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 Independence war of 1948. He studied Hebrew literature and bible in the Hebrew Univeresity of Jerusalem. Amichai started writing poetry in 1948, during the Independence War. His poems were first published in the early 1950s. His first poetry book, *Akhshav u-ba-yamim ha-a’herim* (now and in other days), was published in 1955. His poetics was soon recognized for its modernistic trends, unique voice and innovative figurative languge and was considered no less than revolutionary. His poems were translated to more then thirty languages and received a broad international recognition, praised by poets such as Ted Hughes, Paul Celan and Octavio Paz. He won almost every literary prize available in Israel and many international prizes. He died in 2000, and was buried in Jerusalem.

The publication of his first book, *Akhshav u-va-yamim ha-a’herim* (now and in other days) was received with great enthusiasm and was considered by many as marking a deep change and a major shift in the literary and cultural world of Israel of the 1950s. Amichai’s poetry changed the way the human experience is 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 stand.

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 Israeli-everyman 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 in 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.