Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000)

Yehuda Amichai was born in Würzburg, Germany to an Orthodox Jewish family, and was raised speaking both Hebrew and German. His family migrated to Israel in 1936. He participated in World War II as part of the Jewish Brigade, and fought in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948. He studied Hebrew literature and the bible at the Hebrew Univeresity of Jerusalem. Amichai started writing poetry in 1948, during the War of Independence. His poems were first published in the early 1950s. His first book of poetry, *Akhshav u-ba-yamim ha-a’herim* (Now and on Other Days), was published in 1955. His poetics was soon recognized for its modernistic trends, unique voice and innovative figurative language and was considered nothing less than revolutionary. His poems were translated into more then thirty languages and received broad international recognition, with praise from poets such as Ted Hughes, Paul Celan and Octavio Paz. He won almost every literary prize available in Israel as well as many international prizes. He died in 2000, and was buried in Jerusalem.

The publication of Now and on Other Days was received with great enthusiasm and was considered by many as marking a major shift in the literary and cultural landscape of Israel in the 1950s. Amichai’s poetry changed the way the human experience was transformed into Hebrew poetry. Focusing on the personal experiences of the poet, it offered a realistic, sober, secular position and spoke in a direct tone. Yet, his simple, short and accessible poems, did not give up on asking larger existential questions about life, God and love. He wrote in a personal, intimate tone, reporting his own experiences and insights in a poetic voice that represented the transition from the plural “we” to an individual expression. In one of his best-known poems, “God is Full of Mercy,” he declares that as a poet he uses “a small part of the words in the dictionary.” This line became a symbol of his poetics and cultural standpoint[?].

The combination between his simple, direct tone and his profound search for physical and metaphysical answers gave him the status of the un-official representative of the everyday Israeli of his time. Yet it is important to notice that although his poems are simple, they are far from being simplistic. Many leading scholars have shown that his direct style and simple words hide a complex, multi-layered and inter-textual poetics.

List of publications (Hebrew):

* *Akhshav uva-yamim ha-aherim* (Now and on Other Days) (1955) Tel Aviv: Likrat.
* *Ba-ginah ha-tsiburit* (In the Park) (1958-59) Jerusalem Shoken.
* *Be-merhak shete tikvot* (In the Middle of Two Hopes) (1958) Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad.
* *Ba-ruah ha-nora’ah ha-zot* (In This Terrible Wind) (1961) Merhavya: Sifriat Poalim.
* *Masa’ le-Ninveh* (Journey to Nineveh) (1962) Jerusalem: Achshav.
* *Shirim, 1948-1962* (Poems: 1948-1962) (1962) Tel Aviv and Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Akshav ba-ra’ash*, (Now in Noise) (1968) Jerusalem: Shoken
* *Mah she-karah le-Roni bi-Nyu York* (What Happened to Roni In New York) (1968) Tel Aviv: Am Oved.
* *Pa-amonim ve-rakavot* (Bells and Trains) (1968) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken.
* *Mi yitneni malon* (Hotel in the Wilderness) )1972( Tel Aviv: Bitan.
* *Me-ahhore kol zeh mistater osher gadol* (Behind This a Great Happiness Lies) (1975) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken.
* *Ve-lo ‘al menat li-zekor* (And Not For Remembering) (1978) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken.
* *Ha-zman (The Time)* (1978) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken.
* *Ha-zanav ha-shamen Shel ha-numa* (The Fat Tail of The Numa) (1978) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken.
* *Shalva Gdola: shirim* (Big Peace: poems) (1980) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken.
* *Sha-at ha-hesed* (Time of mercy) (1982) Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Me-adam ata ve-el adam Tashuv* (From man you are, and to man you shall return) (1985) Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shoken.
* *Lo me-achshav, Lo mi-kan* (Not from now, not from here) (1986) Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Shirei Yerushala’im* (Jerusakem songs) (1987) Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Sefer ha-layla Ha-gadol* (the big night book) (1988) Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Gam ha-egrof Haya Pa-am Yad ptuha ve-etzba-ot* (also the fist was once an open hand and fingers) (1989) Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Od Shirei Ah-ha-va* (More love poems) (1994) Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Mivhar shirim* (selected poems) (1994) Jerusalem: Shoken.
* *Patu-ah sagoor patu-ah* (open closed open) (1998) Jerusalem: Shoken.