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German–Hebrew Encounters in the Poetry and Correspondence of Yehuda Amichai and Paul Celan

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ABSTRACT

*In 1969, Paul Celan visited Jerusalem, where he was hosted by Yehuda Amichai. After Celan returned to his home in Paris, they exchanged two letters. But this does not exhaust the correspondence between them. As this paper shows, Amichai's conversation with Celan—in a broad sense of the term—began long before they met and continued through his last book, *Open, Closed, Open*. Interrogating the concept of a poetic encounter or a correspondence in poetry, I argue that the basis for the dialogue between Celan and Amichai was their shared German–Hebrew bilingualism. The paper deals with previously unpublished bilingual poems from the Yehuda Amichai Archive at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University and shows how these materials correspond both with Celan's poetry and with Amichai's published work.*

In the landscape of postwar Jewish poetry, Paul Celan and Yehuda Amichai stand as two towering figures. For readers across the world, in the multiple languages to which their works have been translated, these two very different authors have come to represent Jewish poetry of late modernism at its universal best: relevant across borders, resonant even in translation, and presenting challenges to its readers to enter into ongoing and consequential processes of interpretation and understanding. To be sure, Celan and Amichai write not only in different languages, German and Hebrew, but also in fundamentally divergent poetic idioms, a fact that emerges starkly when one attempts to capture their styles in the most general (and hence inevitably reductive) of terms. Celan's sparse,

often hermetic, verse is rooted in his early engagement with French and German Surrealism and draws on his intense interest in twentieth-century philosophy. Amichai, by contrast, was significantly influenced by Anglo-American Imagism and wrote in a simple, discursive tone that eschews philosophical language in favor of a rhetorical evocation of the quotidian and the simple. Their biographies, as well, could be read as two divergent paths in the Jewish twentieth century: whereas Amichai left southern Germany with his family before the war and became a quintessentially Israeli author, Celan chose to stay in Europe and write in German after his parents were murdered and he himself survived in a Nazi labor camp in his native Bukovina.

Nevertheless, Amichai and Celan encountered each other in more than one sense of the word. The first is concrete: they met in Jerusalem in 1969, a meeting I shall describe. But the convergence goes beyond this concrete meeting and is rooted in the languages they share: German and Hebrew. For even though Amichai's Hebrew and Celan's German are the firmest markers of their different fates and different choices, each of them was drawn to the other language—German in Amichai's case, Hebrew in Celan's—a language associated with their early education and family background. Whereas Celan's Hebrew surfaces in his published poetry, Amichai's German does not. Nevertheless, since the Amichai archive was opened at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University and a handful of bilingual work-journals have come to light, we are in a position to reassess his engagement with the German language.¹ Though neither of the two poets lived an active bilingual life in these languages, I propose that reading them both through the lens of the German-Hebrew encounter entails not only a reframing of their works but also a new perspective on some key questions in the theory and historiography of modern Hebrew and Jewish literature. In particular, this reading may expand our understanding of the central and enduring role of bi- and multilingualism within this field.²

As authors who mix Hebrew with German, Celan and Amichai can be located more specifically in a yet-to-be written history of literary intersections of the two languages, a history that goes back at least as far back as Moses Mendelssohn's bilingual authorship and translation work. In the first half of the twentieth century, it includes the German literary experiments of M. Y. Berdyczewski, the Hebrew

lessons of Franz Kafka, and the unpublished German poetry of Avraham Ben Yitzhak.³ The Holocaust undoubtedly forms a violent break in that history, making any literary encounter between the two languages fraught with difficulty. Yet Amichai's bilingual work journals—though written during a brief period of his long and extraordinarily rich career in Hebrew—may prompt the reconsideration of a generation of German-speaking Israeli authors such as Dan Pagis, Ruth Almog, and Aharon Appelfeld. Within this schema, Celan can be mapped alongside an entire group of postwar German Jewish authors who engaged with the Hebrew language to different degrees, mostly because they lived in, or had passed through, Israel. These include Werner Kraft, Arnold Zweig, and Max Brod, to name only a few. The case of figures such as Ludwig Strauss and Tuvia Rübner, whose authorship moves back and forth between the two languages, further complicates our view of this terrain. Moreover, Germany and the German language continue to be significant points of orientation for contemporary Hebrew literature, for example in the works of A. B. Yehoshua, Yoel Hoffmann, and Haim Beer. And contemporary German and German Jewish authors such as Katharina Hacker and Katja Behrens significantly engage with Israel and the Hebrew language.⁴ What is bound to emerge from an investigation of this understudied field is by no means a symmetrical picture: Germans, Jews, and Israelis turn to translation, borrowing, adaptation, and exchange between the two languages and literatures for widely different reasons at different times. This picture is further complicated when we take into account the fact that none of the different categories that form it—Germans, Jews, Hebrew or German speakers, Israelis—is inherently stable, and they overlap in multiple senses. But a comprehensive mapping of this uneven topography has yet to be undertaken, and there is much to learn from it. This is the context within which the encounter between Amichai and Celan should be considered; indeed, their case indicates broader theoretical questions that might emerge from a mapping of the German-Hebrew contact zone.

As important as this context is, the convergence between Amichai and Celan goes beyond the biographical and the sociocultural and touches on the very concept of the poetic encounter, or of poetry as an encounter. As I explore in this article, both Celan and Amichai write poetry that engages and raises ethical question; in both cases, this preoccupation draws on the postulation that the poem reaches out

to or is the scene of an encounter with an other. In my reading, this shared sensibility is rooted in their shared bilingualism, growing out of the German-Hebrew encounter that was dramatized in their writing, whether published or unpublished.

To make the case for the connection between bilingualism and the ethics of encounter, in the first part of this article I focus on Amichai's unpublished bilingual experiments. In the second part, I turn to his dialogue with Celan, depicting it as a bilingual conversation that further exposes the ethical dimensions of the German-Hebrew encounter.

I. TRANSLATION AND METAPHOR: AN ETHICAL RELATION

כראש נפרטיטי	<i>Like Nefertiti's head</i>
Dein Kopf	Your head
länglich hingezogen	drawn lengthwise
wie במוצאי שבת	like <i>Sabbath in its end</i>
in der Traurigkeit ⁵	in the sadness

This brief text is from the Amichai archive at Yale University. Not quite a poem, nor a draft (the poet never completed it nor chose to publish it), it is nevertheless intriguing. This and other bilingual experiments are concentrated in a handful of small notepads that were most probably used by Amichai during and shortly after a trip to Germany in 1959, his first visit to his native Bavaria since his family fled the Nazis in 1936. The text makes two comparisons: first, between the head of its addressee and the famous Nefertiti bust (today one of the highlights of the collection of Berlin's Egyptian Museum)⁶ and second, between both of their heads—drawn lengthwise—and the melancholy stretching out of a Sabbath coming to its conclusion.

One might continue by noting, in relation to the first comparison, that in one respect Nefertiti offers Amichai a mirror image of himself. Whereas he left Germany with his family as a young adolescent, then still named Ludwig Pfeuffer, and escaped Nazi Germany to seek safety in the Middle East, her famous image was removed from its Middle Eastern place of origin and brought to Germany. The second comparison, likewise, seems to draw on Amichai's early

experience, using the vocabulary of the Orthodox Jewry to which his family belonged. Amichai reverses the order of the familiar *motsaei Shabbat* (literally, the exit of Sabbath), which marks the conclusion of the Sabbath as a completed process, to create the more tentative *Shabbat bemotsaav* (Sabbath in its exit). The draft attributes sadness to this time of Havdalah, the transition from sacred time to the mundane week, marked with a ceremony that employs all five senses; but it perhaps also employs that sensuousness to hint at the erotic dimension of the encounter at its center, the encounter between the speaker and his addressee.⁷ This addressee is positioned between the two royal figures: the Egyptian queen, on the one hand, and the queen Sabbath, on the other.⁸ The balance seems to evoke a third journey, in addition to the trips made by Nefertiti and the young Ludwig Pfeuffer: the biblical Exodus from Egypt to Canaan, in the course of which the Israelites are presented with the law—and specifically with the regulation of the Sabbath—at Mount Sinai. In other words: a trip from the realm of Queen Nefertiti to the realm of Queen Sabbath. With that regulation, the sanctity of the day of rest that has its origin in the story of creation becomes a matter of practice for the people of Israel. This gives the melancholy of Sabbath's end a broader national and theological context. Cynthia Ozick's interpretation of the intertwining of Exodus and the giving of the law expands the context further by describing the desert also as a birthplace of metaphor (the act of comparison that constitutes this brief fragment) and of the reciprocal ethics of metaphor: "By turning the concrete memory of slavery into a universalizing metaphor of reciprocity, the ex-slaves discover a way to convert imagination into a serious moral instrument."⁹ Furthermore, the same space—the desert between Egypt and Mandatory Palestine, later Israel—was where Amichai served as a soldier of the British Brigade during World War II, and its northernmost reaches in the Negev desert were an important theater in the war of 1948, in which he fought as a member of the paramilitary Palmach. War was an important theme in Amichai's early poetry and fiction, and, in its coincidence with the foundation of the state of Israel, it was a significant point of reference in his self-fashioning as an *Israeli* poet.¹⁰ At the same time, the battlefield was fertile ground for the development of Amichai's metaphoric imagination and his application of metaphor as a serious moral instrument, to use Ozick's term, as I will briefly discuss below.

To sum up, at this stage, the double comparison of the fragment opens expanses of both space and time. It projects a triangular geography that connects Egypt, Berlin, and Israel/Palestine, and evokes, on the one hand, the loaded history, both ancient and recent, of that triangle (from Exodus and the birth of law and metaphor in the desert to the rise of Nazism and the necessity of exile from Germany, and finally the experiences as a soldier in the desert) and, on the other hand, the stretched-out Sabbath ending. This is at the same time a small, local unit of time—one evening—as well as a cosmic or theological—and cyclically recurring—point of transition, between the sacred and the mundane.

But I imagine my reader may be starting to get impatient. Having read all of this into this sketch of a poem, I still have not said anything about its most striking feature: it is a bilingual text that switches back and forth between Hebrew and German. This practice, of which I shall provide several more examples below, of course finds its firm place on the map that I have read in the poem. It reflects Amichai's journey away from Germany at a young age and was prompted by his return as a visitor to that country—and its language—decades later, after he had become a Hebrew poet.¹¹ It is impossible to posit with certainty why Amichai mixed the two languages or whether and how this influenced his published work, but the work journals nevertheless offer a fruitful ground for considering the stakes and implications of German-Hebrew bilingualism for this important Israeli writer.

Returning to the two comparisons expressed in the fragment, we might begin approaching its movement between the languages by noting that the instrument of comparison—the word *like*—appears in it in both Hebrew and German. This seems to create a balance between the two languages, as each is given its own turn to create a simile. Nevertheless, the act of comparison in both cases turns out to require the Hebrew language in order to refer to the vehicle. This becomes clearer when Amichai switches to Hebrew in the second simile; indeed, this type of crossing over is something that recurs often—though of course not in all cases in which he uses the German *wie*—in the archive. For example:

der Traum oder Du	the dream or you
wie ein סביבון	like a <i>spinning top</i>
liegt dann platt da	lies there flat then

(42, 1473, undated)

mein Körper kalt	my body cold
wie קפה בספל	like <i>coffee in the mug</i>

(42, 1453, April 1959)

Gott bleibt	God remains
wie	like
שאריות בנין	<i>building leftovers</i>

(42,1470, undated)

In all of these cases, the execution of a simile requires that languages be switched, if only for a single word (the lone Hebrew *sevivon*, a dreidel or spinning-top, in the first fragment). But how should this switching be read? What does it mean for one expression to cross at the same time both the threshold of metaphor and the threshold of translation, materializing the shared etymology of the two terms?¹²

Amichai's experiments can be read as a form of macaronics, part of an ongoing—and surprisingly stable—tradition of mixing languages in literary texts.¹³ As the field of literary studies becomes increasingly oriented toward multilingualism,¹⁴ scholars are becoming skeptical about “the unwritten rule of monolingualism in the literary realm”¹⁵ and “the myth of monolingualism, according to which there is a one-to-one match between one territory, one nation, one language and one literature,”¹⁶ focusing instead on the realities of languages in contact as they make their multiple ways into literary texts and their reception. Twentieth-century poets such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Irena Klepfisz, to name just two, have published bilingual poetry (English-Spanish and English-Yiddish, respectively) that reflect their experiences of hybridization, alienation, creativity, and revolt.¹⁷ Similarly, Amichai's bilingualism is rooted in a complex social reality: the multiethnic, multi-religious, multinational, and, of course, multilinguistic reality of Israeli society. More specifically, it speaks for the ambivalent existence of German Jews within the attempted melting pot of the early years of the state.¹⁸

Indeed, the journals in the archive offer a glimpse not only into the private world of the young Amichai but also into a social world inhabited by other German

speakers. Observing these German Jews, *Yekkim* as Hebrew speakers refer to them colloquially, Amichai switches language in order to quote their speech:

בבנק באוטובוס	<i>In the bank in the bus</i>
רק זקנים נכנסים	<i>only old people enter</i>
אחד השתעל	<i>one of them coughed</i>
...	...
wie geht's Kurt?	how's it going Kurt?
...	...
זקן יקה בחשוף רגלים עובר	<i>an old Yekke in exposed legs passes</i>
נושא ירקות	<i>carrying vegetables</i>
שלקח מאשפה	<i>that he's taken from the trash</i>
(42, 1458, June 1959)	

But in most instances, Amichai's German is not the language of others, not the distant idiom of aging, indigent men who are unknowingly overheard by the young man who understands their "wie geht's." In these other poems, Amichai uses the mixture between languages to address an intimate person (the *Du* whose head resembles Nefertiti's) and to delineate in advance the circle of possible readers of the poem—if we allow ourselves to call the unpublished draft that—to those who share the bilingualism.

The role of bilingualism in the constitution and exploration of intimacy becomes even clearer in another love poem from the archive, written exclusively in German:

Du bist bei mir	You are with me
wie eine übersetzte	Like a translated
Sprache	language
mein und doch fremd	mine and yet foreign ¹⁹
(42, 1466, undated)	

On the face of it, Amichai is here addressing a language and confronting the fact of its simultaneous intimacy and foreignness. But by writing in German, which of his two languages is the Hebrew author addressing? Perhaps we should rather read this text metaphorically, as a message addressed to a concrete *Du*, an

addressee much like the lover whose head is compared to Nefertiti's. Though the poem describes a process of translation, Amichai does not specify which languages are involved. In fact, he does not refer explicitly to a message translated from a source language to a target language. In any case, at the heart of this image lies the conflation of the address with the operation of comparison. For the speaker of this poem fragment, to turn to his lover is to compare her: you are like a language. But therein also lies the distance that disrupts this intimacy: the language is translated, and the other ultimately remains foreign.²⁰

In another brief bilingual text from the archive, Amichai freezes a picture that recalls, to readers of his published poetry, his penchant for mixing high and low, creating an effect both comic and ponderable:

Der Ameisenhimmel

סוליה מלמטה

The Heaven of the Ant

A shoe-sole from underneath

But the stakes of this aphorism go beyond the poet's ability to infuse the seemingly mundane—even something as diminutive and ostensibly meaningless as an ant—with metaphysical significance. Through it, we can return to the question of the relation between metaphor, translation, and, we can now add, ethics. This is because the fragment takes a metaphor (the shoe compared to heaven) and exposes it as an exercise in both empathy (Ozick's serious moral instrument) and translation. The translation occurs between the language, or the perspective of the ant and the perspective of the human wearing the shoe, and is possible because one of them has imagined himself into the position of the other, has empathized with the other.

Moreover, the encounter between the ant, looking upward, and the shoe, coming down at it, insofar as it is an encounter of two things facing each other, is also a humorous and ironic dramatization of the meeting of the two facing languages—Hebrew oriented from right to left and German from left to right—on the same page. The aphorism thus both utilizes and illuminates the condition out of which it is written: for a bilingual author who moves between German and Hebrew, changing language in mid-expression requires an about-face, a turn in the opposite direction, from the perspective of the ant to that of the shoe.

Bilingualism and the encounter between the two facing languages seem to appear in Amichai's aphorism as a violent encounter of unequals. The German ant,

it suggests, will inevitably be squished by the forceful stride of Hebrew, the language attached to Amichai's self-identification as an *Israeli* poet. One may imagine the shoe as a hiking boot climbing a desert mountain, or indeed as part of the military uniform that Amichai donned in the desert to fight the war that founded the state of Israel. At the same time, as the words appear on the page in Amichai's handwriting (and as I have transcribed them here), it is the ant's heaven—in German—that hovers above the Hebrew-language shoe sole. Indeed, the recent history of persecution of Jews by German-speakers—the proverbial Nazi boot that trampled Europe—informs not only the linguistic exchange dramatized in the aphorism but also its ironic agnosticism. In short, it seems impossible to describe the condition out of which this fragment is written without a constant reversal of perspectives. The vertical movement of the shoe gives way to the horizontal outlook of the translator who is moving between points of view and repeatedly switching orientations. Thus, the aphorism seems to insist that every encounter is irreducible to a single position or point of view. The poet takes it upon himself to record this irreducibility and to preserve an image of the tension that encompasses both of the positions. While the man in the shoe walks confidently and unaware, the ant sees his shoe sole not as impending doom, but rather as *Himmel*, heaven.²¹

For a reader of modern Hebrew poetry, the point of view of the ant is associated with the famous couplet of the early twentieth-century poet Rachel Bluwstein: "I have only known how to tell of myself. / My world is like the ant's"²² Indeed, Amichai was an enthusiastic reader of Bluwstein; describing the effect of her poetry on those who cherish it, he wrote: "It has, in fact, become an integral part of what they feel and know, resounding in the ear and planted in the heart."²³ As Chana Kronfeld notes in her seminal essay on Amichai's concurrently consistent and self-effacing philosophical system (which she describes as a form of rhetorical anarchism), Bluwstein's model of a seemingly self-humbling speaker with her narrowly delineated point of view is echoed in one of Amichai's most important early arspoetical poems, "Lo kabrosh" (Not Like a Cypress). Reading that poem and others, Kronfeld exposes a "general principle of Amichai's rhetorical ontology: the principle of *inter-categorical existence*." The different personas and figures that merge in his poems, she argues, "systematically challenge our tendency to reduce rhetorical and philosophical distinctions to neatly discrete binary oppositions."²⁴ This is the frame-

work within which this aphorism should be understood. In the work journals, Amichai makes multiple similar gestures to relate opposing viewpoints.

Such a gesture occurs in another monolingual draft of a poem, this one written in Hebrew:

ברק הדשב רוקב	Visit to a Battlefield
אחר 10 שנים	10 years later
עכשיו אוכל לבוא	This time I can come
מהצד שממנו בא אויבי	from the side of my enemy
ואראה אם הוא ראה את הנוף	and can see whether he saw the landscape
...	...
יתארקל ׳רשכ	when he ran toward me
כי אותי לא ראה בוודאי	because he certainly did not see me

(42, 1461, undated)

The draft is framed as an attempt to grasp the point of view of the enemy—the radical other. The attempt is powerfully circumscribed by the violence of war and the understanding that on the battlefield his enemy could not even see him, let alone imagine himself into the poet’s point of view. As Dan Miron has shown, the central organizing principle of Amichai’s early poetry is the metaphor of the body as a receptacle that must remain whole to be filled with life, a figure that is extended to his description of others (parents, lovers, fellow soldiers) and the world.²⁵ This poem marks a significant departure from that principle in that it expends its energy not in order to maintain the integrity of personhood but rather to experiment with its fluidity and its interchangeability with the positions of others.

What these different archival materials have in common, then, is that each exposes the efforts of the young Amichai to write poetry that “intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite,” to use the terms of his contemporary, Paul Celan.²⁶ In this effort, both metaphor and translation are mobilized as forces that allow the author to cross thresholds and switch perspectives. I borrow from Celan not coincidentally, of course. Rather, the encounter between Amichai and Celan is crucial for this discussion, because it was a key moment in Amichai’s grappling with his German identity and his engagement with the German language.

II. A BILINGUAL CONVERSATION

Amichai was among the Israeli authors and thinkers who hosted Celan when he visited Israel in October 1969.²⁷ The visit was an encounter that the German Jewish poet had prepared for in his growing engagement, over the course of that decade, with the Hebrew language and the possibility of Jewish nationalism. Moved by the events of June 1967, Celan composed a poem that drew lines from the ancient fortress of Masada to the Nazi concentration camps and finally to Israel's victory. More relevant to my discussion here is the multilingualism of the poems of his *Die Niemandrose* (1963) and the collections that followed in the 1960s. Celan's poems switch between Spanish, French, Yiddish, and Hebrew, creating what Jacques Derrida describes as an incision or a "mark of the difference among the languages within the same poetic event."²⁸ But this general principle is arguably radicalized in Celan's use of Hebrew, a language most of his German readers were unlikely to understand. As Amir Eshel has argued, Hebrew words such as *Ziv*, *kumi uri*, *Havdalah*, or *Yizkor*, used by Celan in his poems of the 1960s, are not quotations or adornments. Rather, they are the most genuine and most radical fulfillment of the project announced in his famous Meridian speech, delivered in acceptance of the Büchner Prize in 1960—and above all apparent in the notes he composed in preparation for the speech—of allowing poetry to be an encounter with the other, an encounter with the Jew, a *Verjudung*.²⁹ Expanding on a famous statement by Adorno, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi describes Celan as the "last Barbarian," and recalls that that term *barbarian* is rooted in a reference to those who spoke another, incomprehensible language.³⁰ She emphasizes the refusal of Celan's poetry to be assimilated by its German readers and interprets his use of Hebrew words as a mark of this refusal:

The Hebrew letters and words from a scriptural or liturgical vocabulary . . . remain as salient, as resonant and as unassimilated in his poetry as his poems are in German culture. The Hebrew words persist unexamined, maintaining the status of a document, a relic, a ritual—or an irretrievable memory.³¹

These dimensions of Celan's language-switching may shed light on Amichai's bilingual experiments, despite the great difference between the two authors.³² But first some additional background is needed on Celan's visit to Israel and on the dialogue between the two authors.

For the Israeli public sphere in the late 1960s to host a German-writing visitor was by no means a simple or straightforward act. The visit came at the end of the decade that was bookended by the Eichmann trial in 1961, on the one hand, and the euphoria following the victory in 1967, on the other. In 1965, diplomatic relations were established between Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany, following more than a decade of intense public debate over remunerations agreements.³³ In this context, it becomes clear why Celan's hosts at moments approached his German as if it were a diplomatic matter in itself. For example, in introducing Celan to an audience in Jerusalem, Amichai tried to put the listeners at ease by saying that his language was "neither the German of the Germans nor the language of Bukowina; it is Celan's own German."³⁴

Celan, by contrast, explained in conversations and statements during his visit and immediately afterward that despite his decision not to immigrate to Israel and become a Hebrew-speaking and Hebrew-writing citizen of the Jewish state, he thought of his poetry as Jewish. In a radio interview conducted by Shmuel Huppert and Amichai while he was in Jerusalem, Celan offered the concept of *pneuma* as a key his Jewish identity:

I believe I can tell you that I am self-evidently Jewish. The questions about Jewishness also always encounter this self-evidence. Self-evidently, Jewishness has a thematic aspect, but I believe that the thematic does not suffice on its own to define Jewishness. The Jewish is so to speak also a pneumatic concern.³⁵

Celan's use of the term *pneuma*, Greek for spirit and the term most frequently used in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *ruah*, is rooted in his engagement with Jewish thought through the writings of Franz Rosenzweig and Gershom Scholem.³⁶ In its ethereality, it suggests something more fundamental than substance, something that permeates the poetry even in places where it is not

visible as theme. As if to balance this image of a poetry infused with Jewish spirit, Celan emphasizes in the interview and other conversations that writing deals not with things ephemeral but rather in the concrete. As Huppert recalls, Celan told him and Amichai that “poetry immortalizes the leap between what does not yet exist and what no longer exists.”³⁷ And in a brief report of his conversation with Celan, published shortly after the visit in the Israeli daily *Haaretz*, Yehoshua Tira quotes Celan as saying that “poetry adheres to all the occurrences of the world and everything that happens leaves its conscious or unconscious stamp on the production of poetry.”³⁸ These comments would echo in the texts that Amichai wrote to Celan and about him over the following decades.

The encounter between Celan and Amichai in Jerusalem was followed by a brief exchange of two letters, which were recently uncovered, translated, and published by John Felstiner.³⁹ This German-language correspondence is dense and fascinating, especially when read in the broader context of the writing and thinking of Celan and Amichai. I propose to read it as a multilayered, richly encoded negotiation about the stakes of bilingualism and specifically the seemingly impossible bilingualism that they share as German and Hebrew speakers. Celan’s letter opens with a few words of politeness. He apologizes for his delay in sending the letter to Amichai and expresses his joy that he himself had made the way to Jerusalem and to Amichai’s home a few months earlier: “For me it’s a most heartfelt need to tell you how happy I was to meet you, you and your poems, how glad I was to be with you.” But for Celan, who had written that the poem “goes toward” and “heads toward” the other, the issue that truly had to be addressed was his journey as a reader toward Amichai’s poetry.⁴⁰ And through that journey he also raises the key issue of the letter: the uneasy relationship of the two languages that he and Amichai shared, German and Hebrew. “I’m truly ashamed,” he begins by disavowing his own Hebrew, “that I can orient myself in your Hebrew poems only with the aid of English translations. But I’ve a strong impression it’s just this, orienting myself, that affords me what’s most poetic; what really belongs to you in your poems comes through with the most convincing, most conspicuous force” (translation modified). Celan’s choice of words to describe his way into Amichai’s poetry—*mich zu orientieren*—reiterates and underscores the condition reflected in Amichai’s ant aphorism: the “about-face” and reorientation required by a writer or a reader who navigates

between Hebrew and German.⁴¹ Perhaps Celan is here indicating that estrangement and the delay caused by his linguistic limitation allows him to read the Hebrew volume that Amichai had given him—his *Akhshev ba-ra'ash*, which he inscribed with the Hebrew words: “For Paul Celan, in recollection of the days in Jerusalem⁴²—more slowly and more appreciatively, and that it is in this delay that what truly belongs to the author in his poems comes through with such force. Or perhaps the long German sentence hides within it a statement about Celan’s own bilingual turns and reorientations: “it’s just this, orienting myself, that affords me what’s most poetic.” In other words, perhaps this is a more personal reflection on his distance from the Hebrew language and his refusal to leave his German, the condition that requires that he find his way to Amichai’s poems. This, he seems to be suggesting to Amichai, is what affords him his poetic idiom in the German language.

In fact, Celan contrasts himself with Amichai not simply as the author who writes German in contrast with the author who writes Hebrew, but rather as the author who mixes languages, in particular Hebrew and German—and, it follows, as the writer who is always required to find his way to language and reorient himself—in contrast with the author who writes monolingually. In the sentence that follows Celan’s assertion that Amichai’s poems speak their own truth with a convincing and conspicuous force, he describes what he perceives as Amichai’s monolingual mode: “You are the poem you write, the poem you write is: you yourself.” The symmetry of this statement is not a form of stuttering, but rather an attempt to capture the image of a monolingual existence, where the way from the self to the poem is straightforward and can be followed back to the self. The impossibility of this symmetry in Celan’s own case reverberates in the paragraphs that complete the letter, in which he turns to two orders of business: offering himself as a mediator for Amichai’s poetry to make its way to Europe in translation and expressing his feelings about Israel. In both cases, the business at hand cannot be executed without exposing a deep-seated ambivalence. Having proposed to help Amichai publish his poetry in France, Celan proceeds to address his difficulties with the German literary sphere and, by extension, with the German language:

Unfortunately I can’t offer you something similar where the German language is concerned: for a long time now I’ve not contributed to any

German-language magazine. The changes that have happened there— involving not only the publishers' mindset, though above all of course it's that too—they've blocked my access.

The blocked access, or, more accurately, the lack of symmetry between what comes to the lips spontaneously and what is materialized in the public sphere— presumably in the form of poetry—persists when Celan turns from the field of poetry to the field of politics:

Dear Yehuda Amichai, let me here say again what came to my lips spontaneously, in our conversation: I cannot imagine the world without Israel, and I will not imagine it without Israel. That I would wish to see this kept personal, not public, you no doubt understand: that way it acts with all its intensity. With your person and your poems, you too make me think of this over and over.

One way of reading these lines is by tying them to the negotiation between the two poets on the question of bilingualism. In this reading, Celan here makes a plea for his unsymmetrical linguistic existence: an existence in which certain words and certain languages can exist only in private and the road from the self to the poems is not easily traversable.

And indeed, in his response Amichai accepts the role of the monolingual, emphasizing the rooting of his Hebrew in the soil of the Jewish state:

It's truly a heavy yoke you lay on me, to carry all of Israel on my shoulders. Anyone who writes in Hebrew binds his own existence with that of the language and the people. Israel's downfall would mean the downfall of my language. All the more so, with no consolation in the permanence of the written word, of the spirit.

In contrast with the Jewish *pneuma* that Celan had spoken about in Jerusalem, Amichai maintains that written words and spirit (*Geist*) alone do not suffice. He stages his linguistic and ideological allegiances not as weightless breath but rather as a heavy yoke that he is willing to bear.⁴³ Heaviness, rooting, and concreteness

are also the terms with which Amichai chooses to describe his own poetry in contrast with Celan's:

I frankly envy the way your art renders word and image objective (with extremest subjectivity)! My poetry, which holds forth in what's real and is prompted pragmatically by events, stands in envy of yours. My images are only the clatter of chain-links that tie me to life's happenings.

If Amichai's rejection of *Geist* and the written word as replacements for Israeli citizenship reads as a response to Celan's statements about the Jewish *pneuma* of his poetry, the description of his poetry as chained down to life's happenings sounds like a response—perhaps even a challenge—to Celan's insistence on the relation of his poetry to reality, as expressed in the conversation with Tira.

Amichai ends his letter with an invitation to Celan to “come back here from time to time.” But the two did not meet again; instead, Amichai learned of Celan's suicide, committed in April 1970. As he writes in a poem published in the 1971 collection *Velo al menat lizkor* (Not for the Sake of Remembering), the news reached him in London and his immediate response was one of identification: “they said he had killed himself / the same rope tugged lightly also / on my neck.” But the poem is quick to expose the conceit, or the impossibility, of that identification: “It was not a rope: he / died in water.” Yet the text continues to strain for a point of contact, a possibility of identification with the dead poet, by echoing Celan's insistent use of repetition in the following line: “the same water, water, water.” The line sounds more like *Engführung* (*Stretto*), one of the poems that Celan read in Jerusalem (for example, the lines: “Asche. / Asche, Asche. / Nacht. / Nacht-und-Nacht” in the fifth part of the poem), than like Amichai's discursive, communicative poetic voice.⁴⁴ The poem ends with what seems like a final reflection on Celan's poetry and its difficult, almost injuring image-making, hinting that it was this difficulty that precipitated the suicide: “A final image: / life like death.”⁴⁵

Amichai returns to the same sense of incommensurability—between himself and the German Jewish poet, between their writing and their lives and deaths—in a poem published in 1998:

Paul Celan. Toward the end, the words grew
 fewer inside you, each word
 so heavy in your body
 that God set you down like a heavy load
 for a moment, perhaps, to catch
 His breath and wipe His brow.
 Then He left you and picked up a lighter load,
 Another poet. But the last bubbles that rose from your drowning mouth
 Were the final concentration, the frothy concentrate
 Of the heaviness of your life.⁴⁶

In contrast with his letter of 1969, in which Amichai describes his own poem as chained down to reality, the roles here have been switched. Celan is the heavy load that God must put down and allow to sink, while Amichai, the poem implies, is the lighter load picked up in his stead. In a gesture recalling the act of empathy that caused him to feel a tug at his neck in London in 1970, Amichai attempts to imagine the details of Celan's death by describing the last bubbles of breath floating on the surface of the Seine. Thus, in his imagined parting from Celan, the last thing that Amichai allows himself to see is a guise of *pneuma*, the breath that Celan had spoken of in Jerusalem.

This final encounter with Celan appears in Amichai's last collection of poetry—*Patuah sagur patuah* (Open Closed Open)—a book that has been read as a summing up of the poet's prolific career and a meditation on the paradoxes of ending.⁴⁷ As Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld, the masterly English translators of the book, have shown, it alludes to many of Amichai's earlier published poems, rearticulating and reworking some of its central themes. According to Bloch and Kronfeld, "the notion of Otherness is new in Amichai's poetic vocabulary; he explores both its positive and negative valences, drawing on the multiple meanings of *acher*, 'other,' in Jewish tradition." As they describe, otherness stands for a multiplicity of things—both love and death, both God and the Holocaust—in the collection that is centrally preoccupied with reversal, contradiction, and change of perspective.⁴⁸ With the drafts of poems that I presented in the first part of this article in mind, we are now in a position to perceive otherness not as something

entirely new to Amichai's poetic vocabulary, but rather as an early concern to which he returns.

Indeed, among its wide-reaching poetic and philosophic concerns, *Open Closed Open* also includes the closest writing to bilingual poems that Amichai ever published, a series of word games that take apart names and expose the words that hide in them (for example, the hidden theology in the name Theodor, associated in the Israeli context with the Zionist leader Theodor Herzl).⁴⁹ The poem on Celan's suicide is part of a cycle titled "Shemot, shemot, ba-yamim ha-hem bazman ha-ze" ("Names, Names, in Other Days and in Our Time"). It begins with a meditation on the poet's own name (the Hebrew *Yehuda* that replaced the German *Ludwig* when Amichai arrived in Palestine in 1936):

My name is Yehúda. The stress on the *hu*,
 Yehu, yoo-hoo—a mother's voice calling her little boy in from play
 ...
 My name is Yehudá, the stress on the *da*
 Yehudá like "thank you" in Hebrew, *todá*, a Yehudean pride,
 relic of the heroics of Judah the Maccabee.
 Yehudá like a resounding oud—a dull echo
 like a string wrapped around a pack of letters,
 or a sharp echo like an elastic band snapping
 at a woman's waist. *Da da*, no Yehu, no Yahweh

The "*da da*" into which Amichai's reflections relapse is not mere infantile babble but rather a multilingual moment that opens these personal reflections onto the bilingual experiences and experiments of their author. Appearing in a poem written in Israel during the 1990s, following the great immigration from the former Soviet Union, the sound inevitably evokes the Russian affirmative, *Da*. But encapsulated within the name Yehuda and the Hebrew *toda* is also the German *da*, a locution that may recall Freud's famed analysis of his grandson's "Fort-Da" game as a rehearsal of the experience of his mother's absences and returns.⁵⁰ The poem thus momentarily gives voice to Amichai's bilingualism, as it expresses a longing for maternal presence and responds to the "mother's voice calling her little boy in from play" with which the poem begins.

But the chronological order that I have followed in my reading of Amichai's dialogue with Celan perhaps suggests a teleological argument, where the Hebrew author gradually becomes more of a bilingual, more of a barbarian like his German Jewish interlocutor. To counterbalance this teleology, I end with one additional bilingual poem from the early work-journals, a poem that foreshadows some of the key figures I have traced in the conversation between the two poets:

wie der wind durch	Like the wind through
Blätter	leaves
zog Gott durch die	God drew through the
Buchstaben im	letters in
סידור אבי	<i>my father's prayer book</i>
er blies mir die	he blew me the Torah
Tora auf aus der תנך	from the <i>Tanakh</i>
wie Luftballone	like balloons
[42, 1468, undated]	

This image may recall a Chagall painting or a scene from Bruno Schulz. But the poem is also closely tied to Celan's "barbaric" transgressions from the German language and his Judaization of his poetry, to recall the analyses of Eshel and Ezrahi quoted above. Indeed, the wind that blows in the leaves of the father's *sidur* is an incarnation of the Jewish *pneuma* that Celan evoked in Jerusalem.⁵¹

This draft thus expands not only our understanding of the affinity between Amichai and Celan but also of the poetics of his bilingual writing. In my discussion of Amichai's bilingual experiments, I have highlighted the crossover of metaphor and translation as dramatized in Amichai's language switching. This poem, in contrast, hinges on the relation between *Tora*, which appears here in German, and *Tanakh*, a term that prompts a reorientation and a switch to Hebrew. By turning to Hebrew at this point, the draft folds the *Tora* into the acronym *Tanakh*, creating a playful variation on the poetic practices of metonymy and allusion.⁵² But the word *Tora* can refer not only to the Pentateuch that forms part of the larger body of scripture, *Tanakh*, but also more broadly to knowledge and learning. In this sense, the balloons that rise from the Bible at the end of this draft contain a pneumatic essence handed from the father to his son. The draft is

ambiguous as to who is blowing this *pneuma*, since the “er” in the sixth line can refer both to God, who is named in German, and to the father, who is named in Hebrew. In this double bilingual guise, Amichai perhaps gives us a final image for his experimentation with the two languages. The plural balloons blown with the spirit of this two-faced father/God figure hover with a movement that defies both teleology and rootedness.

However, Amichai himself did not reject rootedness; rather, he saw it as the precondition for his writing, as he explained to Celan in 1969. His bilingual writing was a circumscribed exercise, one that did not become part of his published poetry. The true importance of this exercise emerges against the backdrop of centuries of bilingual authorship, going back to the Haskalah, that brings together the two languages, German and Hebrew, and forms a central and fascinating—though largely unexplored—facet of Modern Hebrew literature. As this field opens up to new scholarship, Amichai and Celan’s bilingual writing and their bilingual encounter will remain a vital point of reference.

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NOTES

- I first heard about the German materials in the archive from Chana Kronfeld, who later read through some of the poem fragments with me and helped me understand them. She also shared a file with some transcriptions and translations of Amichai’s German poems by Bill Halo, which was very useful as I made my way into the archive. My understanding of Amichai and Celan was fundamentally formed by my ongoing conversation with Amir Eshel. He, as well as my parents, Galit Hasan-Rokem and Freddie Rokem, read earlier drafts of this paper and offered vital comments. I have presented these materials at Stanford University, Duke University, and the University of Chicago as well as the 2009 MLA annual convention and have received many useful suggestions, especially from Galili Shachar, Nitzan Lebovic, Eric Downing, Mai Mergenthaler, Josef Stern, Zohar Weiman-Kelman, Maya Barzilai, and Adam Stern. Nicolai Riedel of the German Literary Archives at Marbach and Shiri Goren of Yale University generously scanned and mailed me information that I was missing.

- 1 As discussed by Nili Scharf Gold in her recent biographical study, *Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel's National Poet* (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2008).
- 2 This key question spans the bilingual careers of early authors such as S. Y. Abramovitch and Uri Tsvi Greenberg and reaches to contemporary authors who draw on their own or their parents' bilingualism, such as Sayed Kashua or Ronit Matalon (to name just two examples). It has been studied and theorized extensively, and a complete review of the literature is impossible in this context. Important works include Shmuel Niger, *Bilingualism in the History of Jewish Literature*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990); Itamar Even Zohar, *Polysystem Studies*, special issue of *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990); Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Benjamin Harshav, *The Polyphony of Jewish Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007); Dan Miron, "Sh.Y. Abramovitch ben Yiddish le-ivrit: omanut neshima bi-shnei ha-nehirayim?" in *Itot shel shinui, safruiot yehudiot ba-tkufa ha-modernit: kovets maamarim li-khvodo shel Dan Miron*, ed. Gidi Nevo, Michal Arbel, and Michael Gluzman (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2008), 25-72.
- 3 Avner Holtzman discusses Berdyczewski's German literary career in *El ha-kerā she-ba-lev; Mikhab Yoseph Berdyczewski: shnot ha-tsmibah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1995). On Kafka's Hebrew, see Amir Eshel, "Von Kafka zu Celan: Deutsch-Jüdische Schriftsteller und ihr Verhältnis zum Hebräischen und Jiddischen," in *Jüdische Sprachen in deutscher Umwelt: Hebräisch und Jiddisch von der Aufklärung bis ins 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Michael Brenner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 96-127; David Suchoff, "Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2007): 64-132. I learned of Ben Yitzhak's German poetry from Maya Barzilai, "Ein Ganzes? The Unclaimed German Writing of the Modernist Hebrew Poet Avraham Ben Yitzhak," paper presented at the German Studies Association Annual Conference, San Diego, Oct. 2007.
- 4 This was recently discussed, for example, by Michal Ben-Horin, "Death, Gender, and Gesamtkunstwerk in Hebrew Literature," and Sebastian Wogenstein, "Redemption from History? Speaking Hebrew in Contemporary German Literature," both papers presented at the MLA Annual Convention, Philadelphia, Dec. 2009. See also the recently published collection: *Rückblick auf*

Deutschland: Ansichten hebräischsprachiger Autoren, ed. Anat Feinberg (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, Nov. 2009).

- 5 Yehuda Amichai Archive, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, Box 42, Folder 1471, undated. Subsequent references to box and folder numbers, followed by dates (where available) will be given in parentheses in the text. When not stated otherwise, the translations to English throughout the paper are my own. In the Amichai fragments, words translated from Hebrew are italicized. Permission to reproduce materials from the archive has been granted by Hana Amichai.

- 6 The bust was discovered at Tell el Amarna in 1912 and brought to Berlin soon afterward, though it was not displayed publicly before 1920. As Oliver Simons describes it, the widespread fascination with the bust centers on questions of comparison: did its ancient producers conceive the bust as a mimetic representation of the queen's face? And what accounts for her uncannily modern beauty, for the fact that her twentieth-century viewers were tempted to compare her to contemporary beautiful women? As Simons remarks, Nefertiti was the subject of numerous popular literary depictions in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. See Oliver Simons, "Der Raub der Nofretete," in *Macht und Anteil an der Weltbeherrschung: Berlin und der deutsche Kolonialismus*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller (Münster: Unrast, 2005), 191-96. For Camille Paglia, "The proper response to the Nefertiti bust is fear." She sees it as "the least consoling of great art works. Its popularity is based on misunderstanding and suppression of its unique features [the perfect symmetry of her face—N.R.]" Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Random House, 1990), 68. The bust continues to attract attention—and controversy—to this day. In addition to recurring accusations that the bust was fraudulently exported from Egypt and demands that it be returned to its place of origin or at least lent to Egyptian museums for temporary exhibition (demands consistently denied by the German parliament), the most recent controversy concerns accusations that it is a fake, commissioned by Borchart in 1912. See Christoph Seidler, "Streit um die schweigsame Schönheit," *Spiegel Online*, 5.15.2009. Accessed online at <http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/0,1518,624757,00.html> on 5 Nov. 2009.

- 7 Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld discuss Amichai's association of religion and sensuality in "Amichai's Counter-Theology: Opening *Open Closed Open*," *Judaism* 49, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 153-68 (specifically: 158-59).

- 8 My reading of this fragment—especially the locution “Shabbat bemotsaav”—was facilitated and enriched by an exchange with Josef Stern. As he has pointed out to me, Amichai’s *Shabbat bemotsaav* seems to duplicate the structure of *Shabbat hamalkah* (rather than *Malkat shabbat*). Furthermore, he suggests that the Queen Sabbath is more paradigmatically related to the beginning of the holy day than to its ending; hence, the poem stages an ironic realization, at the end of the day, that the queen is Egyptian rather than Hebrew. And like the standstill of the Sabbath, Nefertiti is frozen in the famous Berlin bust.
- 9 Ozick’s interpretation is based on Leviticus 19.34: “The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” See Cynthia Ozick, “Metaphor and Memory,” in *Metaphor and Memory: Essays* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 278–79. A somewhat related argument has recently been made by Ted Cohen in *Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 10 The most prominent telltale sign of Amichai’s identification of the beginning of his career with the foundation of the state is, of course, his choice to title his first anthology *Shirim, 1948–1962*. In a *Paris Review* interview, Amichai famously speaks of his experience in the desert in revelatory terms, describing it as the place where he became a poet. In this interview, a Faber anthology of modern British poetry that falls into the desert sand from a British Army library truck and is dug up by Amichai plays the role of the burning bush that informs the young man of his destiny as a poet. In that same passage, Amichai describes how, during that time, “we began preparing, on a small scale, for a Jewish state—we were actually preparing for a new conflict while the one we were in was fading away.” Yehuda Amichai, “The Art of Poetry XLIV (interview with Lawrence Joseph),” *The Paris Review* 122 (1992): 213–51; quotation from p. 227. In the interview, Amichai also states that he began to write in the early 1950s and describes himself and his contemporaries as experiencing a “free-fall into modernism at exactly the same time as the Jewish state had begun” (232). Later in the interview, in a discussion of his sense of history, Amichai returns to the desert and to the story of Exodus (238). Amichai similarly brings the association between modern-day Egypt, where he had served as a soldier, and the ritual recounting of the story of Exodus on the Passover Seder into play in his story “Yetsiat Mitsraim,” in *Ba-ruah ha-nora’a ha-zot: sipurim* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1985). Several other stories in that collection depict Amichai’s experiences of war in the 1940s and 1950s. This is discussed by Glenda Abramson in *The Writing of*

Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 185–86. In *Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel's National Poet*, Nili Scharf Gold discusses the problem of dating the beginnings of Amichai's career at length and underscores the role of the war of 1948 and of the foundation of the state for the formation of his poetic sensibility. Gold's designation of Amichai as a "national poet" has been sharply criticized by Boaz Arpali in "Patuah, patuah! dea aheret al ha-monografia shel Nili Gold al Yehuda Amichai," *Haaretz*, 16 Jan. 2009. Accessed online at: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasite/pages/ShArt.jhtml?more=1&itemNo=1055858&contrassID=1&subContrassID=18&sbSubContrassID=0> on 24 Aug. 2009. On Amichai and war, see also Glenda Abramson, "Portrait of a Poet in a Landscape," in *The Experienced Soul: Studies in Amichai*, ed. Glenda Abramson (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 57–70; Dan Miron, "Yeled tov u-male ahava," *Haaretz*, 14 Oct. 2006; and Yair Mazor, "Farewell to Arms and Sentimentality: Reflections of Israel's Wars in Yehuda Amichai's Poetry," *World Literature Today* 60, no. 1 (1986): 12–16.

- 11 In her discussion of the German materials in the archive, Gold claims that German was more of a primary language for Amichai and proposes to reveal "the German truth beneath the Hebrew façade, and the European landscape beneath the Israeli topography and history in some of Amichai's most frequently quoted poems." See Gold, *Yehuda Amichai*, 18. This claim has been criticized by Robert Alter, who states that "the idea that a hidden German subtext must be uncovered in the poems in order to fully understand them is preposterous." See Robert Alter, "Only a Man," *The New Republic*, 13 Dec. 2008. Accessed online at <http://www.tnr.com/booksarts/story.html?id=e98e3b7e-e189-404b-92b6-bc431e0b90ef&k=9040> on 20 Aug. 2009.
- 12 As Paul de Man notes in his discussion of figurative language in philosophical writing: "It is no mere play of words that 'translate' is translated in German as 'übersetzen' which itself translates the Greek 'meta phorein' or metaphor." Paul de Man, "The Epistemology of Metaphor," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 11–28. Chana Kronfeld argues that de Man's harsh criticism of the blindness of metaphor is incongruous with Amichai's creative use of metaphor. She demonstrates that for Amichai, metaphoric language is a revelatory and life-sustaining tool, one that "can release the creative and revolutionary powers of language . . . in the struggle against ossified linguistic, national or religious authority" as it "provides a tentative, dynamic way of organizing, albeit temporarily, the fragmented aspects of experience and the bits and pieces of the self; and yet it stresses—and *remem-*

- bers—the differences between the realms it organizes together.” Chana Kronfeld, “Hyphenated States: Metaphor as Poetics of Survival in the Work of Yehuda Amichai,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 50 (2002–2003): 23–44. I quote here from pp. 38 and 42. Amichai’s use of simile and metaphor has taken center stage in the scholarship, in particular in Boaz Arpali, *Ha-prahim ve-ha-agartal: shirat Amichai 1948–1968* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibutz ha-me’uhad, 1986); Nili Scharf Gold, *Lo ka-brosb: gilgulei imaz’im ve-tavniyot be-shirat Yehuda Amichai* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1994); and Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 143–58.
- 13 The classic historical study is Leonard Forster, *The Poet’s Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
 - 14 Or alternatively: polylingualism, heterolingualism, polyglossia, among other terms. The proliferation of terms in this case may very well be of the essence: never one word for one thing.
 - 15 Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman, “Fictional Representations of Multilingualism and Translation,” *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 4 (2005): 11–34.
 - 16 Reine Meylaerts, “Heterolingualism in/and Translation: How Legitimate Are the Other and His/Her Language?” *Target: International Journal on Translation Studies* 18, no. 1 (2006): 1–15.
 - 17 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2007); Irena Klepfisz, *A Few Words in the Mother Tongue: Poems Selected and New (1971–1990)* (Portland, Ore.: Eighth Mountain Press, 1993). The cases of Anzaldúa and Klepfisz are arguably closer to the archival materials discussed here than the important Hebrew examples of Avot Yeshurun and Yoel Hoffmann, since the latter write in Hebrew while incorporating “foreign” words, whereas the former switch languages to such an extent that it becomes difficult to posit which of the languages is primary, as it would be difficult to state whether the Amichai texts discussed here are written in Hebrew or German.
 - 18 Moshe Zimmermann and Yotam Hotam discuss the mixture of frustration and apologetics that characterized German Jews in Mandatory Palestine and the State of Israel; see their introduction to *Bein ha-moladot: Ha-Yekkim bi-mehozotehem* (Jerusalem: The Shazar Center for Jewish History and the Richard Koebner Minerva Center for German History, 2006), 13–16. The volume presents an invaluable and broad panorama of perspectives on the “Yekkim,” their place in the Jewish settlement in Palestine and later the State of Israel, and on their

- varying perceptions of the place of German language, literature, and culture in their Israeli identity.
- 19 As Chana Kronfeld has pointed out to me, the poem also capitalizes on the Yiddish connotation of “bei mir”: to me, or in my eyes.
 - 20 See also Gold, *Yehuda Amichai*, 118.
 - 21 By implying that the ant is about to die and go to heaven, the fragment perhaps also plays on the pun between shoe sole and soul. The pun would work in German as well: Seele is close enough to Shuhsole, but of course here the second appears in Hebrew—*sulia*—and since that word maintains the homophony, the pun becomes translinguistic. In “Ve-hi tehilatekha,” Amichai describes God as a mechanic under a car, whose only visible parts are his shoe soles. *Shire Yehuda Amichai* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2002), 1:88. The poem is discussed by Kronfeld in *Margins of Modernism*, 144–45.
 - 22 *Flowers of Perhaps: Selected Poems of Ra’hel*, translated by Robert Friend with Shimon Sandbank (London: The Menard Press, 1995). I thank Chana Kronfeld for pointing out the allusion to Bluwstein to me.
 - 23 Yehuda Amichai, “Foreword,” *Flowers of Perhaps: Selected Poems of Ra’hel*.
 - 24 Chana Kronfeld, “The Wisdom of Camouflage: Between Rhetoric and Philosophy in Amichai’s Poetic System,” *Prooftexts* 19, no. 3 (Sept. 1990): 469–91; quotations from p. 481.
 - 25 Dan Miron, *Mul ha-ah ha-shotek: iyunim beshirat milhemet ha-atzmaut* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1992), 271 ff.
 - 26 Paul Celan, “The Meridian,” in *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosemary Waldrop (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1986), 37–55; quotation from p. 49. Interestingly, when Amichai states in the 1992 interview that he has “a strong sense of ‘the other’ in [his] poems,” he compares himself not to Celan but to the Italian poet Eugenio Montale. Amichai, “The Art of Poetry,” 250.
 - 27 As John Felstiner describes, during his time in Israel Celan met both old friends and acquaintances from his native city, Czernowitz, as well as authors whom he had read extensively over the previous decade, most notably Gershom Scholem. John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 264 ff. Celan’s friend Ilana Shmueli describes their shared experiences in Czernowitz, Paris, and Jerusalem in *Imri she-Yerushalaim yeshna: Reshimot al Paul Celan* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1999). A partially overlapping account was published in

- Ilana Shmueli and Thomas Sparr, eds., *Paul Celan, Ilana Shmueli, Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2004), 155-78.
- 28 Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth: For Paul Celan," in *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, ed. Aris Fioretos (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 32.
- 29 Amir Eshel, "Von Kafka zu Celan: Deutsch-Jüdische Schriftsteller und ihr Verhältnis zum Hebräischen und Jiddischen," 105-106.
- 30 A discussion of Adorno's famous/infamous statement that associated poetry after the Holocaust with barbarism is beyond the scope of this paper. For Adorno's statement within the context of his philosophy, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Can One Live after Auschwitz: A Philosophical Reader* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003). Michael Rothberg offers a critical survey of the afterlife of Adorno's statement in "After Adorno: Culture in the Wake of Catastrophe," *New German Critique* 72 (1997): 45-81.
- 31 Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *Booking Passage: Exile and Homecoming in the Modern Jewish Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 152.
- 32 Celan's Hebrew is also discussed extensively in Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 228 ff. See also Klaus Reichert, "Hebräische Züge in der Sprache Paul Celans," in *Paul Celan*, ed. Werner Hamacher and Winfrid Menninghaus (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 156-69. Two differences between the two cases of bilingual writing that stand out immediately are first, that Celan chose to publish poems that mix languages rather than keep them archived, and second, that he transcribed his Hebrew words and thus did not confront the orientations of the two languages on the page. However, when he wrote by hand, Celan did use the Hebrew alphabet; see, for example, the poem "Du sei wie du," which ends with the Hebrew words *kumi uri*, reproduced in Celan's handwriting in Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 266. The fact that Amichai does not transcribe his German in Hebrew letters gains perhaps in significance when read in the context of the longstanding tradition of writing *Judendeutch*, German transcribed in Hebrew letters.
- 33 Moshe Zimmermann, "The Chameleon and the Phoenix: Germany in the Eyes of Israel," in Zimmermann, *Avar germani—zikaron israeli* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002), 258-76.
- 34 As reported by Israel Chalfen, "Paul Celan in Jerusalem," in *Paul Celan, Ilana Shmueli, Briefwechsel*, 149-50. Chalfen does not specify whether Amichai said these introductory words in German or in Hebrew, but since there were non-German speakers in the audience (Hebrew translations of some of the poems, prepared by

Amichai and by Manfred Winkler, were read after Celan had read from his poetry), I assume that Chalfen translated the statement from Hebrew for his German report.

- 35 Transcribed and quoted in Lydia Koelle, *Paul Celans pneumatisches Judentum: Gott-Rede und menschliche Existenz nach der Shoah* (Mainz: Mathias Grünewald Verlag, 1997), 66–67. Koelle describes Celan’s voice in the recording as expressing the opposite of the *Selbstverständlichkeit* that is repeated three times in the short quotation: hesitance and a need to persuade his listeners. Celan reiterated his allegiance to a pneumatic Judaism in a letter to Gerschom Schocken, in Feb. 1970. See Koelle, 68 ff. and Amir Eshel, *Zeit der Zäsur: Jüdische Dichter im Angesicht der Shoah* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999), 179–81.
- 36 Franz Rosenzweig uses the term in the opening page of his essay “Geist und Epochen der jüdischen Geschichte,” a text Celan bought in 1967 and had read carefully (Koelle, *Paul Celans Pneumatisches Judentum*, 69–70). As Koelle mentions, Celan also underlined passages referring to *pneuma* and *ruah* when he read Gershom Scholem’s *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit. Studien zu Grundbegriffen der Kabbala*. Amir Eshel outlines the echoes of these figures in Celan’s poetry in *Zeit der Zäsur*, 184–202.
- 37 Quoted in Koelle, *Paul Celans pneumatisches Judentum*, 99.
- 38 Yehoshua Tira, “Paul Celan,” *Haaretz*, Oct. 17, 1969. A German translation by Lydia Böhmer was published in *Paul Celan, Ilana Shmueli: Briefwechsel*, 144–48.
- 39 John Felstiner, “Paul Celan and Yehuda Amichai: An Exchange between Two Great Poets,” *Midstream* 53, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 2007). All quotations from the correspondence are from this publication, which also includes an illuminating introduction and commentary, on which I draw in my interpretation.
- 40 The image of the road goes back to Celan’s acceptance speech for the Bremen Prize, in which he describes the passing of language “through death-bringing speech” and the journey of the poem toward “an addressable reality.” It is fundamental to the poetics articulated in the Meridian and in the notes Celan wrote in preparation for the speech, starting with the departure of Büchner’s Lenz to the mountains and continuing with Celan’s references to and critique of Heidegger’s use of the image of a path in the woods and a path that leads homeward. Amir Eshel, “Paul Celan’s Other: History, Poetics, and Ethics,” *New German Critique* 91 (Winter 2004): 57–77. On Heidegger’s roads and paths, see especially 69–72.
- 41 Orienting himself in the German language as a Jew had long been a problem for

- Celan. In a letter to Erwin Leiser on Apr. 15, 1958, Celan wrote that German lyric offered him a narrower terrain on which to orient himself but it was precisely this that made his “Orientierungsversuche” (his attempts to orient himself) more productive as ways of conversing with the past. The letter is reproduced in Erwin Leiser, *Leben nach dem Überleben: Dem Holocaust entronnen – Begegnungen und Schicksale* (Königstein: Athenäum, 1982), 75–76. Partially cited in Felstiner, *Paul Celan*, 122.
- 42 In the table of contents, now with the rest of Celan’s personal library at the German Literary Archive in Marbach, some twenty-five titles of poems are underlined. I have not been able to determine whether the underlining is Amichai’s or Celan’s (or perhaps even someone else’s) and whether it signifies poems that existed in English translation, poems that Amichai recommended in particular, or poems that Celan was interested in.
- 43 As Amir Eshel has shown, Amichai elsewhere (and before this encounter) did make strategic use of the Hebrew *ruah* to evoke a cultural memory of Jewish *pneuma*. I shall return to this at the end of this article. Amir Eshel, “Eternal Present: Poetic Figuration and Cultural Memory in the Poetry of Yehuda Amichai, Dan Pagis, and Tuvia Rübner,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2001): 141–66.
- 44 Repetition, in fact, is one of the recurring strategies used by poets who write about Celan and his suicide, as discussed by David Wellbery in “Death as a Poetological Problem: On Texts by Erich Fried and Ernst Meister,” in *Argumentum e Silentio: International Paul Celan Symposium*, ed. Amy D. Colin (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), 87–98. The similarity is particularly striking because both poems discussed by Wellbery are substantially different from Amichai’s.
- 45 “Moto shel Celan,” *Shire Yehuda Amichai*, 2:342. The poem on the facing page seems to continue the allusion to Celan. Titled “Suicide,” it describes an exchange between a guard who threatens to shoot and a man who claims to know a password (Celan’s “Shibboleth”?) but refuses to pronounce it. Amir Eshel describes the poem “Moto shel Celan” as “ein Bekenntnis zur gemeinsamen ‘Narbe,’ zum Geschichtszeichen, dessen sich Jehuda Amichai trotz des anderen Verlauf seiner Biographie sehr bewusst zu sein scheint.” Eshel, *Zeit der Zäsur*, 178.
- 46 Yehuda Amichai, *Open Closed Open: Poems*, trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld (New York: Harcourt, 2000), 130.
- 47 Natasha Gordinsky shows that the collection is centrally concerned with the possibility and impossibility of ending a poem as a philosophical problem. Natasha Gordinsky, “‘Al shulḥani munaḥat even she-katuv aleiah “amen””:

- Poetika shel shinui be-patuaḥ sagur patuaḥ,” *Mebkarei yerushalayim be-sifrut ivrit*, 22 (2008): 524–32. See also Dan Miron, “Keitsad yakhol adam lihiot patuaḥ vesagur be-et u-ve-ona ahat,” *Haaretz*, Jan. 5, 2001.
- 48 Bloch and Kronfeld, “Amichai’s Counter-Theology,” 155–56.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 160.
- 50 Freud’s famous analysis of his grandson’s “fort-da” game—in which the young boy mirrors his mother’s coming and going from him—appears in his “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953–74), 18:1–64.
- 51 As noted above, that *pneuma* also surfaces in the published poetry, and in particular in relation to father-son relations as an embodiment of Jewish cultural memory. Amir Eshel, “Eternal Present,” 152. On Amichai’s use of “ruaḥ,” see also Kronfeld, “Hyphenated States,” 37.
- 52 Chana Kronfeld illuminates Amichai’s sophisticated practices of allusion in “Reading Amichai Reading,” *Judaism* 45, no. 3 (1996): 311–24.