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Irony, Revenge, and the Naqba in Yehuda Amichai's Early Work

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Volume 21 Issue 1 (March 2019) Article 2**Hannan Hever,****"Irony, Revenge, and the Naqba in Yehuda Amichai's Early Work"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol20/iss2/2>>

Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 21.2 (2019)***
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Ed. **Oded Nir and Ari Ofengenden**

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Abstract: This article offers a materialist reading of the poetry of Yehuda Amichai, the most well-known Israeli poet outside Israel. The article explores the political role of irony in Amichai's early work, situating him as a prominent member of the "State Generation" poetry. Challenging accepted readings, the essay argues that Amichai's poems that deal with the 1948 war, should be read as a post-traumatic response, which uses irony and rich and bold metaphorical devices to distance itself from the horrors of the war, and therefore also form the political and ethical meanings of the Naqba. That Amichai's poetry translates the language of horror to that of love involves an extreme depoliticization, which accounts for its popularity in Israel and worldwide. The reification of intimate love by Amichai neutralizes any possibility for resistance. This a-political stance is a result of Amichai's writing of universalistic civic poetry, which made it possible for him to neutralize the war poet's need to bear responsibility for the Palestinian Naqba (in which many Palestinians fled Palestine, or were deported from it), which made Israel a state with a Jewish majority. The neutralization of the literary (and political) opposition between the language of Israeli citizenship and the language of nationhood in Israel, which could include Palestinians, is a powerful tool of oppression. However, Amichai ignores the fact that the unethical results of the 1948 war still inhere in the Israeli state's refusal to grant equal citizenship rights to all Palestinians, by recognizing their right of return. This essay's discussion of Amichai's novel deals with the way in which Jewish sovereignty is constructed in the novel. The novel exposes this sovereignty's founding after the war, through linguistic representations of the power that turns illegitimate the desire to exact revenge on the Germans, which exists outside the law of the Israeli sovereign.

Hannan HEVER**Irony, Revenge, and the Naqba in Yehuda Amichai's Early Work**

[A]

In 1955, Yehuda Amichai published his famous, highly acclaimed poem, "God has Pity on Kindergarten Children," which was included in his first volume of poems, *Now and in Other Days*:

God has pity on the kindergarten children.
He has less pity on school children.
And on grownups, He has no pity at all,
He leaves them alone,
And sometimes they must crawl on all fours
In the burning sand
To reach the first-aid station
Covered with blood.

But perhaps he will watch over true lovers
and have a mercy on them and shelter them
like a tree over the old man
sleeping on a public bench.

Perhaps we will give them
the last rare coins of compassion
that Mother handed down to us,
so that their happiness will protect us
now and in other days. (*The Selected 2*)

The irony in "God has Pity on Kindergarten Children" effects a hierarchical division in the extent of God's protection over Man: He has pity on kindergarten children and less on schoolchildren, whereas on grownups, namely combatants, he has no pity at all. The irony in the poem is revealed primarily in the line "And sometimes they must crawl on all fours," wherein the combatants wounded in battle are delineated by the absurdity of the metaphoric connection between them and the babies who cannot yet walk on their own. Dubbing the wounded combatants "grownups," as their nicknaming by kindergarten children would do, intensifies the absurdity of the metaphor that creates the irony created by the speaker.

The speaker's irony in Amichai's poetry can be read as a post-traumatic response that distances the traumatic event of the war, which Judith Herman defined as a violent act that shatters the self and "have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community" (Herman 51). According to Herman's analysis it is clear that the presence of Irony in Amichai's early poetry can be explained by Dan Miron's response to Amichai's sonnets in his first book ("Hove"). From the fact that according to Miron the main thematic structure of the sonnets is an opposition between past that Amichai has no clue about it, and love that overcomes the past, we can deduce that the repressing of the traumatic past of 1948 war enables to overcome it by love only through a distancing from the past by Irony. A very similar response we can find in Nathan Zach piece about Amichai's early poetry where he writes that only through Amichai's confidence in love he can translate anxiety and horror into a love poetry. (Zach, "Shirei" 63).

But the poem's ironic voice, which is meant to protect the fragmented self so as to render meaningful the shattering experience of war, appeals not to himself but to God, who has forsaken him, and whom the speaker holds responsible for the soldiers' well-being. In his frustration over God's lack of compassion for soldiers, the speaker ironically points to an alternative route of reconstitution of his and the soldiers' post-traumatic self possibly through God's pity on kindergarten children or school children, the responsibility toward whom may seem a lighter burden than that toward the fate of soldiers.

[B]

But in so doing, Amichai does not hold accountable as a citizen who participates equally in the Israeli sovereignty who had sent the soldiers to the battlefield, and who is therefore responsible for the hurt inflicted on their bodies and souls. Amichai, therefore, asserts the sovereign's existence outside any

contradictions, and political conflict so that the sovereign feels entitled to abstain from intervening. Irony allows Amichai to circumvent the presence of the forsaking sovereign—the one whose duty is to regulate and control responsibly State's violence—once it reduces it to the casualty clearing station, which the wounded must reach on their own.

By means of a universal protest poem, the ironic distance allows Amichai to evade political action in a concrete time and place; an action that will challenge the Israeli sovereign's sense of responsibility for the wounded soldiers who were sent to battle at his order. Through the use of irony, the speaker deflects his gaze away from the materialistic, historical existence of the sovereign responsible for the war - to the abstract God, protecting the kindergarten children. This transfer of responsibility from the sovereign to God allows Amichai to evade the possibility of becoming an agent of action, fully aware of his own politicization and historicizing, and thereby to evade the possibility of becoming a vessel of political criticism. Amichai's famous poem "I want to die in my bed" (*The Poetry* 34) constitutes a statement which is not of political refusal but political abstention from civic responsibility for the violence of the Israeli sovereign.

In contrast to refuge Amichai concludes the poem by undoing the political dilemma of assigning responsibility to either the forsaking sovereign or the forsaking God. By way of de-historicizing and de-politicization, Amichai once again elevates to the level of transcendence - now to those who supposedly exist as eternal, ahistorical entities, such as the "true lovers" or "the old man / sleeping on a public bench," over whom "perhaps he [God] will watch." The politics of desire that underlies personal, intimate love enables Amichai, again and again in many of his poems, to utilize the composition of his poetry to posit the reification of intimate love and thus to foreclose the possibility of bringing to the poem's surface the political questions that may now remain hidden from the reader.

Amichai's typical way to represent in his poems the contradictory, post-Westphalian Israeli sovereignty—which is supposed to be protective of its citizens and accountable for the risks to which it exposes them—is by elevating any political conflict to a transcendent position; by annulling any political conflict in a transcendent absolution of responsibility. Such is the case in "God has Pity on Kindergarten Children," where the absolution of responsibility is manifested in the intimate relationship of universal, ahistorical love or in the familial love between mother and son. This transcendence, typical of Amichai's poetry, sublates the contradiction between the shielding power of love and family and the forsaking sovereign, and enables Amichai to imagine a universal sovereignty that exists above and beyond the foundational contradiction of Israeli sovereignty. There is a possibility that when Nathan Zach accused Israeli Literature for being a "Literature without a World" ("Sifrut") he meant also to its imaginative disconnection from the Israeli's historical materiality.

[C]

Indeed, in Amichai's first two poetry books—*Now and in Other Days* published in 1955 and *Two Hopes Away* published in 1958—he presents himself as a civic poet "who rejects the notion that the poet is entitled to any privileged elite position or granted any aesthetic chosenness that would free him or her from the need to be of use to their society" (Kronfeld, "The Full" 28, 282). The political implication of such a description is that Amichai has always presented himself as an individual who enjoys the same rights as the rest of the citizens of the Israeli sovereign state. Yet the citizenship granted by Israeli sovereignty is but a facade of the legal membership characteristic of a democracy founded on values of universal justice, for Israeli sovereignty, a so-called democracy, had been established on a contradiction between the universal citizenship and the ethnocentric definition of the state of Israel as the exclusive state of the Jewish people, which inevitably labels its Palestinian subjects second-class citizens. Amichai, who, indeed, has been always perceived as "a civic poet," avoids this contradiction by, as described above, by irony, by refraining from critiquing the state, and, as I'll show later, by formulating an anti-revenge stance, which is one of the corner stones of sovereign law.

Such contradictory citizenship had led Amichai, a Jewish Israeli poet who imagines himself a universal citizen and hence a full member of the Israeli sovereign state, to efface from his texts the very signifiers that betray the material contradiction underlying Israeli sovereignty, which bestows on him the exclusive privileges of Jewish citizenship. It is only by imagining a universal sovereignty, which compels him to eliminate his privileges of as a Jewish citizen from the surface of his poetry, that Amichai is able to reconcile his renowned individualistic, existential resistance to the war with his own participation in it as a compliant subject of the Israeli state.

And indeed, the power relations that constitute the sovereign Israeli national subject are strongly affirmed in the poetry of Amichai, who is one of the prominent poets of the "State Generation" writers.

One can use Hamutal Tzmir's work on the figure of irony in State Generation poetry to reconstruct the power relations at play in the text, which constitute "the processes of individuation and autonomization of the author and of literature in terms taken directly from the collective political situation of their time: an emancipatory struggle, the establishment of a sovereign nation-state, issuing identity cards to members of the nation turned citizens." This dualism is made possible by the inherent double sense of the term "subject," designating at once both an individual subjected to the state, and an autonomous individual, whose subjection is an expression of his or her individual volition. Aesthetic experience, such as that of poetry, displaces here the paradox of the state, which at once represents the members of the nation individually, and at the same time embodies the abstract idea of the state (Tzmir 30).

Moreover, Amichai is compelled to obscure the fact that the imagined universalistic citizenship in a democracy granted to him by the Israeli sovereign had been facilitated by violently bringing about the Naqba—that is, by means of the ethnic purge which had driven Palestinians away from the newly drawn borders of the Israeli state, thereby violently establishing de facto a Jewish majority and a Palestinian minority, whose status as inferior citizens denies them the privileges vested in Jewish citizens.

A typical example for an articulation that completely obfuscates the essentially Jewish privilege of the Jewish writer in Israel is to be found in the major Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua's definition of the "identity card" of his contemporaries—that is, the Jewish writer's citizenship as constituted by way of submission to Israeli sovereignty—which he describes in terms of "the sense of Israeliness as wholly Jewish," a sense that has endured within the Israeli present." And indeed, Amichai has been perceived as a representative of the "*Likrat*" group of young writers, which was led by Benjamin Herushovski (Harshav), seen as "presentists," as they were mockingly dubbed by members of the journal *Achshav*, who had inherited and continued the line established by "*Likrat*" (Zvik, "Mavo" 7).

In actuality, however, the universalist notion of citizenship of the "State Generation" (Ginsburg 154) had helped to legitimize and normalize the Palestinian oppression, and had thus relegated the Palestinians to the margins of an Israeliness premised upon universalist citizenship. Nathan Zach, the prominent spokesperson of "State Generation" writers, famously captured this sentiment in the line "I am a citizen of the world and I wish to remain one" (Zach, *Shirim* 34). Even "the members of his own group, who see him as the 'face of the younger poetry' stress that Amichai is the most civic of poets in their belligerent group, since 'something in this poetry never forgets prosperities past'" (Zvik, "Mavo" 8; Moked), and thus embrace his own self-definition as a civic poet (quoted in Ginsburg 152). Following Efi Ziv we can define this normalization of the oppressor self-perception as a transparent insidious trauma which enable a kind of a political blindness. (Ziv 5)

Although Yehoshua claimed that his definition of Israeli identity is inclusive of Arabs, but this is clearly an imaginary act of depoliticization and de-materialization that severs political citizenship from cultural identity as if the two have not been inextricably bound in one material space, suffused with political and ethical meanings.

And indeed, as Yehoshua put it, the writers of the "State Generation" internalized Israeli sovereignty without scruples or criticism. Unlike Shai Ginsburg's conception of citizenship as a leverage of political resistance that is founded on the rhetorical gap between the figurative and the literal; and against his claim that Amichai succeeded in liberating himself from the logic of Israeli citizenship (Ginsburg 156, 165), I argue that Amichai's and his contemporaries' notion of citizenship is devoid of critical cogency, for it lacks the foundational principle of universality. In its stead, Israel's is a defective, exclusionary form of citizenship, which had been facilitated by the violence of the Naqba that persists to this very day. I am thus in full agreement with Hamutal Tzmir's stance, which collapses the distinction between nationalism and citizenship in State Generation poetry—for Israeli citizenship is founded on hegemonic Jewish nationalism that excludes and oppresses those of its citizens whose national identity is Palestinian.

Yehoshua described this internalization as "a clear grasp of the state's physical borders, of the breadth and the limits of its accountability and control"—a "fact," he notes, that "helped us form a distinct generational identity" (Brinker 174). Yehoshua thus imagines the delimitation of Israeli sovereignty to have taken place independently of the Palestinian Naqba, which had nevertheless determined de facto the limits of Israeli sovereignty. Or, as Amichai put it, "But the border guards of possibility / Permitted us to enter their domain" (Amichai, *The Poetry* 23).

Amichai portrays this internalization from the autobiographical stance inherited in his personal experience of being wounded in the war; one that recounts the spilled blood yet fails to criticize or question the causes for war: "The twentieth century was the blood in my veins, / Blood that wanted to get out in many wars / And through many openings (*The Selected* 2-3). Amichai's poem "The ones who blew up houses" offers what seems as the apogee of the narcissistic representation of the Naqba in his poetry: "The ones who blew up houses / are now abandoned like an abandoned village." (*Be-Merchak*

57). The use of the term "abandoned" ("netushim"), which alludes to the blown-up houses yet also to the agents of their destruction (Openheimer 274) is ironic to the point of cynicism—as if the reader is asked to have some compassion for the perpetrators. The poem's conclusion goes even farther by forming an analogy between the bliss-filled body and the demolished house: "But my body is free and glad / like a destroyed house" (57).

Just like Yehoshua, Amichai imagines the Israeli sovereign as a Westphalian one, whose identity is founded on the sovereignty-territory-citizenship triad, which Foucault called "over-determined discourse on sovereignty" (Shenhav 26). But the very overdetermination of this discourse reveals that in practice things could not be more different. The materiality of Israeli sovereignty is essentially a post-Westphalian one, which, as Foucault argues, no longer governs its subjects as residents of a definite territory, but rather as population (Shenhav, 25, 31; following Foucault's *Security, Territory, Population*).

But writers of the "State Generation" such as Amos Oz, A.B. Yehoshua, Amichai, and others, submitted themselves to the unhistorical myth of the state by internalizing it completely. This myth, whose function is to naturalize history, as Roland Barthes argued (Barthes 143), underlies the self-definition of Israeli sovereignty, which depends on the sort of legalism meant to legitimize the sovereign's monopoly on a given territory based on the treaties of international law (Shenhav 25-26). Such sovereignty enables its Jewish citizens to maintain and retain their privileges as Israeli Jews, as well as to proclaim these privileges as natural facts—a strategy whose function is to obscure not only Jewish colonialism, but also the Naqba as its quintessential manifestation. Imagined as universal, Israeli sovereignty effaces class, gender, racial, and national conflicts so as to subject them to an imaginary, post-Westphalian sovereignty.

Benjamin Harshav (Heroshuvski) wrote that after the 1948 war "Once the statehood was achieved, a deep depression over-came Israeli society, it became clear that the thousands of casualties we sacrifice in the War of Independence [...] were individual victims each one and all. No solace could be found for the pain felt over each individual's loss" ("Hirhurim" 129). It seems that in the light of this post-traumatic condition of *Likrat's* writers one should read a passage from *Likrat*, which was involved in the publication of Amichai's first book in 1955 *Now in the Other Days*. Regarding literary criticism, they wrote: "Would this journal assemble a bunch of writers who will realize the loaded value and mission of criticism in our times as we see it? And would they be willing to join and lend this journal their forces?" Their reply is particularly interesting: "But this very doubt in itself does not perform as the hesitation-prior-to-the-deed." (*Likrat*). Amichai's ambivalent perspective (Kronfeld, *Margins* 146) brought him to refrain from committing himself to a preliminary conception that is necessary for the journal's future development. This avoidance betrays anxiety toward any such commitment, which may inadvertently invite a closer scrutiny of the façade of universal sovereignty. Thus, they elaborate: "we are therefore exempt from any assurances as to what we are about to publish and we shall not elaborate our wishes and aspirations." The reluctance to face potential difficulties that may undermine such façade becomes fully articulated in the next sentence, which confines the tackling of obstacles to the moment of beginning: "We need naught but *begin* walking, although we very well know that the road ahead is *sown with hurdles*" (my emphasis). It seems that this dialectic of refusal, founded merely on walking a new path, underlies the journal's motto, which was excerpted from a poem by Constantin Pofanov (translated into Hebrew by Shlonsky): "Go ahead and search for a new path. / The universe is besieged and in fetters, / it is cruel and furrowed" (*Likrat*).

The manifesto opening the journal's first issue highlights the undetermined nature of this literary circle's goal. They do note that "leaving the objective unspecified means not the evasion of discussion, nor the obscuring in principle of the problems faced by authors in general, and the Israeli author in particular, such as the relation between art and society, the relation between author and audience, etc." But, note bene, the denial of "obscuring in principle" is indicative of a fundamental obscuring in toto, as demonstrated by Amichai's poetry's carefree irony. The writers are guided by the sociological notion that they belong to the generation of post-1948 war writers: "but it beseems to us that this is the first attempt to gather a group of men of letters, whose first fruits matured after the Independence War, that is, in the late 1940s. Today's is not the exhilarating reality of the war years, which produced a multifarious group of writers in poetry and prose. Ours is a grey, and wearisome, and ireful reality—but it nonetheless will be the measure of the work's merit. The most profound measure." Against the "exhilarating" literature of the "Palmach Generation" (1948 war generation, *Likrat* members conceive their reality as a grey, normalizing one, which evinces that "long bygone is that naivete, that youthful belief that 'conquering the world' is in our power. These have superseded by skepticism, cynicism, and shoddy bewilderment." In other words, "the 1950s expectation for 'normalization' resulted in a pendulum-like counteraction of prose and poetry, in which the individual's sense of the world takes

center stage" (Brinker 149). Indeed, the hope-filled violence of conquest has been superseded by skepticism and cynicism, which enabled the post-war generation to disown the violence of the war and its devastating outcomes. Irony and skepticism thus created a coping mechanism for the post-trauma of the 1948 war, namely, the notion of Universal Israeli citizenship as a powerful rhetorical tool, used to this very day. This is the political function of Amichai's famous line "But I want to die in my bed" in the poem "I want to die in my bed" (Amichai, *The Poetry* 34, translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld): to repress the horrors of the war and the Naqba, and of the oppressive Israeli regime that was subsequently established. This form of violent separation and a sharp distinction between the Jewish colonial and the Arab natives guided the Zionist discourse practically from its inception to justify its colonial violence.

Founded on the idea of the Chosen People aspiring to reconstitute its covenant with God, Zionism thus requires a theological separation between Jews and gentiles, and here between Jews and Palestinians. The transformation of the Jewish state's hegemonic identity—one that may expose the post-Westphalian nature of sovereignty—is therefore impossible. Indeed, this exclusiveness of Jewish identity that presents itself as universal sovereignty is gradually revealed today as a material anomaly of Jewish sovereignty. Mahmoud Darwish's 1964 poem "Identity Card," whose publication coincides with the formative years of State Generation literature, lays bare the latter's false representation of the Palestinian as an integral component of Jewish sovereignty. Against the universalist "identity card" internalized by "State Generation" authors, as A.B. Yehoshua suggested; or, alternatively, against Amichai's personal, absolute denouncement of the administrative-bureaucratic need for identity card in his poem "On Every Rising Hill" ("we were in this world / Offhandedly. / Without a card / Without identification." [Amichai, *Be-Merchak* 38]), Darwish's poem calls for an obverse, disillusioned type of "identity card":

ID Card

Mahmoud Darwish

Write it down! I'm an Arab
 My card number is 50000
 My children number eight
 And after this summer, a ninth on his way.
 Does this make you rage?
 I am an Arab.
 With my quarry comrades I labor hard
 My children number eight
 I tug their bread, their clothes
 And their notebooks
 From within the rock
 I don't beg at your door
 I don't cower on your threshold
 So does this make you rage?
 Write it down!
 I am an Arab.
 I am a name with no honorific.
 Patient in a land
 Where everything lives in bursting rage
 My roots were planted before time was born
 Before history began
 Before the cypress and the olive trees
 Before grass sprouted
 My father is from the plough clan
 Not from the noble class
 My grandfather was a peasant farmer
 Had no pedigree
 Taught me the pride of the sun
 Before teaching me to read
 A shack to guard groves is my home,
 Made of branches and reeds
 Are you pleased with my status?
 I am a name with no honorific.
 Write it down!
 I am an Arab.
 Hair color: charcoal

Eye color: brown
 Attributes:
 A cord around the quffiyeh on my head
 My hand as hard as rock
 That scratches if you touch it
 My address:
 I am from a forgotten abandoned village
 Its streets nameless
 All its men in the fields and quarries
 Does this make you rage?
 Write it down!
 I am an Arab.
 You have stolen my ancestors' groves
 And the land we cultivated
 I and all my children
 Leaving nothing for us and all my grandchildren
 Except these rocks
 Will your government take them
 Like people say?
 Therefore,
 Write down on the top of the first page:
 I do not hate people
 And I do not steal from anyone
 But if I starve
 I will eat my oppressor's flesh
 Beware, beware of my starving
 And my rage.
 1964.
 (Translated from Arabic by Salman Masalha and Vivian Eden)

The Speaker in the poem is a Palestinian citizen of Israel, and his defiant standing against the Israeli sovereign's representative relies on his present-absentee status as a resident of Israel in the aftermath of the 1948 war. In the performative moment in which he demands of the sovereign's representative to put "Arab" under "nationality" in his identity card, he renounces his absentee status but, at the same time, risks asserting his presence as an Israeli subject of equal rights.

Unlike Amichai, who declares in his poem "God's Hand in the World" that "My hopes have erected white housing projects / far away from the crowds inside me." (*The Selected* 10), Darwish puts on display his national identity as a Palestinian resident of Israel. In so doing, he makes public, at his own risk, his inherent absence, thereby dismantling Israel's imaginary territorial uniformity homogeneity, in which the Jewish-Israeli sovereign and his subjects delude themselves to believe.

This is, then, the dramatic moment of unveiling the pretense of the Westphalian identity, implied in Yehoshua's conception, of the Jewish-Israeli subject; an identity that can be envisioned only under a state of emergency. That such identity presupposed by A.B. Yehoshua, Amichai, and like other "The State Generation" writers who were blind or suppressed to the Israeli state of emergency,¹ and have perceived it as a natural given commensurable with the constitution of Israel's borders in 1948. These blindness and suppression have enabled them to justify by default the Israeli sovereign's control over the Palestinian population in Israel under martial law, as well as the denial of the Palestinians' right of return (Shenhav 39). Amichai clearly abides by such justification when he writes, in "A Military Operation" the following lines: "But the border guards of possibility / Permitted us to enter their domain" (*The Poetry* 23, translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld); or, elsewhere, in his commendation of repression and "immemory": "My girlfriend forgot her love on the sidewalk / like a bicycle. All night outside, in the dew" (*The Selected* 10).

The Naqba played a prominent role in the constitution of Israeli nationality in the work of the "Statehood Generation" writers (as in the oft-cited short story by Yehoshua, "Facing the Forests"). By slightly adjusting Ernest Renan's definition of nationality, one may argue that that generation's literary work involves the gesture of forgetting; thus, in Amichai's short story "Dicky's Death," collected in *In This Terrible Wind* (volume's name was translated as "The World is a Room"), the Naqba is already represented through its forgetting by means of an ironic gesture that allows the speaking voice, a combatant soldier in the Negev Brigade involved in the events of the Naqba, to absolve Israeli

¹ Amichai chose not to publish a poem which reveals his consciousness to the Israeli State of Emergency: "The People here live inside fulfilled prophecies / Like inside a cloud after the explosion / Which does not disperse" ("Bimlot").

sovereignty as well as himself of any responsibility for the grim fate of the "stateless" Palestinians: "We didn't know what we were doing. In the morning, we returned to Ruhama. We burned villages, and the girls burned the food" (Amichai, "Dicky's" 114).

The speaker's irony in this sentences has unmistakably an effect of what Roman Jakobson identified as the poetic function, which is the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection (the paradigmatic relation between burning the village and burning the food) to the axis of combination (the syntagmatic relation that effects the ironic identity of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic (Jakobson)—in short, the conflation of two historical facts into a single literary utterance of irony. The poetic irony of this text allows Amichai to absolve himself once again, even more intensely, by saying "we didn't know what we were doing."

[D]

Following Paul de Man (209), I would argue that irony enables Amichai to recount the war both as an *empirical* self, an agent responding to his own trauma by deflecting his gaze away from his battle wounds; and, at the same time, as an *ironic* subject who is aware of the figurative nature of ironic language, and who thereby undermines the ironic effect created by the empirical subject—since the coexistence of both positions dismantles irony from within and hence destabilizes the position of the ironic subject.

In other words, the object of irony is not only what lies outside the subject, but also what lies within—a self-irony, one that questions its own ironic stance.

This destabilization impairs the ironic subject's capacity to evaluate, politically, the causes of his trauma. He secures the transcendence of sovereignty beyond the reach of political critique— one that may hold the sovereign accountable for the trauma of the wrongdoer subject. In so doing, Amichai affirms the contradictory, violent, and immoral Israeli sovereignty, which had sent him to the battlefield. A prominent example of Amichai's justification and internalization of the sovereign edict is the irony created in the poem "Government," which, as is evident from the title, is a poem about sovereignty:

The Minister of Interior inside my body
In the folds of my flesh, I feel his face hiding. (*Achshav* 17)

Sovereignty is submitted to an ironic gaze, with members of the government placed inside the speaker's own body, and their placement being almost a homonym of their official capacity: "The Minister of Interior (*sar hapnim*) inside (*bifnim*) my body"; "The Minister of External Affairs (*huts*) on the exterior (*bahuts*), having exited out of my eye."² However, once things are subjected to the judgment of the sovereign and its ministers, irony all but dissipates: "And I know not who is to blame," The only minister he knows anything about, he continues, is the Minister of Education, and he knows that this minister cannot even see what is right in front of him, using the idiom "under the lamppost" to mark the place, next to the minister's office, where some sparrows chose to build a home for their family (Amichai, *Achshav* 18).

Amichai—whose endorsement by the Israeli administration was evident by him becoming a laureate of the Avraham Shlonsky Award in 1958—was, like other poets of the "State Generation," close to the Zionist leftist literary organs. Moshe Dor, one of the "Likrat" poets, wrote in his memoir how much they were influenced by former generation's poetry of Nathan Alterman and Avraham Shlonsky. He argues that despite that the first drafts of Nathan Zach's poetry were heavily influenced by Alterman's poetry, the later Zach did not hesitate to charge Alterman's poetry in a very harsh way (Dor 89). Dor insists that most of the *Likrat* poets were enthusiastic readers of Alterman's poetry, while at the same time they also found in the poetry of marginal poets—like David Fogel, Avraham Ben Yitzhak, Early Uri Zevi Greenberg, Yonathan Ratosh and Avot Yeshurun—a counter-poetic stance against the canonic and well-known tradition of Modern Hebrew Poetry.

Dor recounts how he himself used to publish his poetry in *Al-Ha-Mishmar*, the Zionist leftist journal of MAPAM. While their literary circle despised MAPAM's commitment to Stalinist Socialist Realism, Amichai nevertheless published a gaudy eulogy "The Death of Stalin" after Stalin passed away. Dor did not fail to note that he himself published in *Ashmoret*, too, the journal of MAPAI, the Zionist hegemonic

² In Israeli modern Hebrew, the official title *sar hahuts* is translated as "Minister of Foreign Affairs." Here the translator opted for "Minister of External Affairs" in order to retain the phonetic and semantic affinity between the official title and the minister's "placement" in relation to the speaker's body. Translations of this poem are by Nir Kedem.

party of the period (Dor 90). The very important anthology *Shirat Russia* (Russian Poetry) that was a source of inspiration for the "Likrat" group, but they later expressed their reservations about it when Shlonsky, who co-edited the anthology with the poet Lea Goldberg, made known his sympathy for the Soviet regime.

Although according to Dor there was a European German poetic common ground for Benjamin Heroshuvski (later Harshav), Nathan Zach and Yehuda Amichai, regarding their political affiliation, Harshav himself put it bluntly when he wrote that

"let us not be mistaken; as an individual, Amichai was not anti-Zionist and did not oppose the Zionist idea and its realization. He was sergeant first class in the Jerusalem Brigade (the Sixteenth Brigade), and enjoyed being a part of the state's cultural institution. [...] Indeed, internalizing the structure of Israeli sovereignty Amichai had searched for a political home that he later made in MAPAM, the United Workers Party, which had been the chosen political home for many of Israel's writers and intellectuals at the time. So deep was his sense of partisan belonging, that after Stalin's death Amichai published a eulogy in his memory" (Harshav, "Hirhurim" 129).

All this helps explain why the poem "God has Pity" removes Israeli sovereignty from the domain of political critique. Amichai divests the soldiers of everything but "the last rare coins of compassion / that Mother handed down to us." The intimate, protective relationship between the mother and her children, the soldiers, stands in glaring ironic contrast to the forsaking sovereign who was supposed to protect the soldiers he had sent to battle. The fact that Mother's rare coins of compassion are her last, however, detaches the feeling of pity on the soldiers from any progressive, collective narrative whose function may be to end the national need for war, as well as the readiness to sacrifice his life in the service the Israeli sovereign.

The finitude of motherly protection suggests that even after the war had ended the state of emergency remains in effect, thereby supposedly reconciling Israel's undemocratic constitutive contradiction, and enabling both the constitution of martial law and the prolongation of the Naqba by means of the refusal, in principle, of the Palestinian right of return.

This is perceived through the eyes of the ironic subject who makes himself, as we have shown following Paul De Man, the victim of the ironic gaze he himself as he victimizes the object of his ironic gaze. Here, irony is therefore not a call for action or resistance but a self-destructive irony, which renders the subject effecting it a dodger, properly speaking. In other words, Amichai's is not a genuine ironic subject who utilizes the sense of absurdity effected by irony to assert his (and the sovereign's) accountability for his victim, but rather a self-ironizing subject, whose irony serves to dodge responsibility rather than as a means to resist the sovereign, as is clearly demonstrated in the poem "Lullaby 1957": "The others went off far away, to conquer. / The others always widen the horizon, / And ours is narrow, from hand to head." (*A Life* 30). Likewise, evading political responsibility is manifest, too, in the poem "I Need to Cry," which opens with the following lines: "I need to cry / because people have opinions / and opinions have teeth / and I do not know." (*A Life* 13). A stance that expresses reluctance to criticize and resist sovereignty is also manifest in the poem "And That Is Your Glory, Phrase from the liturgy of the Day's of Awe," which alludes to the anti-monarchic The Parable of Yotam: "Even the trees went out once to choose a king. [...] Ungird my T-shirt, love; this was my final bout. / I fought all the knights, until the electricity gave out. / And that is my glory." (Amichai, *The Selected* 11). The issue of evading the responsibility of the sovereign comes up in the poem "Not Like a Cypress": "And not like the single man, / like Saul, whom the multitude found / and made king. / But like the rain in many places" (*The Selected* 12) or in the poem "King Saul and I": "Dead prophets turned time-wheels / When he went out searching for asses / Which I, now, have found. / But I don't know how to handle them. / They kick me." (*The Poetry* 67). Another example for this personal avoidance that leads the speaker into his internal world, away from all concerns of responsibility, for military action, but also from the obligations of familial relations, can be found in the poem "I Sit by the Window": As he is watching soldiers rushing, the speaker expresses his desire to maintain his position sitting "between two chairs", "to live between my surname and my name / and do not belong to one of them" (*Be-Merchak* 18-9).

Employing the affirmative irony of a responsibility dodger, Amichai confirms in another poem, "I waited for My Girl and Her Steps Were Not There," the perpetuity of the state of emergency when he writes "Soldiers are always training for some war" (*Achshav* 9). Affirmed by these poems is Amichai's view of war as a continuous state, as if such state exists independently of the sovereign's law that enable it to perpetuate by declaring a continuous state of emergency. Nili Scharf Gold writes that Amichai chose not to publish the personal poetry wrote in 1947 since by publishing these poems he could endanger his persona as a national poet. Her interpretation of the transformation of his personal letters

of 1947 to their intertext, the cycle "We Loved Here," which he published in 1958 (Scharf-Gold 242), is a clear proof how he has created then in his poetry the endless Israeli state of emergency. In the twentieth sonnet in the cycle, the persistence of the state of emergency is emphasized: "Beyond the mountains the troops were waiting, / not discharged from their wars / and never returning to their homes." (Amichai, *Achshav* 78). Those who refuse to recognize the state of emergency as natural and obvious, and refuse to serve at the pleasure of the sovereign, as in Amichai's poetry, are labeled "exceptional subjects"—defeated enemies from within whose existence is thus denied. Irony is that which makes possible the denial of the exception that could sabotage the possibility of normalization. Irony's withdrawal from material reality allows it to normalize the actions of the sovereign, and, at the same time, to constitute a literary utterance that imagines the state of emergency as natural and self-evident. Such is the case in the poem "We Did Not Wait," which at first seems a revolutionary-socialist poem: "the factory's smoke / knew first that the world has been cheated." (*Be-Merchak* 9). But right after it admits to already know the miseries of a world that will not rise against war and starvation but is nevertheless open to hope, which can be the revolution's aim or its modus operandi. Amichai concludes the poem with "the turbine-ridden air" that "descended quietly on all the tired / and it suffered like them and it loved." By shifting the focus to love, Amichai thus effaces any and all revolutionary dimensions the poem seemed to evoke.

Amichai often focuses on the moment of transition from a sovereignty of an unexceptional state of affairs, to that of the state of emergency. Thus, for example, he writes in "Two Poems About the First Battles": "The first battles brought out / terrible flowers of love" And later: "On the way to the front we slept in a kindergarten, / I placed a wooly teddy bear under my head, / tops and dolls and trumpets descended onto my tired face --- / [...] and so, too, in my eyes under my eyelids" (*The Poetry* 9, translated by Leon Wieseltier). And in the first poem in the sonnets cycle "Here We Loved" Amichai writes of his father who "Spent four years in their war, / did not hate his enemy nor did he love them, / But I know that already there / he built me day after day from his quietnesses / so few, which he gathered / between bombs and between smoke." Amichai here describes his father as a person for whom the war is not about conflict or enmity, but rather a phase of maturation, evolving toward the birth of a new generation in an age of peace. And indeed, regarding his son's future, Amichai wrote "He collected many dead for me, / so that I'll know them through his eyes and love them // and will not die like them in horror..." But the father's efforts have been in vain. Amichai sees the moment of transition from peace to war as inevitable, and, consequently, it is pointless to probe into its political causes and justifications: "He filled his eyes with them and was wrong: / to all my wars I go" (*Achshav* 59).

This self-sabotaging irony distances the speaker from himself as much as from the material, violent reality of life in Israel, thereby normalizing the current state of affairs and denying its violent nature. Citing Nathan Zach, who said of "Statehood Generation" Literature, "it is a worldless literature," Nissim Kalderon has this self-sabotaging irony in mind when he takes Zach's words to mean a literature not relating directly "to a familiar landscape of social reality, given in particular historical, cultural, and geographical time and place" (Kalderon 55). The same is true of irony in Zach's poetry, whose speaker is firmly entrenched in the position of "I don't know," which established the beginning of a place for a generation of intellectuals in Israel, but which also led them to shy away from taking a stand," which is to say, the opposite of what "Zach had expected intellectuals to do: to give an account—to account for themselves, their past, and everything around them" (Kalderon 35, 62).

This reluctance is what made possible the denial of the horrors of the 1948 war: "We measured ours, so very little - - - / and we were content, not like conquerors, / who gallop till the end of all gas, / we walked in loving dearly, clandestinely" (Amichai, *Achshav* 68). This way of imagining things had indeed demanded of the sovereign's citizens and the intellectuals under his aegis a moral account for violence perpetrated in their name, but such demand was superseded by the imagining of the Israeli sovereign as a universal, Westphalian sovereign. Dismantling the façade of Westphalian sovereignty requires, according to Shenhav, "uncovering the violent mechanisms founded on the law; the very same which, reversing Clausewitz's famous maxim, Foucault described as 'the continuation of war by other means'" (Shenhav 26).

Here it is worth mentioning that the formative years of the "State Generation's" literature coincides with Eichmann trial. Indeed, the State Attorney Gideon Hausner's opening remarks crucially undermine the Westphalian nature of Israeli sovereignty. When Hausner announced that he is the representative of the six million that were killed in the Holocaust, he effectively confers on his words a historical import, particularly his own import as the one speaking on behalf of the murdered. But at the same time, as he sought to establish his moral authority to his prosecution speech against Eichmann, a moral authority founded on his self-presentation as the representative of the Jewish people—both dead and living—he was also undermining his claim to be that representative of the Israeli sovereign. For, the Jewish people

killed in the holocaust had no sovereign, and of course was never under the sovereignty of the state of Israel. It is for this reason that Hausner, in his role as prosecutor, cannot speak in the name of the murdered as the state's representative.

Amichai proceeds essentially follows Hausner's way about the subject. He, too, imagines a Westphalian sovereignty, while materially it is but a post-Westphalian one. Celebrating his poetry's break from the dictums of the sovereign, Amichai nonetheless retains the façade of universal sovereignty by its mediation through the personal utterance. Although it seems that "On the outside, I am smooth and quiet and brown. / and the world loves me.," the conflict with the outside world is in fact strictly superficial, for "... my hair is sad as reeds in a drying swamp— / All the rare birds with beautiful plumage / Flee from me" (Amichai, *Achshav* 4, translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav).

That he himself is the source of what takes place on the surface enables the speaker to become indistinguishable from others walking on the surface, and thereby to maintain the poem's concealment of the violence-producing mechanisms at play: Many are those who walk in one direction:

If only they knew, only a few know that.
I came from within myself as from the bosom of the earth, warm,
vigorous, burning and spilling amongst everyone
in the wide world. (Amichai, *Achshav* 8)

This result in the denial of the violence inflicted by the post-Westphalian sovereign, the very one who prohibits illegitimate acts of violence, namely, acts of revenge. However, since such violence is directed against "stateless" refugees (Arendt 269-90)—namely, Palestinians driven off their lands by denying them the protection of the sovereign law—it effectively becomes an act of revenge. The ironic representation of violence against Palestinians thus becomes the figurative basis for marking the events of the Naqba as a military, real rather than imaginary act of revenge. Keeping up the appearances of normalcy involves such cruelty, to the extent that the speaker in the cycle "[name of cycle]" wishes to spare his mother the sight of the war's aftermath, which he sees as an act of revenge.

To this end, the speaker retells the biblical story of Ishmael and Hagar, and identifies his mother with Hagar, who became the target of Sarah's vengeance for her intimate relations with Abraham:

She put me,
as Hagar did Ismael,
under the bushes.

So that she won't see me dying, in war (Amichai, *Be-Merchak* 43-44)

The speaker's endangerment in war is made equivalent to Hagar's risking of her son's life, when she is forced to leave him under a bush. That the act of revenge does not in the end take place turns revenge itself into a natural, self-evident, fact within the framework of a normalized citizenship that neutralizes its naming as vengeful, much like in the legal motto that appears in all rental contracts, "collectively and individually," which is the title of Amichai's well-known poem "The Two of Us Together and Each of Us Alone" (*The Poetry* 5, translation Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld). The poem places its speaker beyond any military or violent conflict: "The fighters are waiting behind the hills. / Compassion is what we dearly need. / The two of us together and each of us alone. // The moon is sawing the clouds in half. / Come, let's step forth for a lovers' duel. / Just the two of us at love before the warring camps. / It still may be possible to change it all. / The two of us together and each of us alone." In other words: just like the Hebrew rhyming of "fighters" [lohamim] and "compassion" [rahamim]: [in Hebrew: Mehachorey ha-har hiku ha-lohamim / Kama zekukim anu le-rahamim], so does the pairing of the lovers' unity and separation create a transcendence of the military conflict, and clarifies that Amichai, just like A. B. Yehoshua, imagines the state of emergency as normally and naturally rooted in Israeli reality, and seemingly as a state of peace that exists under Westphalian law, turning the materiality of the violence of Israeli war into a post-Westphalian act.

Just like the title of the book, which rejects any utopian aspirations, "Now and in Other Days," the conclusion of the poem also highlights the static character of the state of emergency in which the fighters are waiting, making any progression or redemptive future impossible: "Take me in. / For us there's no angel who will come to redeem. / For we are together. Each of us alone." Such stasis clings on to the present experienced as dangerous, for fear that the state of emergency will result in a change for the worse. The same applies to the poem "The Opening of the Road Barked" (*The Poetry* 36) and "Your Life and Death, Father," which opens with the following lines: "Let us drink, father, / To the flowers, to the

ideas, / I who was your hope / Now am hoped no more" (*A Life* 16, translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav). In the cycle "Six Poems for Tamar" Amichai returns time and again to the stasis that binds the love protecting the speaker to the state of emergency: "I'll wake up early and bribe the coming day / to be kind to us." "Every day of our life together/ Ecclesiastes cancels a line of his book." This is especially evident in the lines: "Like the taste of blood in the mouth, / spring was upon us – suddenly." (*The Poetry* 12-3, translated by Stephens Mitchell).

For the Israeli sovereign to be able to deny the legitimacy of revenge, it must first deny that Israel is presently under a state of emergency. Nissim Kalderon offers insight into the "State Generation's" turning a blind eye to the state of emergency and repressing its existence, despite that it had been well in place during 1950s and 1960s Israel. According to Kalderon, the contemporary authors' distance from reality had made then "a very strong literature evolve, vital for its writers and readers". Such literature depended on "Zach's separation of the inside the poem and its outside, first and foremost through the abstraction of time and place." Kalderon demonstrates his position by Zach's poem "My Chocolate Rooster": "we got this far through a society, within which we haven't found our place. / through debts we could not have lived" (Kalderon, 17, 20). The debts and the placelessness are here that expression of the impossibility of living in tandem with the moral demands of the Israeli state of emergency.

This Westphalian imagination is, without a doubt, the reason for the outright denouncement of revenge by the "State Generation" writers, for the realization of revenge entails the transgression of sovereign law. For these writers, its internalization as a universal law makes revenge an illegitimate political act—occasionally by utilizing the avenging figure of Samson that so often recurs in Amichai's poetry. Amichai even takes the critique of revenge one step further, when the speaker in "I Want to Die in My Bed" describes his transformation from the Samson-like biblical figure into "heroic" soldier, bereft of any will to fight a war utterly alien to him, and who obeys the sovereign rule that prohibits vengeance: "Samson's a hero, thanks to his long black hair. / I had to be taught to bend the bow, to dare, / They made me a hero-on-call, they sheared my head. / I want to die in my bed." (*The Poetry* 34, translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld). In "Ballad of the Washed Hair," Amichai again takes up Samson's weakness when he writes "A girl who has washed her hair / asks the hard world, as if it were Samson, / where is it weak, what is its secret." (*The Selected* 20-21, translated by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell). In "Songs to Rosh Hashana" the speaker compares Samson to "Jesus who stretched out his hands, hanging on a board, / is like Samson, who also stood stretching his hands between the columns." Such comparison nevertheless turns out to be misguided: "Only us, after some time, / will see there's a difference" (*Be-Merchak* 43). Samson is an avenger powerless to change neither his past nor his future. Conversely, Jesus's messianism invites a new reading of all the events leading up to his crucifixion, and, to be sure, implies the possibility of his resurrection (*Be-Merchak* 44)). Perhaps this is what Amichai had in mind when he titled his book "Two Hopes Away,"—with the one exacting revenge, thereby fulfilling hope for something unattainable and futile, and the other amounts to the hope of the dodger excluding himself from the collective, thereby refraining from enacting refusal, resistance, or revenge. But in "The Right Angles: Hebrew Quatrains, no. 43" (*A Life* 44, translated by Benjamin and Barbara Harshav), Amichai makes clear what the title means:

Two hopes away from the battlefield, I had a vision of peace.
My tired head must go, my feet dream a dream, do not cease.
The scorched man said: I'm the bush that burned with no trace.
You may. Leave your shoes on your feet. This is the place.

This burned man is the one who gave his body and life for the realization of peaceful life. Unlike the biblical story of Moses, it is not the bush but the man who was burned and consumed. The burned man tells the speaker in the poem that striving for peace takes a heavy toll, but it will eventually deliver him to safety. The sovereign in the poem is not God, as in Moses's case, but rather the burned dead, who annuls the religious ritual and brings the speaker to "the place," that is, to God as yet another sovereign. The burned soldier—who is this other God—is the sovereign responding to the two hopes, the distance between which and the battle enables the speaker to envision a possibility for peace that will end the fighting. The first hope is that of the exhausted soldier, whose involvement in the battle compels him to keep walking. The second hope is that of the one floating above the ground, for he is suffused with a utopian sensation of peace that he believes his legs to be dreaming.

It seems that the crucial question here concerns the relation between these two hopes—the exhausted, meandering one on the one hand, and the one hovering above in hope for peace, on the other hand. How such hope-ful exhaustion leads to a hope for peace? One possible answer is that the burned man, who abolishes any theological dimension that has to do with war, is what links the two. In

place of a theological goal foreseen by the Bible he presents a new kind of linkage, one founded on a different sovereignty that has nothing to do with the regulation of the violence of sovereign law. It therefore exempts the speaker from any and all negotiations over the limits of violence, including that of revenge.

[E]

This is exactly the course of action taken by Amos Oz, one of the prominent figures of the "State Generation" writers. In his essay "The State as 'Reprisal Operation,'" published in 1962, he charges Uri Zvi Greenberg's poetry, arguing that it is written out of a strong sense of a state of emergency, which according to Oz ignores what he sees as the normality of the Israeli condition.

According to Oz, it is precisely a generation that had formed in a pathetic period, as in close to the establishment of the Israel, that "naturally tends to barricade itself behind apathy and suspicion against all manner of furious admonitions and sermonizing denunciations." This apt articulation of Statehood Generation's oppositional stance against the pathos of their literary predecessors, brings Oz to the literary-historiographical conclusion that "this sentiment is one of the reasons for the disappearance of the scolders' endurance, a position once so typical to new Hebrew literature in its early days, which had slowly diminished in the Revival Generation and ensuing generations."

However, despite Oz's appreciation of Uri Zvi Greenberg's poetry as one whose pathos breaks through the Israeli incredulity toward the state of emergency, he nonetheless rejects it in toto, on behalf of "the recoil and revulsion experienced by any person that holds humanistic values when confronted with the value-system on whose behalf Greenberg takes the admonisher's podium" ("The State" 64). To reconcile what seems like a contradiction Oz poses an aesthetic supposition, which actually disguises a political one, and which characterizes the writers and critics of the "State Generation," as well as astutely distinguishes the artistic grandeur of the work from its political stance (Kalderon 10).

But Oz, who worries that Greenberg's political positions subsist beneath the surface of the Israeli discourse, vehemently attacks Greenberg's support of Israel's reprisal operations, and even concludes generally that Greenberg's poetry treats the state of Israel itself as "the Jewish people's grand 'reprisal operation' against its historical fate throughout the generations in exile."

Oz ties Greenberg's anti-diasporic stance to Jewish self-hatred, from which he surmises that Greenberg demands from the Israeli sovereignty's present a dramatic transfiguration of the behavior of the new Jew, which according to Oz "is founded on satisfaction of revenge, and a turn to the past." But Oz himself—who insists that a thin line separates "the understandable, human sensation of delight of any Jew confronted by the symbols of independence, the flag, a military parade, and the twisted, pathological delight incited upon hearing a description such as 'the Israeli martial law in El Arish'"—admits, in fact, to Zionism's potential to move easily from a moderate use of symbols of sovereignty, toward the establishment of Israeli sovereignty on the desire for vengeance. Just like his contemporaries, Oz represses the Israeli state of emergency, and therefore he utterly rejects Greenberg's demand to form a national emergency government. But Oz, whose denunciation of vengeance originates from on a call for a moderate relation to the Jewish past, argues, at the same breath, that the Jewish world "ceased to die." Oz's rejection of the desire for vengeance is therefore founded upon a Zionist sovereignty that has severed itself from the nonexistent hence non-sovereign Jewish past, and that rejects the Zionist maxim, "to be a people among peoples." In other words, Oz's resistance to be "a people among peoples" in the violent sense, is at the same time a denial of the Jewish state of emergency, which enables him and other writers of the "State Generation" to imagine in their writing a Westphalian Jewish sovereign that delegitimize the violence of revenge. But, as argued above, the material situation is altogether different. Greenberg's tempestuous poetry is indeed revolting, but as far as Oz is concerned, it has a kernel of truth, which is the state of emergency over which the Israeli sovereign presides.

The understanding that Zionism is a project of vengeance is overwhelmingly supported by the views of Jewish settlers in the occupied territories settlers, who tend to favor the land over the state. As Hanan Porat put it, "the idea that sovereignty is a condition for settlement is wrong" (qtd. in Shenhav 45). In other words, the settlers' notion of Zionism allows them to act outside Israeli sovereignty, so that their violence towards the Palestinians requires no legitimation from the Israeli sovereign, which considers it a vengeful one.

It seems that it is therefore possible to define the 1948 war and the Naqba as acts of Jewish revenge directed at the Palestinians. Shenhav considers the material violence of the Westphalian sovereign an effect of "sovereign chasms" (Shenhav 37), which the sovereign tries to fill or cover,

thereby determining any transgression of his rule as an illegitimate act of revenge. As opposed to a Schmittian and a Westphalian sovereign that is founded on political theology that is itself based on the state of emergency, this "perforated" sovereignty subsumes the transgression of the law within the law itself. It is true that Amichai, as opposed to Yehoshua, problematizes the power of the sovereign in the poem "Good Full of Mercy," by casting God as a forsaking sovereign. The speaker in the poem expresses his disappointment in this sovereign: "Were God not full of mercy / there would be mercy in the world, and not just in Him." (*The Poetry* 99, translated by Robert Alter). But Amichai eventually develops this protest into a position of aporetic embarrassment and abandonment of all protests. He does, in fact, recounts his personal experience in battle when he testifies that "I, who hauled from the hills dead bodies, / can say that the world is empty of mercy.", but he then immediately states that "I who was Salt King by the sea, / who stood indecisive at my window" and presents himself as powerless against the sovereign, who could have explained the meaning or reason of the victims of war: "I, who must solve riddles despite myself, / know that were God not full of mercy, / there would be mercy in the world / and not just in Him."

And indeed, this deceptive spectral existence that haunts the law from within and from without (Shenhav 38), disrupts the linear theological trajectory of the Israeli sovereign. This deception is manifested in the figure of the living-dead, which was very popular in the "Palmach generation's" poetry, which the "State Generation" writers strongly attacked, as in Amir Gilboa's or Amichai's poetry. Yet it is precisely their criticism of the living-dead figure which forcefully testifies to the internalization of sovereignty, for by embracing the finality of death these writers assert the sovereign's prerogative to send soldiers to their deaths. Consequently, they accepted the sovereign's pretense of delegitimizing revenge, which in fact depends on denying that Israel is under a state. Such disregard for the state of emergency is evident in Amichai's poem "I Am Not Ready," which expresses indifference to this state: "For the water are come in even unto the soul and I'll be told / we came to you following all the things that happen, / we came from afar, and now we are here, / whether you are ready or not" (*Be-Merchak* 23). The criticism of the misleading living-dead stance accepted without question Ben Gurion's official political theology, which was internalized by Amichai's poetry (and that of many other poets of the "State Generation"). This internalization of Ben Gurion's messianic narrative of the establishment of Israel is evident in his poem "Nine Months" in the lines: "And he who comes to redeem us / will go back, for we are redeemed" (*Achshav* 50).

The "State Generation" poets' literary alternative to the living-dead figure that dominated the 1948 war poetry was, I argue, which allowed them to dodge a direct confrontation with the literary choice of the 1948 poetry. The ironic gaze that enables evasion often translates to a focus on phases of transition, which nevertheless fails to take responsibility for the represented events. Such is the case in Amichai's "Rain Falls on the Faces of My Friends" (*Achshav* 10), dedicated to Dicky, his commander who died in the battle over Huleikat. The poem invokes the term "re'i," [my friend] common to the "palmach poetry" as the Hebrew equivalent of the Red Army's "comrade." The poem does make a sharp distinction between dead and living soldiers, but the fact that it ends with "'od" [more] effects the temporal obscurity associated with being "in-between."

[F]

The temporality of Biblical Hebrew's present continuous, conspicuous in many of Amichai's poems, attests to the fact that instead of acknowledging that the state of emergency is an exception requiring a collective endeavor of ongoing rectification and rehabilitation, Amichai opts to conclude his poem with temporality of never-ending with the line "now and in other days"—a line that signifies an eternal present of violence and trauma, whose cause and originator should remain unknown and unquestioned, as much as the question of who is responsible for them and how to end them. Surely, the temporal logic of the book's title, *Now and in Other Days*, is an expression of an impassioned opposition to the urgency entailed in declaring a state of exception, which, as Carl Schmitt argued, constitutes the one who declares it as a sovereign. Amichai, however, submits to the constant, uncontested presence of the state of emergency which seems to lack the dramatic moment of declaration that will constitute the sovereign. In fact, it lacks even the revolutionary moment of the Declaration of Independence which had transformed the "State to Come" into a sovereign state.

I would argue that the permanence of the state of emergency in Amichai is manifest in the deflection of the ironic gaze away from the wound; a deflection, according Gershon Shaked, which is a typical device of "Statehood Generation" writers, for whom the existence of the state is an uncontested fact that makes redundant the urgency of Zionist desire to arrive at the moment of rehabilitation of the

wounded soldier's fragmented subjectivity. In contrast, Haim Guri, from the former generation, wrote his poem "1923-1958," published during the same period of the flowering of the poetry of "The State Generation," which opens with the famous line "And I have no time," expresses a collective desire to end the state of emergency as quickly as possible. This is evident where he writes: "My life has passed between newspapers./ Breathless / From running short distances – / For God's sake!" (Guri 259).

Guri here rejoins to the classical Zionist stance, which from its inception—and definitely since the Balfour Declaration—includes a collective imaginary of linear time (Kronfeld, *Margins* 287), one which leads the solution of the "Jewish question" in the land of Israel. Zionist collectivity corresponded to a consciousness of those who saw themselves, and in fact still see themselves, as "making history." The constant need for a state of emergency enabled the Zionists to continue acting relentlessly and endlessly. It looks like that unlike Guri's poetry, Amichai's poetry presents itself as free of this Zionist axiom of linear historical progress (Zvik, "Baderech" 95; Kronfeld, *The Full* 287), which commits one to the constant promulgation of the state of emergency. But this is just a superficial impression. This can be deduced from Harshav's statement: "Amichai was an anti-political political poet, he praised the intensity of the moment, the temporary experience of love 'now, with no certainty about any past or future, the mundane values of just living and living" (*The Polyphony* 178). In other words: If Guri's poetry represents the historical progress of Zionism, Amichai's praising the present can be understood as a suppression or a kind of blindness to the fact that it is written during a political state of emergency. Therefore, Harshav's contradictory definition of Amichai's poetry' as "anti-political political poet" can be understood as an anti-political blindness that creates a political act.

This is the reason why we can portray Amichai's poetry as also committed to the never-ending state of constantly "taking action" which is strengthened by the undemocratic contradiction that underlies Israeli sovereignty, which divides the unity of the sovereign and enables him both to oppress the Palestinian citizens and to justify retroactively the violence of the Naqba and its persistence to this very day. For Guri as well for Amichai, ending the state of emergency, therefore, runs against the Israeli sovereign's interest.

As Agamben argued, assuming responsibility could only be realized by means of the sovereign law (21-4); however, since the Israeli sovereign is but an imagined democratic unity, both the sovereign and his soldiers are able to evade legal responsibility for the declared state of emergency. For this reason, Amichai's poetry, founded on its author's internalization of the Israeli sovereign's law as democratic, universal and moral, is unable to legitimize openly a particular revenge, rendering it an illegitimate use of violence of "the one taking the law into one's own hands."

The idea of Jewish vengeance against the gentiles stems directly from the latter's violent "solution" for the "Jewish question," recurring in Europe throughout history. According to Leon Pinsker's "Auto-Emancipation," which is without a doubt the foundational text of modern Jewish nationalism, the liminal presence of Jews in Europe was the main cause for outbreaks of anti-Semitic attacks. Pinsker published his essay anonymously ("by a Russian Jew") in Berlin as a response to the wave of anti-Semitic attacks that swept through eastern Europe in the 1880s. Pinsker had Western-European Jews in mind as an audience, but it had a bigger impact in the Eastern parts of the continent. The principle that guided Pinsker's position was that Jewish efforts to assimilate themselves into local populations had failed to solve the "Jewish question." The cause of antisemitism as "xenophobia" was, according to Pinsker, the result of Jewish liminal existence in Europe as specters, which provoked violent anti-Semitic responses. Consequently, argued Pinsker, the Jews were compelled to reconstitute themselves as members of a modern nation, thereby becoming "a people among peoples."

This is why Pinsker saw auto-emancipation, that is Jewish self-emancipation, as the main goal of European Jewry. For Pinsker, this goal could be achieved only through creating a Jewish space in which Jewish liminal existence could be normalized. But Pinsker's solution, which involved the instantaneous immigration of Jews out of Europe (made unequivocally clear in Hillel the Elder's maxim serving as an epigram to Pinsker's essay: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if not now, when?"), failed to take into account the Jewish need for revenge, through which they could violently settle their historic score, violently, with those who imposed martyrdom on them for so many years. Thus, the realization of Pinsker's goal was perceived by a considerable part of European Jewry to imply not only peaceful creation of a Jewish space, but also exacting a violent revenge as a response to antisemitism. The long tradition of the downtrodden and oppressed Jew created a fragmentary subjectivity, whose way to grapple with its own martyrological fragmentariness was by means of a violent response that would unify this fragmented Jewish subjectivity, if only temporarily. The act of revenge is doubtless an empty and useless one, since it cannot change the past, nor does it change anything in the world, that is, in the perpetrator, in any significant way. Exacting revenge on the perpetrator is not of any use to the

avenger, barring the satisfaction of the desire for revenge, and a momentary restoration of agency for his or her own subjectivity.

Pinsker did not initially specify the location of the new space onto which Jews will immigrate from anti-Semitic Europe. Later pressures made him mention Palestine, or Zion (as it was called for theological reasons on which modern Jewish nationalism was founded), as the space in which the "Jewish question" will be resolved. Thus, after changing his mind with respect to Zion as the preferred destination for this solution, he later became the secretary general of the Lovers of Zion (*Hibbat Zion*) group.

I argue that this was the moment in which the *Hibbat Zion* movement was transformed from a movement of longing for a homeland, forsaken centuries ago, to a colonial movement. This is a Schmittian moment in which the material, territorial, solution to the "Jewish problem" crystallized as a political stance, which firmly held itself against the Arab natives of Palestine as its political and material enemy. Carl Schmitt's definition of the political as the antagonism between friend and enemy neatly characterizes the power relations in Palestine ever since the 1880s. The Jews thus turned into Zionists, who understood early on that this endeavor will entail a violent confrontation between European Jews and native Palestinians. This is the moment in which Zionism called for immigration to Palestine, as a necessity of a state of emergency. Amichai, on the other hand, in his poem "Half the People in the World," presents us with the pretense of his detachment from any political conflict:

"Half the people in the world
love the other half,
half the people
hate the other half.
Must I because of this half and that half
go wandering and changing ceaselessly [...] Half the people love,
half the people hate.
And where is my place between such well-matched half,
and through what crack will I see
the white housing projects of my dreams
and the barefoot runners on the sands
or. at least. the waving
of a girl's kerchief, beside the mound?" (*The Selected* 14-15, translated by Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell)

This is the zero point in which Jewish colonialism was born. Through immigration to Palestine, for clear political-theological reasons, Jewish sovereignty began a violent struggle to fortify its control over Palestine, which was by then called, as it is now, "Zion." The immigrants who transposed the "Jewish question" to Palestine regarded it as the place in which the "Jewish question" will be solved through their self-constitution as a Jewish sovereign, who is entitled to use violence to secure its control of space, even at the expense of the natives who had been living there prior to the Jewish immigrants' arrival.

However, the violence of the beaten, disintegrated, subjects has evolved into the form of revenge. Even if the latter was directed against the oppressive gentiles, the former's immigration to Palestine transformed the natives, metonymically, into targets for the immigrants' vengeful violence. As subjects that brought with them to Palestine their fragmentariness, which originates in Jewish martyrology, they sought to heal this fragmentariness through acts of revenge against Palestinians. The immigrants sought to end their Jewish liminality, as Pinsker defined it, by their violence towards Palestinians. That revenge is violence that takes place outside the imagined democratic law enabled the Jews to inflict it on Palestinians, so as to deny them the protection of sovereign law, and thus to substitute their former liminal existence in Europe by forcing the Palestinian to a liminal existence in the Middle East. The fact that the Naqba has never completed until the "right of Return" will be materialized turns the Palestinian subject in Israel into a liminal one, effectively present-absentees. In other words: Israel's refusal of the Palestinians' right of return entrenches them in the liminal mode of existence of those who reside outside their homeland yet refuse to surrender their will and right to return to it.

The fact that the many representations of the violence of war in Amichai's poetry—all of which prohibit individual acts of revenge that subvert the sovereign's law – are a-historical and universal indicates that in his poetry, Amichai submitted the representations of violence to the authority of the Israeli sovereign, as well as to its civic facade of universalism, and embraced uncritically a conception of Israeli sovereignty imagined as free of contradictions. Such compliance is quite unexpected when it comes from a poet who placed the individual combatant soldier on a pedestal; one whose personal acts of violence can only be realized as the vengeance of he "who takes the law into his own hands."

[H]

This internalization of an imagined universalist, non-contradictory Israeli sovereignty, expressed in Amichai's poetry, explains why in his monumental novel, *Not in This Time and Not in This Place*, published in 1963, two years after the Eichmann trial and after Amichai's return for a visit his hometown Würzburg in Germany. In this novel Amichai disapproves of his protagonist's plans for revenge. Joel, an archeologist from Jerusalem, returns to his hometown after the Holocaust, and feels a need to avenge the fate of Ruth, his old love: "What would I do there? Perhaps I'll avenge little Ruth, Manheim's daughter, whom the people of Weinburg sent to the crematorium" ("Weinburg" is the name in the novel of Amichai's hometown Würzburg) (13).

The novel features both first and third person narration, both of which refer to a single character yet bifurcate into two parallel storylines: one takes place in Jerusalem and the other in Germany. When he is in Jerusalem he dreams that he is in Weinburg, his childhood hometown, and that he sees girls playing in front of his Jerusalem house: "Little Ruth also played there. I told her to stop it, for we were grown up and she had been burned in the terrible crematorium." (*Lo meachshav* 14-15). Ruth, who was Amichai's friend growing up, and who stands at the center of his novel *Not in This time, not in This Place*, is already present in his book of poetry *Two Hopes Away*. The speaker in the poem tells the reader about god, who abandoned her, and who is cruel and judgmental. His decision

Spit direct fire and hit the dogs,
My hands, little Ruth and also those
Who are not marked by numbers. (*Be-Merchak* 48-9)

In an interview with Dan Omer, Amichai tells of how he and she, who was handicapped as a result of a car accident, were attacked by several boys, who "pushed her to the ground, too, and I heard her prosthetic leg make a metallic sound. And this is one of the things I retained from all those Auschwitz stories. I have never been to Auschwitz, but I did hear the prosthetic leg. It wasn't anonymous. Those boys also knew who she was, and knew that she was handicapped. This girl disappeared in the Holocaust" (Omer 4).

The analogy between the two plot lines, which albeit the fact they are braid together their difference is quite clear, is disclosed when Yoel misleads everybody: some think he went to Weinburg "for remembrance and revenge," while others think he went to the Negev for his archaeological digs (*Not in* 47); Yoel himself announces that he will stay in Jerusalem, and adds that "I will stay here; I will not go back to Weinburg to close the door on my longings; I will not take vengeance; I will stay here until it gets dark" (*Lo meachshav* 36, translated by Shlomo Katz), while he tells Dr. Levi that he came from his hometown: "I told him about conquering Beer Sheba at dawn and how I carried a friend on my shoulder thinking he is wounded when he was already dead. And Dr. Levi told me about the destroyed synagogue" (365).

Much like Amichai's early poems, this novel, too, resolves the conflict between the internalization of the Israeli sovereign's law—here intensified by virtue of archeology's constitutive power to shape Israeli nationality. Dr. Manheim says to Joel: "I heard that you are an archeologist. It is a good deed to dig in the land of the Bible and to uncover proof for the Holy Scriptures" (30).

The Jerusalem storyline forces the protagonist to submit to Israeli sovereignty, while Joel's visit to his German hometown accentuates his Jewish identity. Although the intensification of his Jewish identity highlights Israel's underlying contradiction between democracy and Jewishness, Joel keeps clenching onto the imagined universalism of Israeli sovereignty and its prohibition of revenge, which he obeys by deeply repressing the oppressive, torn nature of Israeli sovereignty.

The fact that after all the Holocaust narrative and the 1948 war narrative become one piece in Yoel's subjectivity (Ben-Dov 113), can explain the failure of Yoel's desire to take revenge. In contrast to the most parts of his poetry Amichai reveals in the 1963 novel his pre-1948 biography as a child in Germany and the horrific narrative of what happened there later (Scharf-Gold 62-88). But the fact he published his novel after the Eichmann Trial, which was a very important moment in the constitution of the Israeli Sovereignty, has a lot to do with the subordination of the narrative of the Holocaust to the narrative Israeli Sovereignty. All this brings us to the fact that the main reason of Yoel's refrain from taking revenge is that the sovereign cannot allow revenge, in principle. From the point of view of its effect on the subject, revenge is a personal act that contributes nothing to the outside world. The sovereign law, which regulates and controls the violence enacted outside the avenging subject, therefore forbids acts of vengeance that undermine its authority.

Revenge imparts to the avenger nothing but a passing moment of the illusion of rehabilitating one's post-traumatic fragmented self. A very clear example of this nothingness can be found in the Talmud:

The famous Rabbinic definition of the verse (Yoma 23a) distinguishes between taking revenge and bearing a grudge. If a man asks his fellow to lend him his sickle and he refuses and on the morrow the second asks the first to lend him his axe and he refuses and he replies: 'I will not lend it to you, just as you would not lend me your sickle' – that is revenge. But if a man asks his fellow to lend him his sickle and he refuses and on the morrow the second asks to lend him a garment and he replies: 'Here it is, I am not like you' --- that is bearing a grudge. Maimonides adds that the wise will refuse to take revenge because worldly things are simply not worth it. To feel a sense of outrage because someone has refused to lend one a sickle is to magnify the importance of a sickle. (Jacobs 271)

And indeed, the novel's epigraph—*על דאטפת אטפוך, וסוף מטיפייך יטוףך*—is taken from *Pirkei Avot* (The Ethics of the Fathers):

"Seeing a skull floating on the water, he said:
'Because you drowned others, they drowned others, they drowned you,
And those who drowned you will themselves eventually be drowned'" (*Pirkei Avot* B:7, 38)

The Commentary to this epigraph states:

This enigmatic statement by Hillel expresses a general law view that evil does not go unpunished, i.e. the principle of measure for measure. While this may be a generally operative rule, it should not be constructed as an excuse to blame victim for their suffering. If a person had been murdered, this does not mean that he/she had committed sins worthy of this tragic end. It would be abhorrent to make such a claim about innocent victims. Hillel surely did not know the circumstance leading to death of a person whose skull he saw floating in the water, but this experience triggered his reflections on the general rule of measure for measure. (Jacobs 271)

The motto of the novel denounces revenge's vicious cycle, since you are killed for killing another, and the one who killed you is destined to be killed. And in Amichai's "Poems for a Women": "I need to kill my brother. / My brother needs to kill me" (Amichai, *Be-Merchak* 59). The function of novel's motto can be explained by Renee Girard's thesis about the collapsing of the juridical system as a cause of a cyclical acts of revenge in which every act of violent imitates and reacts to the former one (169). Thus Amichai warns his readers against committing any act of revenge. The main reason of this warning is that since cyclical acts of revenge exist outside the law of the sovereign, the revenge has no purpose and no meaning.

The taboo on revenge is precisely that which allows the sovereign to circumvent the undemocratic, historical rather than universal nature of his crimes against the Palestinians, and to portray the crimes performed in the Naqba as an exception to the otherwise moral nature of the Israeli sovereign law.

Since Amichai's ban revenge cannot be justified only by an imagined sovereign, then from a materialist perspective the Israeli sovereign state's collective violence finds its justification in no more than the semantic conversion of "murder"—the sort of violence unprotected by the sovereign law, namely, revenge—into a legitimate "killing" sanctioned by the sovereign law. Thus, what underpins the legitimate violence—such as the one involved in war—of the Zionist law is nothing but an act of revenge, which includes, among others, the Naqba, Israel's reprisal operations, and the oppression of the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The responses of critics who do not belong to the "State Generation" become interesting in this context, those that have not internalized Israeli sovereignty and its restraining power. Two of them, Avraham Green Hagorni and Gideon Katzanelson, expressed their disappointment of the fact that Yoel did not realize his desire for revenge. (Zvik 36). Exacting revenge on the Germans is for them a necessary act, whose absence is indicative of the fact that Amichai disconnects the personal from the collective in a wrong way. According to them, Amichai makes the trip a nostalgic journey into his childhood, assigning revenge a minor role, a duty they believe he is too weak to realize.

Katzanelson, who was known for his attack on the "State Generation" in his book *Where are they headed*, sees the novel as "the cry of annihilation": "there is nothing to be done. The Man of our times is divided in two," and only intermittently he opens the "drawer of the present" or "drawer of the past." In this kind of declarations Katzanelson finds "a nihilistic air of a writer and a whole literary generation," whose slogan is "We don't care and leave us be" (Zvik 36). But these harsh criticisms (just like those expressed by Daniel Ben Nahum, who defined Amichai's poetry as a "poetry of alienation" (Zvik 72) can be easily translated as what I called the imagination of universal sovereignty, evident in the works of Amichai and other writers of the "State Generation." And indeed, Gershon Shaked, one of Amichai's

contemporaries, saw in the novel "the 'war of independence' of a person fighting for his life," which is "a war of liberation from all social-national commitment in all its acceptable forms" (Zvik 37). Moreover, this trans-generational conflict (in the case of Ha-Gorni, this is not one of age difference, but of his institutional-educational role), which was translated into a fundamental difference between the critics' self-perception who did not yet internalize the rule of the Israeli sovereign, and the writers of the "State Generation," who saw themselves as naturally the citizens of Israeli sovereignty

A materialist interpretation of the violent acts executed on behalf of the colonialist Zionist sovereign exposes them as acts of revenge from the very outset. When Yoel talks to Mina in Jerusalem, he recounts her words as an explicit admission to her desire to realize the violence of the Palestinian Naqba as an act of revenge:

"A woman too small in a house that is too big." She agreed, with a light sigh and a clownish pathetic look. Indeed, the old Arab house was big. Two pillars supported the ceiling in the room where they stood. Mina went up to one of the pillars and put her arms around it. – "A slim little Samson embracing the pillars," he said. – "Perish my shoulders with the Philistines." – "Who are they?" – "You, and all the rest... You know, Joel, I can't master this house and all its rooms." (Amichai, *Lo me'achshav* 8)

By imagining the structure of Israeli sovereignty as unified, moral and democratic, Amichai thereby obscures his acceptance of coming to terms with the legitimacy of the violent acts executed and justified in the name of Jewish sovereignty, when, in fact, such acts are tantamount to acts of revenge unsanctioned by the universal law.

[I]

Indeed, already in Peretz Smolenskin's *The Revenge of the Covenant* from 1882, considered to be the first Zionist novel, the author championed, as a response to the violence of the pogroms, taking revenge on the Gentiles. Another very famous example are Abba Kovner's missives [*dapim kravi'im*], written in 1948 for the combatants of the Givati Brigade, which described the battle against the Egyptian enemy as a revenge for the death of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Years later, Amos Oz's attack on Uri Zvi Greenberg intimated this sentiment in the title he chose for his famous essay "The State as Reprisal Operation."

In yet another place, in Oz's essay "Under this Blazing Lights," which is possibly the most important political manifesto of his literary credo, he defines the role of the writer as the "tribe's wizard." Oz thus reveals his own identity, and creates a parallel between "the tribe's wizard" and "The Watchman of the House of Israel," the political term coined by Yitzhak Arter, a member of the Jewish Enlightenment (the *haskala*) and the anti-Hassidic satire writer at the beginning of the 19th century (Arter). Arter used the term to characterize the Hebrew writer as a modern Jewish sovereign. Thus, Oz comes to define himself as a writer of a tribe, which in contrast to the enlightened "The Watchman of the House of Israel," whose sovereignty is founded on rationality and universality, is not subjected to the laws of universal reason that ground the concept of citizenship, nor to Zionism's universalist pretense of "A People Like All Peoples." Oz therefore creates a perfect identity between Greenberg's Zionism, that of "the state as reprisal operation," and his own identity as the ethnocentric "wizard of the tribe," thereby exposing the entirety of the Zionist project to be a reprisal, or a material act of revenge.

[J]

All of this propels us toward a critical account of the structure and motives of the Zionist project. The political function of the Zionist cultural project of inventing the "new Jew" was to resolve the "Jewish Question" by absolutely delegitimizing Jewish existence in exile; a solution conceived as the adequate response to the Christian violence inflicted on European Jews throughout history. In place of the "old Jew," whose fragmented subjectivity was an effect of the violence inflicted on him, Zionism conjured up a different figure—one that will restore a sense of wholeness to the old fragmented Jewish subjectivity as described in Shimon Bernfeld's *Book of Tears*.

To this end, however, Zionism engendered a counter-violence. And indeed, from its very inception, Zionist culture and literature (for example, in the writing of Micha Yosef Berdyczewski, who was the spiritual guide of the *Second Aliyah* pioneers) constituted a sovereign subject whose role was to produce, and regulate, violence. Yet that this violence was to be realized and was exercised by an ethnocentric,

non-universal, sovereign, which transformed it right from the start into a tribal violence—one that never transcends its reactive nature, that is, an aimless reaction that simply negates without creating something new. Thus, Smolenskin's call for the "building of the Land" as the proper response to the pogrom against the Jews is but a reaction, which has nothing to do with the constructivism championed by the Zionist labor movement.

That revenge serves no ends but itself thus turns the Zionist building of the land of Israel into a narcissistic act oblivious to otherness, which is measured only by Zionism's own standards, and which is submitted to a violence meant to serve the Zionist subject's narcissistic interests. This is precisely the function of the trope of mirroring Palestinian suffering, so prevalent in humanistic works of Hebrew literature such as S. Yizhar's *Khirbet Khizeh* or David Grossman's *The Yellow Wind*. These and other works revolve around a witness narrator whose recount of events originates from an autobiographical enunciation. The reality of Palestinian suffering represented in these works is indeed shocking. But the autobiographical nature of their linguistic mediation turns the testimony into a "mirror" in which the narrator sees and expresses Palestinian suffering in terms of his own and his people's suffering. We can therefore conclude that the Zionist's discourse of mirroring perceived the pogroms as a cause for building Jewish settlements in the land of Israel. The apparatus of the mirroring which brings the Jew to see himself in the figure of the Gentile, is based on a metonymic displacement of the revenge against Gentiles into a Jewish work of building the homeland.

And indeed in *Nekam Berit* (a covenant of vengeance) from 1882, Smolenskin sees the Zionist construction of the Jewish nationalism as an appropriate act of revenge. Also revealed in this novel is the theological character of Zionist revenge, which constitutes the Zionist sovereign by rehabilitating the covenant between God and the Israelites, which the people violated, and which sentenced the people of Israel to exile. In a typical Schmittian move, God's vengeful impulse toward his people, including the violence of the pogroms, is transformed into the people's revenge against the European. And indeed, as the first Zionist novel, *Nekam Berit* calls for an act of vengeance that will restore the covenant violated by the people, so that it could then be used for the constitution of the Jewish sovereignty.

The realization of Zionism through the building of the land of Israel is, therefore, an act of revenge realized in the displacement of the efforts to resolve the "Jewish Question," which had been transposed from Europe to the Middle East to become a violent Jewish colonialism. This colonialism constituted the Israeli sovereign as a Schmittian one, who employs an oppressive apparatus that has nothing to do with a democratic, universal sovereign.

[K]

As I argued, the act of revenge always gives rise to another act of revenge, reproducing vengeance potentially indefinitely. Thus the fact that the main power operating Zionist culture and politics expresses itself in an act of revenge that necessitates the continued existence of the state of emergency. Thus, for example, Israel's security policy in its early years was based on retaliatory actions, which therefore reproduced the cycle of revenge. In order to let Zionist violence to preserve this violent cycle of revenge, the state of emergency must itself be preserved. The cyclical movement about which Amichai writes in an untitled poem, which starts with the line "And the public square in the city" preserves the static presence of the state of emergency: "It is so that all the beginnings that are begun / become good and round endings. / And any of its endings is a go-ahead, / and your closeness – for me a gate to keep distance" (*Achshav* 48). But in order to endow the cycle of vengeance with legitimacy, the sovereign must act as a partial and fragmented one, that is, a tribal sovereign. For, the universal sovereign, as opposed to the tribal one, like the one that dominates Greenberg's poetry, as Oz remarks, forbids revenge.

It seems that now it becomes possible to address Amichai's novel's motto with more accuracy. It does refer to the sovereign's prohibition on revenge; but that is joined by understanding that this latter is the sovereign's objection to the cycle of vengeance that is founded on imagining sovereignty as a universal one, and whose materialist-symptomatic reading exposes its lack of universality. And indeed, that Israeli sovereignty exists as an ethnocentric sovereignty can account for the way in which it imagines itself as a universal one, which is supposed to prohibit revenge, which can be realized only outside the law of the sovereign.

But following the logic of the motto that quotes the words of Old Hillel, it seems that the fact that the Israeli sovereign is unified and universal only within the imaginary, forces it to oppose revenge's infinite cycle. But the only way that such opposition can be justified is through struggle within the

material base that makes it possible in the first place, and not through humanist resistance. For, it must be stressed, the justification for the continued existence of cyclical revenge has nothing to do with the sovereign's adoption of tribal customs, but rather to the displacement of the the state of emergency as the material base of cyclical revenge onto what is presented from a humanist point of view as immoral conduct.

Thus it seems that the Israeli sovereign's goal is to continually preserve the material reality that necessitates and justifies the state of emergency, which was declared into existence by the sovereign and which exists in Palestine for all practical matters since the British Mandate's 1945 emergency ordinances. In order to obey the law of revenge, the Israeli sovereign must act so that in Israel will forever persist a state of emergency, in which "Soldiers always train for some war. [...] But my girl yet walks through the streets / adorned in the jewels of the end-time / and the beads of the terrible danger / around her neck." "I Waited for My Girl and Her Steps Were Not There" (*The Poetry* 8, translated by Robert Alter). And in the poem "Friday Night" that opens with the following lines "Would you come to me tonight? / the laundry has dried in the yard" (*Achshav* 33), Amichai enacts the disregard for the eternal and traumatic state of emergency and its displacement onto somewhere else: "war, which never has enough, / is now in another place."

In the same poem Amichai replicates, like in A.B. Yehoshua's "identity card," the illusion according to which for the Israeli subject the borders of Israel are clearly defined: Or in other words, only the persistence of the state of emergency enables the Israeli sovereign, split and ethnocentric as it is, to endow itself with legitimacy for its own violence, which is a tribal, vengeful, one—that is, outside the law of the universal sovereign. Thus, as I argued, the Jewish sovereign's violence is taken out of the semantic field of revenge, and its deeds are not marked in Israeli discourse as "murder" but as "killing."

A materialist reading of the Israeli sovereign's violence can expose and criticize what it presents through Israeli public discourse as legitimate violence. Such materialist reading exposes Amichai's antiwar poetry as disconnected from any specific historical period (Openheimer 269), and by this to pretend the illegitimacy of the vengefulness of colonialist violence of the Zionist sovereign and subsequently of the Israeli sovereign.

That the goal of Zionism as it was articulated in the Biltmore Program in May 1942 was the establishment of a Jewish state (the term that the program actually used was "commonwealth," which was used by Hobbes and Bodin) makes it impossible to establish a state for Jews whose sovereign law would be universal, that is one that forbids revenge. Instead, the Biltmore Program was in fact an act that articulated Zionist action as a project of revenge.

And indeed, the violence of the imagined sovereign, which takes care to fulfill Israeli sovereignty's constant need to preserve the state of emergency, turns revenge into the driving force behind Zionist violence. Thus, through his wife Ruth, Yoel creates an identity between the 48 war and the biblical revenge against the Amalekites, when he states that in those days, his wife's eyes were like Moses' hands in the battle against the Amalekites. When in the battle goes favorably for the Israelites army, Moses' hands are lifted, and the same is true, Yoel says, of the days of the war in the Negev when she waited for him as he returned from night time military activity, with his friends, some of them are dead and some are wounded. The stable, unified, and universal Israeli sovereignty exists only in the imagination of the people, poets included, the real materialistic sovereignty will prohibit the revenge as a legitimized act of violence.

In the poem "When I Returned They Told Me There's No" the avoidance of revenge is clearly articulated. The story of Moses and revenge against the Amalekites is told from a place in which exhaustion, loneliness, and evading action bring the poem's speaker to withdraw from any notion of revenge: "I've gone very far, the war increased, / My thoughts grew weary / And heavy like the arms of Moses. / And there was no one to hold them up. I was where-from, now here, soon where-to." (*A Life* 33).

Thus Amichai, as much as Smolenskin, Kovner, Oz and many others, shows that in fact Zionist culture, from its inception until today, is not a series of acts of killings sanctioned by a universalist democratic sovereign protecting its equal citizens, but a continuous action of murderous revenge.

This is an ethnocentric sovereignty, which protects its Jewish citizens and abandons its Palestinian ones, which nonetheless pretends to be a universal Westphalian sovereignty, which protects all of its citizens. It is therefore a sovereignty which is based on a very deep gap between those who are protected by the Israeli sovereign and those which are oppressed and deserted as a result of its political structure. The exception is that which the sovereign abandons. The administrative interest that it has for it after its death is described by Amichai in his poem "Corpse in the Field" with a painful irony:

His blood was flung hastily and carelessly

like the clothes
of someone much too tired.
[...]
Mayors, UN army officials
measured the distance from living
to dead,
with right angles and compasses and little rulers,
with cigar boxes, with hard emotions,
with sharpened hopes
and bloodhounds. (*The Poetry* 25)

But, as I argued, the fact that for the "State Generation" writers, Israeli sovereignty is imagined as a universal Westphalian sovereignty, turns the materiality of violence that it directs at its enemies, both internal and external, to an act of revenge. In practice, the sovereign's law normalizes the conflictual power relations that exist between the sovereign's acts of control, and thus it presents the sovereign as a unified, universal one. Thus, in the end, imagining national sovereignty as Westphalian one has a crucial role in Amichai's poetry—we can understand it as a retreat to a safe place and an attempt to evade the responsibility for the fact that national civilian violence that requires the denial of its post-Westphalian nature is indeed violence of revenge.

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