, Yehuda Amichai was born in 1924 as Ludwig Pfeuffer in the southern Germany town of Würzburg. His family belonged to the so-called *Landjudentum*, the German land-Jewry, whose occupation was mainly buying and selling cattle. Unlike Pagis, Amichai

was raised in an Orthodox environment, though he would later call the religious tradition of his family “naïve, if not childish.”<sup>25</sup> Unlike in the centers of German-Jewish culture in Berlin, Vienna, or Hamburg, the Landjudentum of Würzburg did not follow modern Jewish concepts. That might be why Amichai’s father was able to foresee what was happening in Germany: in 1936 the whole family left Germany behind and moved to Palestine/Erets Yisrael and settled in Petach-Tikva.

Although this family exodus saved Amichai from the fate of most European Jews, it never prevented him from acknowledging what might have been. In a poem called *Almost a love poem*, the “I” remarks: “If my parents and yours / would not have come to Erets Yisrael / 1936 / we would have met 1944 / there / on the ramp of Auschwitz.”<sup>26</sup> Although the Shoah certainly is not the thematic center of Amichai’s poetry, he does continuously reflect upon this decisive caesura of Jewish history. Furthermore, even though his poetry cannot be reduced to poetic formulations of biographical materials or to historically translatable references, many of Amichai’s poems clearly transform experiences such as displacement, migration, and persecution into the realm of poetic language: “And the migration of my parents / Has not subsided in me. My blood goes on sloshing / Between my ribs, long after the vessels has come to rest. / And the migration of my parents has not subsided in me. Winds of long time over stones.”<sup>27</sup> On the level of poetic figuration, Amichai’s evocation of “winds” (*ruhot*) clearly goes back to the winds of all Jewish migrations, which cannot be separated from those of the previous one. Moreover, Amichai’s usage of the noun *ruah* (wind, spirit) does allude to the material winds blowing through graveyards of past sites of Jewish life as well as to the term encoding God’s essence at the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:1), a term later transformed in Hellenic culture into *pneuma* (i.e., spirit or soul). His metaphorical “winds” therefore also connote the timeless spirit along the lines of cultural memory’s eternal present—the wind that links the remains of ancient times to those of the recent traumatic past and to the present.

Many of Amichai’s poems figure different forms of this nonmaterial presence. They suggest that, even in the face of post-Haskalah divine absence, even in the face of the Shoah, the persistent search—at times ironic if not sarcastic—for forms of continuity did not come to a halt.<sup>28</sup> Some of Amichai’s poems assert this search in a surprisingly direct manner:

I wasn’t one of the six million who died in the Shoah,  
I wasn’t even among the survivors.

And I wasn't one of the six hundred thousand who went out of Egypt.  
I came to the Promised Land by sea.

No, I was not in that number, though I still have the fire and the smoke  
with me, pillars of fire and pillars of smoke that guide me  
by night and by day.<sup>29</sup>

[153]

*Eternal Present*



Amir Eshel

In another poem, the “I” demands outspokenly to concentrate not on the ruins of history but rather on the endurance engraved in the voice of the single “I”:

Let us not talk about the famous six million,  
Let us talk about the eleven who remained,  
Let us talk about one of them,  
Myself:  
I am a man-hill.  
Yet in all my strata  
Something  
Still moves.<sup>30</sup>

Other than such poetic pleas, most of Amichai's poems prefer the implicit, thus making use of other tropes—in most cases allegorical—to connote the personal and collective thread of continuity. This element can be viewed best in Amichai's allegories of “fathers” and “sons,” which to some extent seem to make use of biographical materials such as Amichai's complex relationship to his own Orthodox father. Yet, like Pagis's *Yuhasin*, Amichai's images of “fathers” and “sons” should be read as frustrating genealogical allegories of time: by depicting a continuous dialogue between the two poetic signs, the poems negate temporal linearity and thus historical oblivion. Hence, many of these allegories of “fathers” and “sons” build toward the unity of all time modes, of all layers of time in the sphere of cultural memory.<sup>31</sup> As in *My son, my son, my head, my head*, these poems convey the deep need, especially in the aftermath of the Shoah, to assert a transgenerational dialogue that transgresses the boundaries of subjective finitude: “My son, my son, my head, my head, / In this train, I pass / Through alien landscapes, reading of Auschwitz / And learning about the difference / Between “to leave” and “not to remain.”<sup>32</sup> By its use of the signifier Auschwitz, like in the case of Pagis's *thirty-nine and a half*, the poem should not be mistaken for a representational explication of the site of the catastrophe, thus allowing it to be read merely as “Holocaust poetry.” Rather, the passengers in this train are not going somewhere specific; this is not the figuring of a realistic journey. Indeed, this “father” and “son” are reading, together, *about* the historical event and, by so doing, concentrate on the conveyance of times past as a part of

the most immediate present. What counts, according to this reading, is not simply the necessary commemoration of the killing engraved onto the signifier Auschwitz but also the continuous, transgenerational passing on of the events. This is the conveyance of an essence beyond the boundaries of subjective existence. Like in Pagis's case, the vigor of Amichai's "father" and "son" allegories comes from their linguistic and cultural sources, namely the etymological root of the Hebrew term *zikaron*. The "father" and "son" are signifiers of the process of symbolizing the unity of all time modes in the realm of cultural memory. Their conversation therefore stands for the process in which cultural memory prevails over oblivion.

As I have suggested above, Amichai's "time" is not to be mistaken as part of the poet's philosophical or religious terminology. Indeed, his poetic time always takes into account the void of divine presence that the Shoah marks. In an interview, Amichai stated:

Like eternity, God is a symbol for everything we do not know. . . . The majestic [aspect] of this term is the very fact that anyone can denote it in different ways. That is the reason why I do not ask, like the Orthodox Jews do, why the Shoah occurred. It is indisputable that six million people could not have sinned. The Shoah could not have been a punishment. I don't know who the Lord is. I only know what the God of my father means.<sup>33</sup>

This God is not there to be worshipped or feared but rather signifies the God of the "fathers" and the "sons" and thus the symbolic string of *zikaron* that holds the community together through time and calamities. The dialogue with "God of the fathers" is therefore a search for the sources of continuity that are embodied in collective memory.

For Amichai, as a secular poet, this continuity manifests itself through the most decisive mode of transmission found in a community's cultural archives: language.

The continuity is the language. This language exists as long as the same language (Hebrew) is being written and used. Even if it is a language that tries new ways, that criticizes and goes against the stream. Actually it [this language] continues. A continuation, which is not simply copying older forms. Real continuation is dialectic. Every Israeli and Jewish writer represents the continuation of Jewish culture.<sup>34</sup>

It is this notion of a cultural continuation based on common language and its archives of literature, images, and metaphors that serve as the foundation for the eternity of the community: "Judaism is a continuous



memory in word and deed, in symbols and practice. That is what poetry is all about: personal documentation, a living museum in which the poet eternalizes his life.”<sup>35</sup>

Amichai’s poetry illustrates majestically how all generations are at one and the same time involved in ensuring material and spiritual, even secular, continuation. In his volume *Time*, originally published in 1978, we read:

Here on the ancient beach of Tantura I sit  
in the sand with my sons and my sons’ sons not yet born.  
But they are assembled with me in my crouched squatting.  
The happiness of the water equals the happiness of Heaven.  
And the waves’ foam penetrates my mind and becomes  
Clear there.

And my past’s future is here and now in my rest.<sup>36</sup>

The negation of genealogical linearity is most decisive here: The “I’s” perspective reaches far beyond the boundaries of its own existence and is extended into the temporal dimension of all generations to come. Sitting on the “ancient” beach of Tantura—a site of Mediterranean history and Israeli earthliness—this “I” is able to address even his unborn “sons” and to regard the future of its own past as a present occurrence. Here again, Amichai’s *Time* is by no means a transcendental category, nor a hermetic system, but rather an expression of what Chana Kronfeld so accurately describes as the capacity of the poetic “I” to encounter the simultaneous layering of opposing personal and collective forces.<sup>37</sup> The signifier “I” incorporates both the personal and the collective; it makes use of rhetoric that points toward the endurance of oblivion in an era when the “I” suffered its most devastating catastrophe.

In an interview with Helit Yeshurun—probably Amichai’s most systematic account of his poetics of time—he said:

I live without before and after, it’s not even the memories, memories are not mere recollections [*ha-zikhronot zeh lo zikhronot*]; I live because I am the child I was, and the lover I was, and the father of my children, and the son of my dead parents, and my parents are present [*nimtsaim*]. Everything exists. Nothing is dead for me [*shum davar lo met li*]. This is a Jewish characteristic—in the Torah there is no before and after.<sup>38</sup>

This eradication of any differentiation between “before” and “after” logically leads to Jewish history transcending the realm of general human history. This notion is also reflected in Amichai’s epic yet ironic account of Jewish history, *The Jews*. Here, Amichai depicts his subject by



using the temporal metaphor of taking photographs. Photography, of course, is one of the most remarkable modes of representation for temporal simultaneity in modern art, the material formation of time in motion, the capturing of the passing through the lens of the represented moment:

The Jews are like photos in a display window,  
All of them together, short and tall, alive and dead,  
Brides and grooms, bar mitzvah boys and babies.  
Some are restored from old yellowed photographs.  
Sometime people come and break the window  
And burn the pictures. And then they start  
Photographing and developing all over again  
And displaying them again, sad and smiling.

[ . . . ]

The Jews are an eternal forest preserve  
Where the trees stand dense, and even the dead  
Cannot lie down. They stand upright, leaning on the living,  
And you cannot tell them apart. Just the fire  
Burns the dead faster.

[ . . . ]

A Jewish man remembers the sukkah in his grandfather's home.  
And the sukkah remembers for him  
The wandering in the desert that remembers  
The grace of the youth and the tablets of the Ten Commandments  
And the gold of the Golden Calf and the thirst and the hunger  
That remember Egypt.

[ . . . ]

The Jews are not a historical people  
And not even an archeological people, the Jews  
Are a geological people with rifts  
And collapses and strata and fiery lava.  
Their history must be measured  
On a different scale.<sup>39</sup>

### **A Different History, a Different Scale**

Amichai's image of the Jews as a *geological* rather than a *historical* people may serve as a poignant metaphor for the temporal dimension in modern Jewish poetry facing the Shoah. Indeed, this poetry depicts the remnants of the most recent decisive shift in the course of Jewish



history; yet, by portraying this historical caesura as a part of the geological whole, it asserts continuity beyond the rift. Just as actual geological structures bear the marks of all previous tectonic movements, and thus visually freeze the flow of time, so too does this metaphor imply a totality stretching from “the past,” over the tectonic fissure, into “the present.” At its core, this metaphor accentuates the unity of all time modes in the realm of cultural memory. As such, it masterly matches the image of the Jews as photographs. Like a geological structure, a photo visualizes a time sequence carved into a material, pictorial form. In a photo, time (as it is inscribed into bodies) becomes a part of *what* is present, a part of *the* present. Walter Benjamin described this moment in which the past and the present are united through an image as “dialectics at a standstill.” It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather,

[An] image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. *For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.* Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language.<sup>40</sup>

Amichai’s metaphor of the Jews as photographs or geological formations, like Pagis’s “zekher Vashem,” are indeed images that meld *what-has-been* with the *now* in the immediacy of a single figure. Like Pagis and Amichai, other Jewish poets who wrote facing the events also used similar dialectical images, which combine the primordial with the immediate now. Avoth Yeshurun (1904–92) depicts the Syrian-African rift in its relation to the day of personal and collective atonement and thus metaphorically evokes the rift that swallowed the Volhynian world he grew up in:

The sages say, that the time the Syrian-African rift  
occurred, the celestial inhabitants were not  
up-to-date. Each man was engaged  
at his trade. In grinding hatches. In splitting beasts.

Ancient humanity and land of the axe.  
And when those wanted some change on the earth  
they have to do it by putting to sleep.  
After that they waken the earth.

Like they did to me once in the isolation in narcosis  
under the plywood and the roof  
in Beilinson Hospital: "Yeshurun, you underwent an operation!"  
And here I am. Yom Kippur.<sup>41</sup>

Analogous to Pagis's *Yuhasin*, other poets who try to measure the fracture and yet convey permanence choose to represent "father-son" allegories, which can often be read as palimpsests of the archaic myth of Isaac's binding.<sup>42</sup> In his poem *Isaac*, Amir Gilboa (1917–84), who served in the Jewish Brigade in North Africa and Europe, overturns the biblical narrative to highlight the void of divine providence. In *Isaac*, no Godly voice stopping the killing can be heard: "It is I who am being slaughtered, my / son, and already my blood is on the / leaves. And father's voice was / smothered and his face was pale."<sup>43</sup> Hayim Gouri (1923–), who, like Gilboa, viewed the horrors of the war while helping the so-called displaced persons in postwar Europe, depicts Abraham's archaic knife as still threatening all his descendents. Here, the drama relates unmistakably to the temporal symbolic of the poem, tearing the seemingly archaic event from the past and transforming it—through the temporal emphasis on the present—into the realm of the *now*:

Isaac, as the story goes, was not  
sacrificed. He lived for many years, saw  
what pleasure had to offer, until his  
eyesight dimmed.

But he bequeathed that hour to his  
offspring. They are born with a knife in  
their hearts.<sup>44</sup>

No "father" and "son" who were born after the recent, modern binding are capable of avoiding the ethical riddles dominating a world deprived of human emotion and compassion. This subtext of Gouri's fable is also shared by the poet Tuvia Rübner. Born in Bratislava in 1924, the same year as Amichai, Rübner was able to escape the fate of his family only by a miracle. Like Pagis, Rübner grew up in a German-Jewish, middle-class milieu and was abruptly torn from his family when he was lucky enough to be placed in the last group of Hashomer Hatzair youth leaving Europe for Palestine in 1941. In Palestine/Erets Yisrael, Rübner arrived in Kibbutz Merhavia; in dark, surrealistic poems, he returns to the night that darkened his youth. The poet and literary critic Ludwig Strauss (1892–1953) introduced the promising young poet to his friend, the Jerusalem Germanist Werner Kraft (1896–1991), who encouraged Rübner to continue writing poetry. Yet it was not until 1953 that Rübner decided to write his poetry in Hebrew.



Before then, he had kept writing in German—the language, as he later said, through which he was still able to speak with his lost loved ones. They, however, could not hear: his grandparents, parents, and younger sister were all murdered in Auschwitz. Although Rübner’s poetry is deeply influenced by European, mostly German modernism, one can clearly trace in his writings the same poetic of the “eternal present” previously observed in the work of Pagis and Amichai.

Like Gouri and Gilboa, Rübner turned to the archetype of Isaac’s binding as a key source from the archives of cultural memory. Yet Rübner’s depiction hardly leaves space for a symbolic that is grounded in an ethical scheme. In his poem *Voices*, language seems to have lost every vestige of intelligibility, and only a fractured human speech can be heard:

I am walking. Always walking. Where to  
I am no longer here.

[ . . . ]

I know, my son, I am the father.  
I lead you; we both walk together.

[ . . . ]

A ram seized in the black ribs  
silent stutter in the branches  
Time entangled in his day, in his night.<sup>45</sup>

Here, the poem’s striking image, “time entangled,” renders time motionless, and it marks, like the solidified sap in Pagis’s *The cut of the axe*, both the moment of catastrophe and catastrophe’s duration. Significantly, this fraught moment, which can be found in many of Rübner’s poems, connotes not only finitude but also endurance.

Even in those poems by Rübner in which life seems to fully dissolve into death, the rhetoric of time conveys continuous “telling.” In a programmatic, metapoetic poem called *Teudah* (Document)—the title denotes both a material document and the witness’s (*ed, edut*) destiny, to testify—the “I” locates the reason for its very existence in “saying” what *is* and what *was*, in transmitting its ancestor’s story and by giving voice to the ashes:

I am here in order to say

House is not a house  
over there, near the town square, did I say square?  
tiled desert.

[ . . . ]

I am here in order to say

[160]

Jewish  
Social  
Studies

The history of my ancestors is coal,  
ashes, my sister's wind  
in my hair, blowing  
back, back, night's wind.<sup>46</sup>

In a clear reference to this form of poetic testimony, the "I" of Rübner's poem *My father* addresses the realm outside of the textual sphere, conveying both the historical caesuras and the very act of bearing witness, asking and answering the questions posed by history:

That every night my father  
shone like the window in the ark.

That every night I was like a shadow  
clinging to the wings of his light.

Tonight my father sweeps over me  
as over a candle the dark.<sup>47</sup>

The allusions to the biblical myth and to the Haggadah liturgy—"Why is this night different from all other nights?"—results significantly in the binding together of the mythological collective past and the traumatized present. Even if the genealogical relationship is reversed, insofar as it is no longer the father who is responsible for recounting the community's past, the story is still told. Like in Pagis's *Yuhasin*, neither the reason for the father's silence nor the events that led to it are mentioned. Rather, the poem concentrates on the reciprocal relation between "father" and "son," vis-à-vis the abyss. At its center, which is by no means redemptive, the "son" is the one who will tell the story "this evening," and by rhetorically emphasizing the *now*, this figurative son connotes the symbolic order in which "telling" and "hearing" are the only testimonial essentials. Even if the father casts a shadow over the son, and even if Rübner's skeptical, if not parodic, usage of the Haggadah text can hardly be questioned, this "son" will still convey the story of this modern Haggadah; he will still tell about the recent flood in the community's history.

It is fascinating to see how Pagis, Amichai, and Rübner's rhetoric of (Jewish) time—their poetic figuration of (Jewish) cultural memory—is also shared by poets who did not write using the multiple layers of Hebrew. One might think, for example, of the epic yet ironic dimensions of Jacob Glatstein's (1896–1971) poem *My children's-children's past*:

In the past I always passed away.  
I passed like a wonder.  
And in the now, I lived  
As a heder-boy should live,

With *Gemore*-melodies,  
With a sun saved up for me,  
In an invented palace  
Of Jewish grief.

[ . . . ]  
In middle age it fell upon me  
To see face to face  
My childish once-upon-a-time.  
My palace of Jewish grief is no longer a legend.  
Day after day they destroy me  
By the tens of thousands.  
How can I have thought  
That the Jewish past  
Is a historical graveyard?

[ . . . ]  
*Face to face with all my Destructions,*  
My ruin is on fire.  
The deaths of my own time will reach me fast.  
*God, I am becoming my children's-children's past.*<sup>48</sup>

[161]

*Eternal Present*



Amir Eshel

The very same inversion of linear temporality, the same consciousness of all destructions, can also be traced in Primo Levi's *Passover*, a poem in which Levi, like Rübner, goes back to the enigmatic questions of the Haggadah:

Tell me: How is this night different  
From all other nights?  
[ . . . ]  
We will spend the night recounting  
Far-off events full of wonder,  
And because of all the wine  
The mountains will skip like rams.  
[ . . . ]  
Today flowing back into yesterday,  
Like the river enclosed at its mouth.  
Each of us has been a slave in Egypt.<sup>49</sup>

For Levi, *Passover* is at its core the rhetorical inversion of time's flow; it participates in the construction of the community's narrative as one that, through the unity of all time modes in the realm of cultural memory, exists beyond any empirical conception of time or historical validity.

Examples of this unique rhetoric of time can also be found in many of the poems written by Paul Celan, whose poetic horizon lies far distant from that of poets like Yehuda Amichai or Jacob Glatstein. Yet

Celan, in his poem *Benedicta*, clearly evokes the winds of time while referring to the Judeo-Christian spiritual tradition based on *ruah*, *pneuma*. In *Benedicta*, we find that the poetic “thou” has symbolically and significantly internalized the winds of long times:

Hast—  
thou hast drunk,  
what came to me from our fathers  
and from beyond our fathers:  
—Pneuma.

[ . . . ]  
You that heard, when I shut my eyes, how  
the voice stopped singing after  
*‘s muz azoy zayn.*<sup>50</sup>

By ending with the silenced Yiddish verse, Celan clearly speaks to the breach of a civilization based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. Nevertheless, the poem thematizes the allegorical drinking of the fathers’ spirit, the dialogue between “father” and “son” in the realm of the present “I.”

\* \* \*

Probing the separation between the aesthetic autonomy of poetry and the language and rhetoric stemming from the archives of cultural memory, I have presented poems above that can be regarded as a remote yet vital echo of a long tradition of telling the past and reflecting the present. This tradition, as Yerushalmi has pointed out, never fell into a sense of predetermined destiny, because the cyclical reading of the Torah was never just a matter of evocation. It always served to reflect on the present. Reading this poetry, exploring the poetic interchanges between lamentation and assertion, trauma, and persistence, one is compelled to think of them as being a thread of the fabric shaping Jewish historical consciousness. These lyrical threads represent a modern and intriguing expression of what Funkenstein called “creative thinking” about the Jewish past: “Creative thinking about history past and present never ceased. Jewish culture was and remained formed by an acute historical consciousness, albeit different at different periods.”<sup>51</sup>

Amichai’s water dam, Pagis’s *zekher Vashem*, and Rübner’s ark can all be seen as significant, poetic forms of “creative thinking,” of lending this acute historical consciousness a poetic voice. Surely, the language of poetry should not be mistaken for just another type of the larger genre, history. Yet, these poems challenge every distinct dichotomy

between historical narrative and poetic figuration of time, of history, and especially of the past. Thus, in reimagining the boundaries between past and present, between “private” and “collective” memory, this poetry clearly stands in the long and rich tradition of historical evocation and creative reflection of all Jewish communal events, of all times. It challenges readers to rethink the plain notion of their Being as confined to immediate time, and instead to view it from the perspective of the poetic, eternal present.

[163]

*Eternal Present*



Amir Eshel

*In memoriam Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000)*

## Notes

All translations of poetry are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

- 1 Yehuda Amichai, *Open Closed Open*, trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld (New York, 2000), 111.
- 2 See Paul Ricoeur, “Introduction,” in *Time and the Philosophies*, Honorat Aguessy a.o., ed. (Paris, 1977), 18–19. On the temporal constitution of temporal experience, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München, 1997), 23.
- 3 In his *95 Thesen ueber Judentum und Zionismus*, sent to Walter Benjamin on the latter’s 26th birthday, Scholem writes “Der Zeitbegriff des Judentums ist ewige Gegenwart” (The time concept of Judaism is eternal present). Gershom Scholem, *Zwischen den Disziplinen*, Peter Schäfer and Gary Smith, eds. (Frankfurt am Main, 1995), 294.
- 4 In his *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York, 1951) Abraham Joshua Heschel writes: “The Bible is more concerned with time than with space. It sees the world in the dimension of time” (6). Later on, Heschel expands this view further. In *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* (New York, 1976), he writes: “Judaism is a religion of history, a religion of time. The God of Israel was not found primarily in the facts of nature. He spoke through events in history. While the deities of other people were associated with places or things, the God of the prophets was the God of events: the redeemer from slavery, the revealer of the Torah, manifesting Himself in events of history rather than in things or places” (200). See also Eliezer Schweid, “Tavnit ha-zman be-tarbut Yisrael: Ha-



- memad ha-kosmi vеха-memad ha-histori,” *Molad* 9, no. 41 (Spring 1982): 152–63; Adin Steinsalz, “Musag ha-zman ba-mahshaah ha-yehudit,” *Skirah hodshit* 33, no. 8 (1986): 3–8; and Alexander Barzel, *Al minneh ha-yahadut* (Tel Aviv, 1994), 240.
- 5 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, 1982), esp. 5–26; Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish history* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), 1–21.
  - 6 Saul Friedländer, “Die Shoah als Element in der Konstruktion israelischer Erinnerung,” *Babylon*, no. 2 (1987): 10. See also Moshe Zimmermann, “Israels Umgang mit dem Holocaust,” in *Der Umgang mit dem Holocaust: Europa, USA, Israel*, Rolf Steininger, ed. (Wien, 1994), 388–91.
  - 7 See Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, 1969), 257–58.
  - 8 Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York, 1984); David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984). See also Amir Eshel, *Zeit der Zäsur: Jüdische Dichter im Angesicht der Shoah* (Heidelberg, 1999).
  - 9 See Ada Pagis, *Lev pitomi* (Tel Aviv, 1995), 30–31.
  - 10 Pagis interview with Yaira Genossar, “Likro be-shem, linkot emdah,” *Iton* 77, no. 38 (Feb. 1983): 32–33.
  - 11 In an interview with Haim Chertok, Pagis said “German is my first language” (Chertok, *We Are All Close: Conversations with Israeli Writers* [New York, 1989], 67), and in the above-mentioned interview with Genossar, he stated: “Ani shayakh la-safah ha-germanit” (I belong to the German language), 32.
  - 12 Dan Pagis, *Kol ha-shirim* (Jerusalem, 1991), 9.
  - 13 Tamar Yacobi, “Itsuv memad hazman ke-gorem le-hoser realizm be-shirei Dan Pagis,” *Ha-sifrut* 22 (1976), and Tamar Yacobi and Meir Steinberg, “Hayahasim bein maba kavul le-poetika: Al-pi shirato shel Dan Pagis,” *Ha-sifrut* 22 (1976): esp. 142–55.
  - 14 Pagis, *Lev pitomi*, 89.
  - 15 *Ibid.*, 28.
  - 16 Dan Pagis, *Points of Departure*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (Philadelphia, 1981), 23.
  - 17 Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, 249.
  - 18 Pagis, *Points of Departure*, 22.
  - 19 Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi, “Dan Pagis and the Poetic of Decomposition,” *Prooftext* 10, no. 2 (1990): 33.
  - 20 Pagis, *Points of Departure*, 3.
  - 21 Mintz, *Hurban*, 264.
  - 22 See Ezrahi, *Dan Pagis and the Poetic*, 35.
  - 23 Pagis, *Kol ha-shirim*, 167.
  - 24 Funkenstein, *Perceptions*, 6.
  - 25 Yehuda Amichai, “Mein Judentum,” in *Mein Judentum*, Hans Jürgen Schulz, ed. (München, 1986), 19.
  - 26 Yehuda Amichai, *Shat ha-hesed* (Jerusalem, 1982), 84.

- 27 Yehuda Amichai, *A Life in Poetry: 1948–1994*, trans. Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (New York, 1994), 51.
- 28 On Amichai's preoccupation with "God," especially from a thematic point of view, and in regard to the transformation that this signifier goes through in the course of Amichai's poetic writings, see Glenda Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach* (New York, 1989), 50–70.
- 29 Amichai, *Open Closed Open*, 7.
- 30 Amichai, *A Life in Poetry*, 287.
- 31 On Amichai's images of fathers and sons, see Nili Gold Sharf, *Lo ka-brosh: Gilgulei imagim vetavniyot be-shirato shel Yehuda Amichai* (Jerusalem, 1994), 82–86.
- 32 Amichai, *A Life in Poetry*, 97.
- 33 Yehuda Amichai in an interview with Yaakov Malkin, "Noladeti lihyot helek me-eruei dorenu," *Yahadut hofshit*, no. 9 (June 1996): 23.
- 34 Yehuda Amichai in an interview with Nili Segal, in *Bitsaron* 21–22, no. 6 (1984): 20–21. On Amichai's relationship to Judaism, see also Josef Milman, "'She-hyah Avraham ve-hehesir et ha-he le-elohav': Ha-metaforah ha-ikonoklastit kevituy le-yahasu ha-kaful shel Yehuda Amichai la-yahadut," in *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Jerusalem, Aug. 16–24, 1989, Division C, Vol. II (Jerusalem, 1990), 243–50.
- 35 Amichai, "Mein Judentum," 22–23.
- 36 Yehuda Amichai, *Time* [translator not mentioned] (New York, 1979), 85.
- 37 Chana Kronfeld, "'The Wisdom of Camouflage': Between Rhetoric and Philosophy in Amichai's Poetic System," *Prooftexts* 10, no. 3 (Sept. 1990): 486.
- 38 Yehuda Amichai in an interview with Helit Yeshurun, in *Hadarim* 6 (Spring 1987): 131.
- 39 Amichai, *A Life in Poetry*, 463.
- 40 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 462–63 (my emphasis).
- 41 Avot Yeshurun, *The Syrian African Rift and Other Poems*, trans. Harold Schimmel (Philadelphia, 1980), 29.
- 42 On the binding of Isaac in modern Hebrew poetry, see Ruth Kartun-Blum, "Me-ayin ha-etsim ha-eleh be-yadi: Hakedah ke-mikreh bohan bashirah ha-ivrit ha-hadashah," *Moznayim* 9–10 (Dec. 1988–Jan. 1989): 9–14. On the Akedah as a paradigmatic archetype in the Middle Ages literature of destruction, see also Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, 38.
- 43 *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, ed. T. Carmi (New York, 1981), 560. For this reading of the poem, see also the introduction in Amir Gilboa, *The Light of Lost Suns*, trans. Shirley Kaufman with Shlomith Rimmon (New York, 1979), 11–12.
- 44 *Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, 565.
- 45 Tuvia Rübner, *Ve-el mekomo shoef, 1953–1989* (Tel Aviv, 1990), 42.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 43.

[165]

*Eternal Present*



Amir Eshel

- 47 *Modern Hebrew Poetry*, trans. and ed. Bernhard Frank (Iowa City, 1980), 107.
- 48 Benjamin and Barbara Harshav, eds. and trans., *American Yiddish Poetry* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986), 329–33 (my emphasis).
- 49 Primo Levi, *Collected Poems*, trans. Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann (London, 1988), 51–52.
- 50 Paul Celan’s poem *Benedicta* is quoted, according to John Felstiner’s translation, in *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven, Conn., 1995), 178.
- 51 Funkenstein, *Perceptions*, 11.