

Yehuda Amichai's Jerusalem

In these days of daily reports concerning territorial struggle between Jerusalem's Arab and Jewish residents and the state of Israel's increased expropriation of Palestinian lands and residences, it is useful to keep in mind the example of Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000) who remains a figure of conscience when it comes to the threat posed to Jerusalem's multiculturalism and sacred legacy by the fundamentalists who yearn to possess it as real estate rather than genuine spiritual space.¹ Many of Amichai's most timeless and compassionate poems examine the meaning of Jerusalem, in both its temporal and heavenly dimensions, as a shared space in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims sometimes coexist, and sometimes struggle against the Other. This essay addresses a few of the important ways in which the poet engaged and was engaged by the troubled city. Reading *Love Poems* (1981) and the more politically fraught 1988 *Poems of Jerusalem*, one is impressed by how the ostensibly disparate categories represented by these two collections distinctly echo off each other.²

For many years, Amichai lived in Jerusalem as a true pedestrian at heart, ambling through the city's streets and open markets. In this way, he was in acute proximity to the inexorable and vulnerable limits of Israeli and Palestinian bodies surrounded by the city's stony eternity. Few poets before Amichai succeeded so well in writing of the city directly out of the continuum of Jewish textual tradition while still managing to address its deep contemporary conflicts, the vexing new reality of inhabiting rebuilt Jerusalem. In other words, the poet's rich intertextuality never lets the reader forget that in these ancient sources, the 'ideal' is already at odds with the 'real.'

Born in the Bavarian town of Würzburg during the unstable days of the Weimar Republic, Amichai's Orthodox Jewish family emigrated to Palestine in 1936. Amichai left behind Ruth, a childhood girlfriend who was killed in the Holocaust.³ After a brief stay in Petah Tikva, the family moved next to Jerusalem where Amichai would remain until his death (except for a sojourn in Haifa and brief periods when he taught in the United States), bequeathing the poet the sense of a casual intimacy with the city that resonates throughout his works. He began writing poetry in 1949, soon after the War of Independence. It seems telling that he wrote none before. "I think of children growing up half in the ethics of their fathers/and half in the science of war" (*Poems of Jerusalem*, 47)—posthumously this stands as the poet's enduring statement on the perverse paradox that informs the life of the average Israeli citizen-soldier. After serving in the Jewish Brigade in Egypt during WWII, Amichai fought as an infantryman during Israel's War of Independence and would serve again in the bloody wars of 1956, 1967, and 1973. What I find especially compelling about this tumultuous personal history is the constancy with which Jerusalem stands out from the poems as a representative symbol for the way that violent reality perpetually defeats the three monotheisms' visionary preconceptions and longings.

When it came to the gushing utterances of visiting poets and writers who "claimed" Jerusalem during their brief sojourns, Amichai could be acerbically unsentimental. He once complained that, "You can write the *worst* poetry in Jerusalem, although the city seems so rich. Sometimes American poets come to Israel, and suddenly it's so 'easy' there to write a poem with the old and the new. But it's the worst poetry that

sometimes very good poets from abroad write, because they just put in a few words like the *Wailing Wall* and the *muezzin* and the *war* and *God* and *David* and *Jesus* and so on, and then the *olive tree* and whatnot. And then they are all in bad business.”⁴ In contrast to the exploitative surfaces of the verse he disparaged, Amichai felt that the success of his own highly charged representations of the city owed to a keenly attuned sense of irony, a sensibility that many of his Israeli readers appreciated. This timbre seems to have been intrinsically linked to the simple fact of his capacity to serve as a witness to the cultural, political, and spiritually complex identities of Jerusalem’s inhabitants.

For Amichai, the conventionally “spiritual” Jerusalem her seekers hope to grasp proves stubbornly elusive: “The city plays hide-and-seek among her names” (*Poems of Jerusalem*, 47). For the restless poet who in interviews often proclaimed himself “crazy about exactitude” (Montenegro, 220) that elusiveness and complexity must have provoked a sense of being perpetually challenged. The definitive Jerusalem poem would never be written. For instance, in “Indian Summer in Princeton,” a poem of mid-career, the speaker reveals how “in my dreams I look at bright, blinding Jerusalem—/And that’s why Jerusalem’s black now/Like an underexposed photograph” (*Poems* [1968], 49), as if confessing his failure to transmit the city’s true qualities, especially at such a great remove. Perhaps more than any other quality it is this strange mingling of secular skepticism and yearning that best explains how Amichai, whatever his intentions, always managed to attract a global readership that far exceeded the historical orientation, cultural context, and shared experience of his original Hebrew audience.

In this respect, Jerusalem invariably returns as a catalyst for some of the poet’s most observant meditations on how the sacred violates the political and vice-versa in

ways that so many Israelis feel reflects their own literal and metaphoric encounters with language, history, and landscape. Though he wasn't the first Israeli poet to interweave colloquial idioms or slang with biblical phrases (the lyrics of Haim Gouri and Amir Gilboa presaged this crucial development in the figurative language of modern Hebrew verse), Amichai was indisputably innovative when it came to juxtaposing the seriousness of political contexts such as war with a playful tone in his representations of Jerusalem. As Ramras-Rauch observes of the poet's steadfast attunement to his city: "A daily observation, a walk through a neighborhood, a momentary view of the city often serves as a springboard to a wider, more complex reality" (87). In the city's embodiment of both the highest achievements of the human spiritual imagination and the rocky altar to which human beings and their ancestors have returned to sacrifice one another again and again, Jerusalem is necessarily the beating and wounded heart of his parabolic and beguiling poetic practice.

Amichai continually plays with the notion of 'belonging' to Jerusalem (with all her political, social, religious, and cultural complexity), against alternative avenues of identity in ways that ultimately implicate the reader as well, particularly in their original Israeli context. In a late poem, musing on why the Jews "call their God *Makom*, 'Place'" the speaker teasingly reveals the irony that

Now that they have returned to their place, the Lord has taken up
wandering to different places, and His name will no longer be Place
but Places, Lord of the Places.

(*Open Closed Open*, 118)

It would seem here that Jerusalem (from whose cycles of destruction Jews were often launched into exilic space) must cohabit with Exile, each existential realm interdependent on the other. This conscientious complementarity was noted by critics as early as 1968:

“For Amichai...to be an Israeli is quite as difficult as to be a Diaspora Jew...his preoccupation with his parents...means that he assumes the burdens and dilemmas of both.”⁵ In the immediate aftermath of Amichai’s death, Yitzhak Laor underscored this paradigm, insisting that on the most fundamental level, “Amichai didn’t buy ‘the new Jew’...it may well be said, in memory of his father and his grandfather.”⁶

In the end, as translators Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld argue, the only cultural construct Amichai had complete confidence in was “the human capacity for language.”⁷ Undoubtedly there is fierce resistance to dogmatic absolutes in that abiding spirit of skepticism; yet such hesitancy is always expressed in uncompromising affirmations of the moral individual, often imagined as a citizen of Jerusalem, struggling under the weighty travesties of history, war, and nationalisms. What is perhaps most consistently apparent, and compelling, even in the earliest Jerusalem poems, is their stoic resistance to the euphoria of any form of *proprietary* love.

This seems especially remarkable just after the Six-Day War in 1967 which unleashed an unparalleled wave of highly rhetorical and ideologically inflected verse, much of it undoubtedly triumphal or otherwise awestruck, in response to the culture’s access to every quarter of the city. In this period, the seductive symbols of “Jewish mysticism” relating to Jerusalem’s history had an enormous impact on all the city’s artists (composers, lyricists, painters, novelists).⁸ Even in the aftermath of two Intifadas and much greater cultural wariness (and weariness), one is tempted to ponder how the poetry of this period could *not* be giddily caught up in reclaimed Jerusalem’s thrall? In his heartfelt, if ornate, language of Menashe Kadishman, a highly acclaimed painter particularly active in the postwar period (for whom Jerusalem has remained a central

motif ever since): “Even if I walk in Jerusalem, then too I am walking to Jerusalem....When you stand on Mount Scopus and look out at Jerusalem on the one side and the Judean desert on the other—you feel that you are floating, you feel part of eternity” (Omer, 213-14). What one immediately notices about this acknowledgement of elevated feelings for occupying holy space, is how the enraptured pilgrim has stealthily silenced the critical artist. In this regard, the sharp contrast with Amichai’s approach is especially evident.

Rather than presume to “capture” Jerusalem as the fantasy fulfillment of a collective dream, Amichai’s Jerusalem always remains an unconventional topography—too complex to be limited to a single narrative of faith, historical closure, or destiny. Instead, in Glenda Abramson’s astute insight, “the city is seen as a projection of himself and his divided life....Like Jerusalem itself his life has been divided.”⁹ Alongside distinctly barbed and ironic gestures to the mythic weight of the city, we discover the startling language of personal emotional loss and estrangement cast against the nationalist sentiment of “reunification”: “I heard bells ringing in the religions of time/but the wailing I heard inside me has always been from my Yehudean desert” (*Poems of Jerusalem*, 39). At the same time, the poet resists the temptation of translating Jerusalem as some hidden domain of mythic interiority beyond his reader’s grasp.

Rather than serve as an indulgent conduit to private myth, Amichai’s Jerusalem remains all too concrete and material even when it stabs us with a sense of a natural universe or divine order in terrible disarray. As a frequent walker in the streets and markets of Jerusalem, Amichai continually situates that personal physical (as well as metaphoric) navigation of a city claimed also by Christians and Muslims.

Correspondingly, throughout the “Jerusalem 1967” sequence, urban space is most of all the source of surprising revelations and transformations of quotidian experience, as this contemplative commemoration of an early foray into the Old City quarter inhabited by the ethnic Other intimates:

On Yom Kippur in 1967, the Year of Forgetting, I put on
my dark holiday clothes and walked to the Old City of
Jerusalem.
For a long time I stood in front of an Arab’s hole in the wall
shop,
not far from the Damascus Gate, a shop with
buttons and zippers and spools of thread
in every color and snaps and buckles.
A rare light and many colors, like an open Ark.

I told him in my heart that my father too
had a shop like this, with thread and buttons.
I explained to him in my heart about all the decades
and the causes and the events, why I am now here
and my father’s shop was burned there and he is buried here.

This provocative juxtaposition of the everyday and the sublime, suggesting that the truly sacred resides in human encounters and genuine dialogue rather than the stony edifices of the conventionally pious, proves ultimately heartbreaking because it is imagined only (“I explained to him in my heart”). Another crucial dimension of this resolutely unsentimental poem resides in its imperative to remember both the father’s religion and wounded history.¹⁰ These necessarily compel the “I” to see the present differently than his compatriots.¹¹

Amichai recognizes that the thick skin of exile was not so easily shed. In “The Deaths of My Father,” included in his sole short story collection *In this Terrible Wind* (*Baruakh Hanora Hazot*, 1961), the poet identifies the father’s final metaphoric death in his departure from Germany (the country he had fought

for in World War I) to Palestine in 1935. Consequently, what seems most striking in the 1963 novel *Lo Me-Achshav lo Mi-Kan (Not of this Time, Not of This Place)* is a similarly pervasive awareness of both settings, Jerusalem and South Germany, coexisting in the same speaker so that the prose work mirrors the themes of displacement and self-division that resonate through much of the poetry. As the first major novel by an Israeli writer to address the Holocaust, Hebrew critics are intensely alert to the role of different cultural spaces in shaping its imaginative force. In this work the protagonist Joel undergoes a peripatetic journey, physically and emotional planes, between the diasporic past and his Jerusalem present. As Bargad suggests, Amichai's reader, like the protagonist Joel, "waivers continually between Jerusalem and Germany; he is certain only of the imposed simultaneity of symbolic action of...spiritual schizophrenia" (55). Similarly, Robert Alter saw the novel as a "brave illustration of the difficulties Israeli writers have in trying to imagine this ultimate catastrophe and how one can live with the knowledge of it."¹² Repeatedly, Amichai embraces his role in the post-Holocaust textual reality, cleaving not to the illusory presumption of "rebirth" but rather to Yerushalmi's sense of the Jewish historic imagination: "The verb Zakhor [remember] appears in its various declensions in the Bible no less than one hundred and sixty nine times."¹³ This ethos confronts the reader whenever Amichai inscribes his poetic sense of the past as a humanizing paradigm essential to an ethical Jewish polity, in the wake of persecution. He chides us gently: "We keep forgetting where we came from. Our Jewish names,/ From the Diaspora unmask us, evoke memories..." (quoted in Guy, 26).

Amichai's spare assertion on one occasion that "History's a built-in memory that is part of reality" (Montenegro, 224) goes quite far in delineating the experience of these stanzas from "Jerusalem 1967." Imagining the Palestinian Arab's story as a refraction of the Jewish past of expulsion, exile, and return is a fundamentally important juncture in the poet's oeuvre as well as Israel's cultural history.

Though the logic of comparing the vulnerability of his father's past in the European Diaspora with the Arab shopkeeper's present condition (now suddenly transformed into a minority in his homeland) constitutes one of the more revelatory moments in Amichai's penchant for unlikely comparisons, the Jerusalem of Arab and Jew is too intransigent a space for redemption. A place too filled with latent and actual violence, for any utopian reconciliation or cessation of tensions over the speaker's rationales for being in that place. Bleaker still is the unhelpful question of whether the humanity of the Other can be consistently perceived. "There" and "Here" are existential distances that simply cannot be traversed by the two foes:

When I finished, it was time for the Closing of the Gates
prayer.
He too lowered the shutters and locked the gate
and I returned, with all the worshippers, home.
(*Poems of Jerusalem*, 45)

There are some Amichai poems that so indulge in the violation of frontiers, they make the reader feel as if s/he has taken hold of a live wire. The charged comparison made in this lyric of colliding histories—an open Holy Ark with the Arab seller's open kiosk—is the kind of stunning contrast that makes it futile to try to untangle the sacred from the profane and perhaps make it a perpetual joy to read anew. This is a crucial moment when

non-Hebrew readers will surely miss the intentions of Amichai's original, for as Abramson parses these stanzas, the effects of the Hebrew terminology greatly underscore the sense of the holy rupturing through the fleeting encounter: "*yakar* (a precious light), *utzeva'im rabim* (many colors), *'amadeti...lifnei* (I stood...before), *amarti belibi* (I said in my heart)" (130). Regardless of whether one reads the English or Hebrew versions, it may take a few moments to absorb the full audacious beauty of the speaker's sense of fellowship with the Arab as a genuinely sanctified moment in time. And then, just as it does so, we are immediately forsaken by the realization that this moment of hope and expectation remains unfulfilled, a bitter acknowledgment of the utter deferral of messianic time. Amichai never hesitates to remind us that the most idealistic hopes always collapse in the holy city.

Though invoked throughout Amichai's poetic development, the intimate relationship between the poet and Jerusalem is especially striking in a series published in 1974, where a link between the city's ruins (whether literal or metaphoric) and the poet's intimate sense of his own fragmentary life and self-division are made more explicit than ever before, perhaps due to the traumatic aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. As Abramson argues in her seminal account of the artist's concerns in this period, Amichai's "forced reencounter with Jerusalem distances him even further from his newly restored roots, as if the city and its reestablished presence in his life...intruded between him and the newly and tenuously recaptured setting of his childhood" (127). Considering the Jerusalem poems' obdurate refusal to console, it is imperative to keep in mind Abramson's assertion that "Jerusalem's significance as a historical city is equal to its significance as an extension or analogy of the poet himself" (131). Both the city and the

poet raised in (and perpetually estranged from and attracted to) a household of faith, are dialectically situated at some liminal space between spirituality and corporeality, tradition and modernity, life and death. Throughout *Poems of Jerusalem*, a sense of mutuality and intertwined destinies is never quite extinguished. Consider these lines from “Jerusalem” (the bare invocation so often repeated as the title of various works in this decade):

On a roof in the Old City
laundry hanging in the late afternoon sunlight:
the white sheet of a woman who is my enemy,
the towel of a man who is my enemy,
to wipe the sweat of his brow.

(Poems of Jerusalem, 5)

Reading these lines reinforces the sense that Amichai penetrates the contemporary meaning of the sacred text’s chilling rendering of the “land that eats up its inhabitants” (Numbers 13:32). And Jerusalem remains the poet’s template of both enmity and prophetic revelations about the human condition; in his relentless staging of each Amichai performs an eloquent deconstruction of the contemporary abasement of Jerusalem by those who strive for her control: “We have put up many flags/they have put up many flags/To make us think that they’re happy/To make them think that we’re happy” (5). Congruent with the mode in which Amichai represents the looming existential threat of renewed war and violence between Arab and Jew—the Jerusalem poems startle in their portrayals of the yearnings of the faithful as haplessly, and tragically, childlike, both in their vulnerability and their fatal obtuseness. Yet it is precisely in this regard it is especially important to heed the fact that Amichai manages this irreverence without ever expressing a hint of contempt for faith itself. “Jerusalem, 1985” provides a contemplative space expansive enough for atheist and devout readers

alike to ponder the painful lessons of a credulous humanity perpetually reaching out—
and the divine forever in retreat:

Scribbled wishes stuck between the stones
of the Wailing Wall:
bits of crumpled, wadded paper.

And across the way, stuck in an old iron gate
half-hidden by jasmine:
“Couldn’t make it,
I hope you’ll understand.”
(*Selected Poetry*, 169)

What immediately impresses about this nearly aphoristic allegory of the *deus absconditus*, or Hidden God, is the poem’s refusal to settle for the cheap trick of merely mocking the pious impulse. At the same time, the reader’s anticipated orientation is gently “corrected,” from the epic or eternal enigma of the stony ruin toward a human emphasis on a city of the intimate and present. Rather than mistake the stones for “holy,” the first section takes us into the charged spaces *around* them, in which the homely scraps of hopeful prayers reside. Indeed, though the question of whether the Wall itself constitutes the “holy” remains respectfully open-ended, the poem addresses the spaces *between* the stones as sanctified space precisely because they so nakedly reveal the proximity of human beings in duress. Even the mischievous delivery of the cosmic (or Catskills) punch-line, with its modern echo of God’s famously obfuscating reply to Job, preserves the poet’s powerful amendment to the meaning of sanctified space. This sense of a prophetic demand to reorient one’s perception achieves particularly memorable effects in the prose poem “Tourists” where moral urgency and a contemplative tone again work together:

Once I was sitting on the steps near the gate at David's Citadel
and I put down my two heavy baskets beside me. A group of

tourists stood there around their guide, and I became their point of reference. "You see the man over there with the baskets? A little to the right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period. A little to the right of his head." "But he's moving, he's moving!" I said to myself: Redemption will come only when they are told, "Do you see that arch over there from the Roman period? It doesn't matter, but near it, a little to the left and then down a bit, there's a man who has just bought fruit and vegetables for his family." (Selected Poetry, 137-38)

Of course the tourists here are only surrogates for the problem of humanity's condition as a whole, for it would seem that the question of where one's gaze ultimately settles (or how one's values are expressed) appears to be the pivotal issue on which the tantalizing prospect of messianic progress will always depend. Deflecting the reader's interest from the historical highlights conjured up by the guide, the ironically dubbed "point of reference" provocatively asserts himself as a compelling totem of resiliency and adaptation, embodying the peculiar triumphs of smallness and naked vulnerability.

As the pinnacle achievement of Amichai's last productive decade (a period once misconstrued as dormant which encompassed the poet's sixties and seventies), the appearance of *Open Closed Open* (Patuah Sagur Patuah [1998]) ultimately enjoyed as much fervent critical acclaim as it had mildly skeptical anticipation. Though it may be true that Amichai never recovered the staggering heights of popularity he enjoyed as the consummate interpreter of the experience of war and the life of the citizen-soldier in the Israeli society of the nineteen-fifties and sixties, critics in Israel and abroad alike almost universally hailed it as a magnum opus representing the poet at the height of his powers. And it does seem that here Amichai's long-familiar capacity for juxtaposing the sacred and the profane, the political and the intimate details of lived experience, achieves its most deeply satisfying effects. Having begun to turn to increasingly private and inward

forms of experience in the seventies and early eighties, and then falling famously “silent” for some years, the speakers of Jerusalem that now emerge in these pages wield a deeper tone of sadness and reflection.

At once familiar to readers accustomed to the poet’s incessant questioning of sacred truths, through juxtaposing biblical Hebrew and the living language of Israeli streets (what Chyet identified as his “potent images of inconsistent realities” [*Israeli Poetry*,81]), this collection achieves a greater complexity than any of his previous work. We have the rich evidence of the poems’ audaciously barbed arguments and counter-arguments, their demanding paradoxes and contradictions. There is surprisingly less lament than in previous collections—and in its place a confident exuberance that seems utterly genuine. Jerusalem becomes more and more present as source and destination, metaphorically at times but ultimately quite literally. Even the relatively somber sequence titled “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Why Jerusalem,” shows the poet affirming the sanctity and resilience of the city’s diverse inhabitants, finding a paradoxical response to the forces of death and destruction that Jerusalem’s precious multifariousness *also* engenders:

In Jerusalem, everything is a symbol. Even two lovers there
become a symbol like the lion, the golden dome, the gates of the city.
Sometimes they make love on too soft a symbolism
and sometimes the symbols are hard as a rock, sharp as nails.
That’s why they make love on a mattress of six hundred thirteen springs,
like the number of precepts, the commandments of Shalt and Shalt Not,
oh yes, do that, darling, no, not that—all for love
and its pleasures. They speak with bells in their voices
and with the wailing call of the muezzin, and at their bedside, empty shoes
as at the entrance of a mosque. And on the doorpost of their house
it says,
“Ye shall love each other with all your hearts and with all your souls.”
(*Open Closed Open* 137)

As earlier we encounter the jolt of the pervasively erotic attraction to the unassimilable Other who shares the stage of violent conflict. Perhaps more importantly, these lines succeed as well as they do because the profanation of the sacred depends on a complex poetic attitude in which the sacred is genuinely cherished as a source of human compassion, even as devoutness and skepticism still intermingle persuasively. Amichai's late Jerusalem lyrics do not withhold the poet's inevitable disappointment in their focus on the *Yerushalim shel matah* (earthly Jerusalem):

This is not the heavenly Jerusalem, but the one down below,
way down below. And from the sea floor, they dredge up ruined walls
and fragments of faiths, like rust-colored vessels from sunken
prophecy ships. That's not rust, it's blood that has never dried.
(Open Closed Open 136)

My encounter with these lines was recently deepened by reading Nili Gold's exquisite biography, *Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel's National Poet* (Brandeis UP, 2008), where she posits that Amichai's great achievement resides in his resistance to "the high diction, tone, and nationalist bent of his predecessor's poetry," forging in its place a "prosaic verse that refuses to worship heroism" wherein "literary, biblical, and liturgical Hebrew became...vibrant as he playfully interwove modern concepts with fragments of prayers and ancient prophecies" (Gold 9). Poetic and prophetic language both depend on a rigorously matter-of-fact approach to the urgent task of communicating the most painful and necessary apprehensions of reality and in Amichai's lifetime the pressures between Zionism's loftiest hopes and the violent present certainly accelerated.

To journey through Yehuda Amichai's Jerusalem poems is to experience the universal loneliness of personal experience when the individual stands naked, extricated from the obfuscations of myth and the wrenching, violent momentum of history. Perhaps

it may be said that for Amichai, the Jews' "natural" return to Jerusalem engenders a relative homeland at best, a site of unbearably insatiable longing that only intensifies the artist's wrestling with the acute existential questions more suited to exile than national certainty that always mark Israeli identity, politics, and religion.

NOTES

¹ Amichai left behind an impressive oeuvre, including twenty-five books of poetry, two novels, two short story collections, and even several children's books. Poems from the following collections are cited throughout this essay: *Open Closed Open: Poems*. Trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, (New York: Harcourt, 2000); *Poems*. Trans. Assia Gutman, (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); *Poems of Jerusalem and Love Poems: A Bilingual Edition* (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: The Sheep Meadow Press, 1993); *The Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai*. Trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986). This essay is based on an earlier essay that appeared as "Yehuda Amichai's Exilic Jerusalem," *Prooftexts* 26:1-2. Winter 2006: 212-239.

² Aptly these were later combined in a bilingual volume by The Sheep Meadow Press in 1993.

³ Until his final days she would figure in many of his most elegiac and richly disturbing love poems: "She's a stand-in for Otherness/Otherness is death, death is Otherness/ Will you come back to me like the dead sometimes/ Come back to the living, as if they were born again?" (*Open Closed Open*, 131).

⁴ See David Montenegro, "Yehuda Amichai" in *Points of Departure: International Writers on Writing and Politics, Interviews by David Montenegro* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 216-32. Quotation appears on pg. 219; italics in original.

⁵ Michael Hamburger, "Introduction," in Yehuda Amichai, *Poems*, pgs. vii-xi. Quotation appears on pgs. x-xi.

⁶ Yitzhak Laor, "What the Womb Promises," *Haaretz* (August 6, 2004), 5.

⁷ Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, "Amichai's Counter-Theology: Opening *Open Closed Open*," *Judaism* 49.2 (Spring 2000), 153-68. Quotation appears on pg. 157.

⁸ Mordechai Omer traces those developments which gave an enormous boost to the "slumbering cultural life of the city's artists" (200) in his essay "The Theme of Jerusalem in the Works of the Israeli Fathers of Conceptual Arts." See *In Search of Identity: Jewish Aspects in Israeli Culture*, eds. Dan Urian and Efraim Karsh (London: Frank Cass, 1999), 200-218.

⁹ Glenda Abramson, *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 126-27.

¹⁰ Asked whether his father still "whispered in your ear" in the poetic process, Amichai reportedly laughed "sometimes really he's *twisting* my ear" (Montenegro, 229; italics in original).

¹¹ These lines evoking his father's memory, their layering of Zionist and exilic history, may be usefully compared to a lyric published in the 1974 collection titled *Me-ahorei kol zeh mistater osher gadol*:

Jerusalem is a place where everyone remembers
That they have forgotten something there
But they don't remember what it is.

In order to remember
I wear my father's face
On mine...(Abramson's translation, 139)

¹² Robert Alter, "Confronting the Holocaust: Three Israeli Novels," *Commentary* (March 1966), 67-73. Quotation appears on pg. 68.

¹³ Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 5.