



PROJECT MUSE®

Opening and Closing with Qohelet: The Late Work of Yehuda  
Amichai: A Discussion of *Patuah Sagur Patuah* ( *Open  
Closed Open* )

Eric Berk, William Cutter

Hebrew Studies, Volume 51, 2010, pp. 175-201 (Article)

Published by National Association of Professors of Hebrew



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/400583>

**OPENING AND CLOSING WITH QOHELET:  
THE LATE WORK OF YEHUDA AMICHAÏ:  
A DISCUSSION OF *PATUAḤ SAGUR PATUAḤ*  
(*OPEN CLOSED OPEN*)**

Eric Berk

*Skirball Hospice, A Program of the Los Angeles Jewish Home for the Aging*

and

William Cutter

*Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles*

Many critics have noted the densely wrought structure in *Patuaḥ Sagur Patuaḥ*, and have called attention to its rich inter-textual allusions and use of refrains and key words. (One thinks of Kronfeld, Bloch, Arpali, Alter, Band, and Gold.) But the major articles have not fully treated the heavy burden of association to the book of Ecclesiastes, Qohelet. In *Patuaḥ Sagur Patuaḥ*, Amichai created a multi-layered foundation in classic sources which serves as an underpinning to the overall autumnal stance and skeptic's vision of the 300 poem-units. In addition to the specific Qohelet allusions, there are nearly one hundred more elusive associations that emerge once the reader accepts the importance of the boldly etched references to Qohelet. The authors argue that, once Qohelet becomes the dominant metaphoric "trope," other more transient and innocent associations to the biblical scroll take on greater significance. While resisting a glib "allegoresis" (a tendency to see Qohelet in every possible space), the fact is that the Solomonic wise preacher lies in wait in a surprising number of corners of this extraordinary and weighty collection.

**1. THE UNITY OF *PATUAḤ SAGUR PATUAḤ* THROUGH QOHELET**

*Patuaḥ Sagur Patuaḥ* was Yehuda Amichai's final project, a "late work" in chronological and spiritual terms, in thematic interest, and in the richness of poetic technique. In this essay, we argue that Amichai's cosmos of both thematic and aesthetic coherence in *Patuaḥ Sagur Patuaḥ* is enhanced by an elaborate network of biblical citations and less direct allusions that reveal greater significance in their totality than might appear from examining the separate parts. *Patuaḥ Sagur Patuaḥ* is a collection of over 300 short stanzas, each of which can also stand alone. Several features in the total work add to its coherence—including a recurrence of themes, some interesting progressions from theme to theme and knitting of aesthetic genres into a heterocosm of mixed but related instances of prosody and style. But the bib-

lical material plays a particularly important part in the collection's imaginative unity, and it sets off a constant interplay between contemporary and biblical sensibilities.<sup>1</sup>

*Patuah Sagur Patuah* draws on numerous and separate biblical passages and ideas, some as subjects of the individual stanzas, others as sly allusions within stanzas of more general themes, and some intended to create a resonance between old and new themes. But the most salient of these biblical ideas and passages come from the book we know (in Hebrew) as “Qohelet,” “Ecclesiastes” in English. Allusions to Ecclesiastes dominate *Patuah Sagur Patuah* and turn the collection into a kind of conversation with Qohelet, the preacher's, ruminations about time, recurrence, doubt-skepticism, human agency, and memory, resulting in a melancholy acceptance and appreciation of the human condition.<sup>2</sup> These are indeed appropriate themes and attitudes for the Israeli laureate's “late work” and in themselves establish a strong association with the biblical scroll Qohelet. The task of our paper is to demonstrate how the thematic tone of the work is supported by intertextual strategies and to discuss the significance and range of those strategies.

## 2. INTERTEXTUALITY IN HEBREW POETRY

The intertextual element in Modern Hebrew poetry has complicated and enriched contemporary poetic texts far beyond the point of reference or allusion. While Clayton and Rothstein, in their anthology: *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*<sup>3</sup> have already presented numerous faces to the business of intertextuality, the practice has special meaning for Jews, and especially for poets in Israel. In Israeli cultural life the use of biblical material extends a dialogue with a Jewish past in an encounter between secular modernity and spiritual classicism; and it is also a way of claiming a national

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> A. Band, “*Hilun hakodesh, sugei habitui haintertextuali bashir shel Amichai*” (The secularization of the sacred (language): Aspects of intertextual expression in the poetry of Amichai), in *Al briaḥ ve'al yetzirah bemahshavah yehudit* (On versions of creation in Jewish thought; ed. R. Elijor and P. Schafer; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). See also S. Wieder, “*Alterman ve'amichai sharim leqohelet*” (Alterman and Amichai sing to Qohelet), *Dimui* 24 (2005): 73–75. See also C. Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism*, chap. 5, “On the Theories of Allusion and Imagist Intertextuality.” See also C. Kronfeld, “‘The Wisdom of Camouflage’: Between Rhetoric and Philosophy in Amichai's Poetic System,” *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 10.3 (1990): 469–491.

<sup>3</sup> J. Clayton and E. Rothstein, *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

heritage in aesthetic terms. Such usage is another form of what Anita Shapira called “restoring the Bible to the focus of Hebrew culture,” in her English article on the place of Tanak in contemporary Israeli culture,<sup>4</sup> and relates to the history of “*mikra*” in modern Hebrew poetry as amply discussed in Malka Shaked’s recent two volume anthology and lengthy introduction.<sup>5</sup> The issue of *The AJS Review* in which Shapira’s article is published includes articles on related aspects of biblical intertextuality by Gershon Shaked, Glenda Abramson, and Malka Shaked, which should be added to a discourse which has been fostered by the American scholar David Jacobson, and the work in Israel and America of Ruth Kartun Blum.<sup>6</sup> But Kronfeld’s studies draw the discussion closer than any other to the theoretical work of the schools of Tel Aviv poetics which have given rise to the most critical questions in the intertextual enterprise, and have also emphasized the place of Tanak as critical to the socio-linguistic environment of modern Israel. In all of these scholars and critics, the notion of modern midrash hovers, and Amichai gives expression to the practice of midrash in his title to the third poem: “*Tanakh Tanakh, itakh itakh, umidrashim aherim.*” Like countless of his poet colleagues—the best known in English being Carmi, Pagis, Ravikovitch, Goldberg, Ghouri, Gilboa, Wolloch, Zach, and Reich—Yehuda Amichai drew on Jewish tradition with a variety of techniques and for many purposes, but none has been more important intellectually than his enduring effort to surprise his readers with apparently dissonant associations—in much the same way as he works with similes. Nili Gold has discussed how texts work on Amichai’s poems, and how the reciprocity between poem and reader can form an original *perush* in the text.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes intertextual practice has actually been the subject of a poem, as in “*Sinanti mitokh megillat esther,*” (I have filtered from the book of Esther):

---

<sup>4</sup> A. Shapira, “The Bible and Israeli Identity,” *AJS Review* 28.1 (April 2004): 11–41.

<sup>5</sup> M. Shaked, *Lenezah anagheh: hamikra bashirah ha'ivrit ha'hadashah* (I shall play on you eternally: The Bible in Modern Hebrew poetry; 2 vols.; Tel Aviv: Miskal–Yedioth Aharonoth Books and Chemed Books, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> A. Shapira, “The Bible and Israeli Identity,” pp. 11–41. G. Shaked, “Modern Midrash: The Biblical Canon and Modern Literature,” *AJS Review* 28.1 (April 2004): 43–62. G. Abramson, “Israeli Drama and the Bible: Kings on the Stage,” *AJS Review* 28.1 (April 2004): 63–82. D. Jacobson, *Does David Still Play Before You?: Israeli Poetry and the Bible* (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 1997). R. Kartun-Blum, *Profane Scriptures* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> N. Gold, *Lo kabrosh: gilgulei imagim vetavniyot beshirat Yehuda Amichai* (Not like a cypress: Transformations of images and structures in the poetry of Yehuda Amichai; Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1994), chap. 2.

סִנְנֵתִי מִתּוֹךְ מְגֵלֶת אֶסְתֵּר אֶת מִשְׁקַע  
הַשְּׂמֻחָה הַגְּסָה וּמִתּוֹךְ סֵפֶר יִרְמְיָהוּ  
אֶת יְלֵלַת הַכָּאֵב בְּמַעֲיָסוֹ וּמִתּוֹךְ  
שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֶת הַחֲפוּשׁ הָאֵין סוֹפֵי  
אֲחֵר הָאֶהְבָּה וּמִסֵּפֶר בְּרָאשִׁית אֶת  
הַחֲלוּמוֹת וְאֶת קִיץ וּמִתּוֹךְ קֵהֶלֶת אֶת  
הַיְאוּשׁ וּמִתּוֹךְ סֵפֶר אֵיזֹב אֶת אֵיזֹב.  
וְהִדְבַקְתִּי לִי מִן הַשְּׂאֲרִיּוֹת סֵפֶר תְּנִיךְ חֶדֶשׁ.  
אֲנִי חַי מְצַנְנֵר וּמְדַבֵּק וּמְגַבֵּל וּבִשְׁלֹוּהוּ.

I have filtered from the book of Esther  
The residue and the vulgar joy  
And from the book of Jeremiah the  
Moaning pain in his bowels.  
And from the Song of Songs  
The endless searching  
For love and from Genesis the  
Dreams.....<sup>8</sup>

Putting aside the ambiguity of whether “*sinanti*” (Hebrew for “filter” or “vetted”) might refer to preserving as much as to sorting out, the poet proclaims his dominance over the biblical text—that is the decisive control over what is communicated, and enhances that dominance with a far-fetched analogical coda:

אִשָּׁה אֶחָת שְׁאַלָה אוֹתִי אֶמֶשׁ בְּרַחֹוֹב  
הַחֲשׁוּךְ עַל שְׁלוֹם אִשָּׁה אֶחָרָת  
שָׁמְתָה לֹא בְעֵתָהּ וְלֹא בְעֵתוֹ שֶׁל אֶף אֶחָד.  
מִתּוֹךְ עֵיפּוֹת גְּדוּלָה עָנִיתִי לָהּ:  
שְׁלוֹמָה טוֹב, שְׁלוֹמָה טוֹב.

A woman asked me last night on the dark street about another woman  
Who died before her time, before anyone’s time for that matter.  
Out of great fatigue I answered her:  
‘She is doing quite well, quite well.’

In *Patuah Sagur Patuah*, Amichai appropriates a variety of texts, but maneuvers Ecclesiastes to the extent that the book may be re-read in the light of *Patuah Sagur Patuah*. Qohelet becomes the template for contemporary experience through the collection’s seemingly independent poetic ideas.

<sup>8</sup> Translation by W. Cutter.

### 3. THE *MASHAL* AND THE *NIMSHAL*—AMICHAÏ'S *ARS POETICA*

While scholars have called attention to Amichai's specific techniques when he utilizes biblical allusions and classic tropes,<sup>9</sup> we believe that the strategies Amichai employed in *Patuah Sagur Patuah* have structural patterns and strategies that have not been examined adequately. One of those strategies includes developing the relationship between *mashal* and *nimshal*. In *Patuah Sagur Patuah*, the poet calls attention to some of his own figurative language through a poetic treatment of tenor and vehicle, the *mashal* and the *nimshal*. In this regard, we will point out his interest in this literary relationship through two "meta-textual strategies" in the third poem of the collection where he casts a theoretical frame around the chapter-poem "*Tanakh Tanakh itakh itakh umidrashim aherim*." We see this frame as a key to his particular intertextual strategy, and we see it as an affirmation of a rich "ars poetica."

דוד אָמַר בְּקִינָתוֹ עַל יוֹנָתָן, "נִפְלְאָתָה  
 אֶהְבֶּתְךָ לִי מֵאֶהְבֵּת נָשִׁים" הוּא לָקַח  
 אוֹתָנוּ לְדַגְמָה שֶׁל אֶהְבָּה גְּדוּלָה שְׁאֶהְבְּנוּ  
 אֲלֵפֵי שָׁנִים אַחֲר־כֶּךָ בְּנַחַל דָּוִד שְׁאֶהְבְּנוּ בּוֹ  
 בְּסִבְךָ. זֶה מְסִבְךָ זֶה מְסִבְךָ, יוֹנָתָן  
 לֹא הֵבִין כִּי מִתּ וְדָוִד אוֹלֵי לֹא הֵבִין  
 שְׂאֵת וְאֲנִי יַחַדְוּ הֵיִינוּ מְשָׁל וְגַם נִמְשָׁל.  
 זֶה מְסִבְךָ. כֶּךָ וְכֶךָ, גָּבֵר וְאִשָּׁה,  
 תָּנָךְ תָּנָךְ, אֶתְךָ אֶתְךָ.

David said in his lament for Jonathan, "Your love  
 Is more wondrous to me than the love of women" he took  
 Us as an example of a great love that we loved  
 Thousands of years afterwards in the Creek of David where we loved  
 In the thicket. And it is a thick matter indeed. Jonathan  
 Did not understand that he had died, and perhaps David did not understand  
 That you and I together were the *mashal* and the *nimshal*.  
 This is a thicket tangled like a man and a woman,  
*Tanakh Tanakh*, Ta Ta, with you, with you.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> N. Gold, *Lo hakabrosh*; A. Band, *Hilun hakodesh*; C. Kronfeld, "The Wisdom of Camouflage," pp. 469–491; Z. Shamir, "The Conceit as a Cardinal Style-Marker in Yehuda Amichai's Poetry," in *The Experienced Soul: Studies in Amichai* (ed. G. Abramson; n.p.: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 17–26.

<sup>10</sup> Translation by W. Cutter; the poem is not included in the formal translated edition.

The poem then proceeds with small poetic paragraphs using a variety of textual maneuvers—some are commentaries on the texts, some use the text to illuminate a contemporary situation, and some seem to be casual doggerel, although Amichai’s “apparent doggerel” is often deceptive. These maneuvers draw on material from over thirty personalities or themes in the Tanak, from Noah and the *Akedah* to 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings—in each instance a kind of playful re-arrangement of a biblical theme or story, with a “punch line” that comes from the simile which connects the ancient theme to a contemporary association. Each stanza in its own way prompts a reflection on the biblical material that is its basis. But the final stanza in the poem (beginning “The poet of *Shir Hashirim*”) re-visits the more theoretical interest that flows from the opening David-Jonathan parable and comment. “The poet of the ‘Song of Songs,’” our modern poet says, “went looking for the perfect woman whom he could manufacture from the imagery of Solomon’s original poem.” After a lengthy search for the woman who looks like the *Shulamith*, with the strange similes of “The Song of Songs,” (elongated neck, huge aquiline nose, goat hair, etc.) The contemporary poet cites: “Love is as strong as death,” and says:

רק בסוף הבין את הדמוי שדמה  
והבין ואהב ומת (הנמשל התפוצץ עם המשל).

He understood only at the end / the extent of his imagery.  
He understood, and loved and then died.<sup>11</sup>

Thus Amichai places the poetic reflections on parable or metaphor at the beginning and end of the very poem in which biblical foundations of his modern themes are treated most explicitly. The reader is invited, first of all, to think figuratively in general (and even in theoretical terms), and then to think of biblical passages which function like figures of speech—or, “pre-figuring” material: David and Jonathan’s love, and the “The Song of Songs.”

#### 4. QOHELET AS *MASHAL*

It is no surprise to readers of Amichai, and certainly not to those who knew him personally, that he toyed with similes and more complex metaphors in quotidian life and as part of a world view—indeed enough a part of

---

<sup>11</sup> Translated by C. Kronfeld and C. Bloch, except for a concluding line: “For the *nimshal* exploded with the *mashal*.”

that world view that one must disagree with critics who found in him little metaphysical bent. Ours is among the opinions to the contrary.<sup>12</sup> As a man who, in his own words, “stood between” (an “*ish beynayim*”) and a man of divided conscience, (the cleft soul in “I am a Kosher Man”) one of the things he was explicitly “between” was the traditional religious texts and settings of his childhood and his contemporary secular, strongly non-religious experience of the world. And while he seemed most often to settle for the contemporary experience as decisive or preferred, as in the legendary poem “Tourists,” we suggest that his experience with classic texts represented a portion of a larger metaphysical system. His use of those texts is certainly part of the “surprise” that comes from his love of catachresis and the conceit.<sup>13</sup>

Qohelet is a kind of *marshal* that dominates the entire book of *Patuah Sagur Patuah* through its frequent appearance in various contexts—some explicit (where the poet calls attention to the biblical book) and others more stealthy—but enhanced by the presence of seventeen explicit references to Qohelet.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. REVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

Amichai’s profound affinity with Qohelet, confirmed through intertextual strategies and the attachment of his voice to the autumnal philosophy of the biblical scroll, is adumbrated by his earlier poem: “אָדָם בְּחַיָּוֹ” (A man in his life).<sup>15</sup> There he argues, as he often does, against something that Qohelet does not really say in the first place: “A man in his life does NOT [authors’ emphasis] have time for everything under the sun,” but in so doing he has already begun the dialogue with the ancient book. “A Man in His Life” represented more typical early Amichai-esque gestures. (Amichai’s poet frequently argues with something a text does not say.) *Patuah Sagur Patuah* is shaped by Amichai’s understanding of the man, Qohelet, resigned to life’s recurrences even as he despairs because of them, fretting about human agency, and certainly quarreling with norms (as Chana Kronfeld and Chana Bloch have pointed out in one of their more “popular” essays<sup>16</sup>). But that is

<sup>12</sup> B. Arpali, “World View, Poetics, Political Significance: Summing Up Forty Years of Reading Amichai” (lecture given at Yale University, October 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Z. Shamir, “The Conceit as a Cardinal Style-Marker,” pp. 17–26.

<sup>14</sup> These references are considered more fully in section 5 of the paper.

<sup>15</sup> Y. Amichai, *Shirei Yehuda Amichai* (Poems of Yehuda Amichai; Jerusalem: Schocken, 2002), 4:50.

<sup>16</sup> C. Bloch and C. Kronfeld, “Amichai’s Counter-Theology: Opening Open Closed Open,” *Judaism* 49.2 (Spring 2000): 153–167.



in the “big picture.” In the more intimate singular instances, Amichai weaves Qohelet among the many poems in the collection through the complicated arrangement of specific subject layers he has created: skeins of biblical history, characters and ideas from the Bible and from the poet’s life, allusions to other periods of Jewish history, the establishment of modern sovereignty, loss in warfare and in life, and the Holocaust—all these in terms of personal experience and in terms of their broader Jewish significance. Most of the allusions are grounded in concrete pictures or reports of particular experiences that—as it were—happened to the poet. These references and touchstones appear along with the reflections on acts of remembering and forgetting and on the poet’s recall of personal childhood, in addition to a consideration of his own children’s childhood as a genetic and historical re-combination of the events of his life. Throughout the collection, forgetfulness contends with remembering in a cycle that recalls Qohelet’s interest in the root ז-כ-ר, and which is cited in the explicit rhyme: “*Patuah Sagur Patuah / Shakhuah zakhur shakhuah*” (stanza 12 of the book’s final chapter-poem).

Qohelet’s contention about *zikaron* in one sense of the word, memory as monument, is trumped by the modern poet’s concentration on the word in its more traditional usage (memory as an action). The contention of opposites, so congruent with Qohelet’s thinking, is captured in numerous images in *Patuah Sagur Patuah*: see-saws, revolving doors, ping-pong matches, and chairs which open and close depending on the seasons. We have argued that what clinches Qohelet as a kind of *mashal* for the poet is the frequency with which he signals the biblical book’s importance at several turning points in the collection. Once one has seen each of the instances in poetic play, the overall sense of the collection becomes even more clearly associated with the ancient book—including Qohelet’s own progression from despair to acceptance. (See stanza 1 of the poem “*Behayai, behayai*,” where all the contrasting motives of life and colored chess pieces had devolved into “no victory ringing in the wind”—a kind of resignation from competition.)

Here is an example of how the phenomenon works. No victory ringing in the wind is—on the face of it—an innocent notion redolent of Qohelet’s spirit, but not emphatically connected to the intertext. However, once one understands the persistent progression in the Qohelet strategies, the spirit of resignation joins with particular texts in attaching to the biblical book. Thus, the progression: There are specific literal citations of the Qohelet text, “*Haval havalim,*” said Qohelet,” etc.; and the next steps down in intensity are applications of verses from the scroll to situations unrelated, but with the

same language, “*Al sevivotav*.” Then there are implicit uses like “*Hakol yereikhayim*” (from stanza 27 of the poem-chapter, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem / Why Jerusalem?”). And, finally, lines within the collection that are entirely independent of Qohelet, which—in view of the general saturation of the text—become indirect associations of a delightful and sometimes troubling character: “All the sexual positions of my body have already been performed,” is—for example—an attenuated instance of “What will happen has happened before.” Each category has several examples to support our case, but the poet’s use of “*Hakol*” followed by “*hevel*,” “*aval*,” “*aivel*,” “*mei'im*,” and “*yereikhayim*” is most salient and delightful to contemplate.

One reads Amichai and finds oneself associating thing to thing, and finding thing within thing, the opening and closing, and the circularity that are physical images and tropes within the collection. It is precisely this trope of things within things, things being like other things and yet not like them that undergird our consideration of the Amichai work that is before us. The six particular themes through which we tie Amichai to Qohelet have been apparent in some instances, and in other instances have relied on analogical associations and the student’s persistent suggestions. But turning or revolving is depicted in surprising images: “a hesitant key” (poem 1, stanza 24); and a woman who does not turn around to check on a man who is checking out her figure as she walks away from him (poem 4, stanza 4). (Both characters in this little stanza are doing what men and women have always done—what was always will be.) “Seder Plates that go around and around” (poem 1, stanza 15); and “mules walking around and around” (poem 7, stanza 2), and a “centrifuges of time” (poem 8, stanza 7) along with revolving doors (poem 1, stanza 2 and poem 4, stanza 12), headstones that stand around in a circle (poem 7, stanza 17), Jerusalem as a carousel (poem 18, stanza 6), and even the past and future revolving (poem 2, stanza 1).

Some themes and specific phrases had appeared in earlier works, relocating themselves within this larger more comprehensive final opus. This is surely the case with lines from Qohelet. One essential usage is in a stanza which occurs near the end of the first third of the anthology: “*Hadevarim shehayu me'olam*” which initially appears to draw on Rachel’s famous poem: “*Ulai*,” but which takes that association and builds it into a four layered poem which revisits repetition, recalls the *Yishuv*, and insists on introducing the real facts of life (or, “what really was”). Amichai has drawn this theme, it seems, from his earlier poem in the collection *Behind This a Great Happiness is Hiding*:

הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁשׁוּב לֹא יִהְיוּ לְעֹלָם  
 הָיוּ בַּמְּקוֹמוֹת שֶׁלֹּא הָיוּ בָּהֶם

The things that will not occur once again were (or took place) in the places that never were.<sup>17</sup>

Recalling the tantalizing association with Qohelet, the idea becomes transformed in the first poem of “*Hadevarim shehayu me’olam*” (p. 59) and begins: רַחֵל הַמְּשׁוֹרֶרֶת שָׁרָה וְאוֹלִי לֹא הָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים מֵעוֹלָם (Rachel the poet wrote, “And perhaps these things never happened”) [citing her famous poem which became a song of the *Yishuv*].

אֲבָל אֲנִי רוֹצֵה לְשִׁיר עַל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁהָיוּ מֵעוֹלָם, הָיוּ וְדָאִי.  
 כִּי מֵה שֶׁהָיָה מֵעוֹלָם יִהְיֶה לְעוֹלָם, כְּמוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ  
 וְהַמָּלְחָה “אוֹלִי” הִיא הַיָּרֵחַ הַמְּעַדֵּן הַכֹּל בְּאוֹרוֹ הַקָּדֵדִין

But I want to sing of things that were forever, for what was—ever—  
 Will be forever, like the sun.  
 And the word “perhaps” is the moon refining everything in its delicate  
 light.

The poem then associates to what was historically a physical and realistic part of the *Yishuv*, its textures and colors and its Russified pioneering farmers, and then homes in on an even more concrete event in the poet’s life: the story of a cousin who WAS, (“here’s something that really was”) and who committed suicide, an historical event that punctures the balloon of Zionist idealism. The architecture of this stanza is particularly intriguing, as the poem opens with one of the Amichai markers (disagreeing with a reading of a former poem that is not the intended reading of Rachel’s poem anyway), using that as the starting point for a nostalgic recall of the very period from which the Rachel poem speaks. It professes a debunking of the implicit idealism of that period by a description of something that REALLY happened and that was a moment of intimate life more important or more momentous than the building of the nation. Behind all of this poetic development resides Qohelet’s message that “what was, will always be.”

Thus the poet has drawn an intricate set of associations from an earlier poem which echoes “Qohelet” and carries it forward to this final collection in which he corrects the literal sense of Rachel’s poem which itself was never meant to be taken literally. (This is a similar strategy to what we find in “*Adam behayav*,” and the short stanza “*Esah eina*” from the poem “*Tiyul*”

<sup>17</sup> Y. Amichai, *Shirei Yehuda Amichai*, 3:71.

*yehudi*” in *Patuah Sagur Patuah*.) Introduced with “*aval*,” a contrarian participle which is an additional marker of Amichai’s collection, the poet knows that Rachel herself never meant to say that “these things never happened,” (she is, in fact, saying something like “pinch me, I am dreaming”). The poem that begins “*Rahel hameshoreret*” is ostensibly independent of the overall architecture of the book, except that the use of things that were or were not ever in existence calls us to examine Qohelet, and to see the word “*aval*” in a special light (see above, page 155), and in its aural association with the word “*hevel*” (which—continuing the exaggerated use of the phrase—winds up in images of smoke).

Once the reader has grasped the centrality of “things that were” (*devarim shehayu*, in one version or another), one realizes how intricately connected are different instances of recalling or describing things of the past. In the fifteenth stanza of the first poem, for example, ritual objects are connected by signifiers such as the ritual *yad*—torah pointer—which reminds the poetic voice of the dismembered “hands” of Holocaust victims who will not again be living: “the remembrance of many *Motza’ei Shabbat*,” “long hands of steel that point out everything that will not be again,” “orchestras of ghosts”—things that were (in this instance history and the Holocaust) are all recalled by these physical objects, things that now reside in a collection and serve as metonyms in a collection of ritual vessels. Later in the same poem, (stanza 26), the poet recalls his years in the Wurzburg synagogue—that “will not be again.” (And ghosts are the subject of an entire chapter-poem in *Patuah Sagur Patuah*: “*Tiyul leili be’emek refaim*.”)

Perhaps the most vivid instance of this trope is found in poem 3, stanza 3: “*Ani navi shel mashehaya*” (I am the prophet of what was). This innocent title suggests at first a humorous twist on the popular notion of prophecy as prediction. As the title is more fully explicated in the poem, it becomes less innocent and more attached to the overall theme of “things that were” within the greater work:

אָנִי נָבִיא שֶׁל מָה שֶׁהָיָה אֲנִי קוֹרֵא עֵבֶר מִתּוֹךְ כַּף  
יָד שֶׁל הָאִשָּׁה שֶׁאֲנִי אוֹהֵב, אֲנִי חוֹזֵא שֶׁל גְּשָׁמֵי הַחֶרֶף שִׁירְדוּ  
אֲנִי מְמַחָה שֶׁל שֶׁלֶג דְּאֶשְׁתָּקֵד, אֲנִי מְעֵלָה מֵאוֹב  
אֶת הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁהָיוּ מְעוֹלָם, אֲנִי מְתַנַּבֵּא עַל תְּמוֹל שֶׁלִּשְׁוֹם,

I am a prophet of what was, reading the past in the palm  
Of the woman I love, a Forecaster of the rains of winter that have already  
fallen, an expert about the snow of last year,  
Calling up the ghostly past of things that once were.

Now the poet turns to quoting himself, and part of his perspective changes to the intensely personal, the humorous and, as Ziva Shamir has suggested, a preposterous but wonderful conceit: “All the movements and positions of my body have already been ... I am free, my hands are free, but everything (else) has already been.” And a folding chair, whose wisdom the poet has learned, also reflects the repetition of what (once) was—in one instance as innocent as beach chairs being opened up again and again each summer.

The “things that once were” appear in connection with water, an element that Amichai has used frequently in his work. In “*Ha’elegia al hayeled she’avad*,” (The elegy of the lost child), the river’s “Heraclitian” nature, and the path it follows are symbols of changes in essence, but static in nomenclature, or changes in nomenclature but static in essence.<sup>18</sup> Rivers are only one form of water in Qohelet, and Amichai also exploits suggestions about the sea: (Eccl 1:7): “All streams flow into the sea/ but the sea is never full/ to the place from which they flow/ the streams flow back again.” In stanza 11 of the chapter “*Devarim shehayu*” the poet remarks not only on the recurrent nature of water, but on the naming of things:

The flowing waters still wish to teach us  
but we never knew what they taught—yet we learned  
And near the water a bramble and wild birds.  
Nowadays we call them new and precise names  
but they continue to blossom and to fly and to become  
“A nice bird, a fragrant plant.” And what is definite and what is not definite,  
water flows.  
Water flows from the things that never were to the things that will be.

His own son is commanded—(or it is predicted about him, since the imperfect can be represented by both voices) “to change” and yet “not to change”. (Poem 5 of “*Bni mitgaves*”):

אָנִי רוֹצֶה לְהוֹסִיף שְׁנֵי דְבָרוֹת לְעִשְׂרֵת הַדְּבָרוֹת:  
זֶה הַדְּבָר הָאֶחָד-עָשָׂר: לֹא תִשְׁתַּנֶּה  
זֶה הַדְּבָר הַשֵּׁנִים-עָשָׂר: הִשְׁתַּנֶּה, תִּשְׁתַּנֶּה.  
גַּם אָבִי הֵמֵת הוֹסִיף לִי אֶת אֵלֶּה.

I want to add two commandments to the ten:  
the eleventh commandment: do not change  
the twelfth commandment: change, you will change.  
My dead father added these for me as well.

<sup>18</sup> Y. Amichai, *Shirei Yehuda Amichai*, 1:366.

Even Amichai's trenchant poetic aside about a human foible turns out to have much to do with other tropes of the larger collection: not only that matters remain the same (and thus recur in their singing or their telling), but that memory of them both remains and yet changes—or is flawed. That may be why “Gods change, but prayers remain the same,” which in the overall book relates to the back and forth tendency of “remembering” and “forgetting.” It is worth noting that an idea which is interesting enough in its own right gains weight once the larger relevance is realized.

Moving to a touching memory of a particular summer, the poet writes: “This is summer and the *Akhziv* Coast once again once again/ and we are once again once again.” The poem then moves into a consideration of responsibility to the fauna of the setting to birds and beasts: “And what responsibility to both/ Like us who must in love establish/ those who never were together or who separated” (Poem 1 on p. 81):

זֶה קִיץ וְחוֹף אַכְזִיב שׁוֹב וְשׁוֹב  
וְאֲנַחְנוּ שׁוֹב וְשׁוֹב ... וְאִיזוֹ אַחֲרִיּוֹת עַל שָׁנִים,  
כְּמוֹנוּ, שְׁצָרִיכִים לְקַיֵּם בְּאֶהְבְּתָם גַּם  
אֶת אֵלֶּה שְׁלֵעוֹלָם לֹא הָיוּ יַחְדָּו אוֹ נִפְרְדּוּ.

Following this, the poet notes the return of the lovers to *Akhziv*. “Every year at this time we come here, as (it says in) the Tanak: We return to the house where we were together years ago.” (This simple act thus implicates both Qohelet's notion of return and attaches to the yearly Torah reading cycle. See stanza 23, page 28.)

Memory, of course, is the theme of the book's final chapter, where almost every question about memory raised throughout the collection is placed within the context of memory for fallen soldiers, and the monuments attendant to their deaths. An unlikely yoking of memory with water joins in stanza 8 of the chapter-poem “*Tiyul yehudi*,” where the poet and his family visit the village home of the poet's grandmother: water flows through the small estate, where “what once was, still is.” Memory, name change, and water all come together in an innocent family trip. This is a chapter where the Qohelet theme is muted, but emerges in an unusually effective way once one sees the entire collection through the Qohelet lens.

Amichai's contrarian voice joins conveniently with Qohelet's character and concerns. Through Ecclesiastes, Amichai establishes two of the dominant markers of his oeuvre: the quotation of an old idea or biblical trope and then the rejection of it; and (sometimes) disagreeing with the experience of

the text's basic assumptions by way of ironic twists that really do not disagree with the original intent. We add here to the already discussed "A Man in His Life" and "Things That Were in the World," that the importance of Ecclesiastes is enhanced through a wily reference to Balaam, and in a twist where he claims likeness in spite of a more apparent unlikeness.

אֲנִי מְחַפֵּשׁ לִי מְקוֹם נוּחַ וְגִבָּה וְיַעֲלֵל  
כְּדִי לְהַשְׁקִיף עַל חַיֵּי לְבָרָכָה וּלְקַלְלָהּ.  
אֲנִי גַם לְמַטָּה וְגַם לְמַעְלָה. אֲנִי כְמוֹ בְלֹעֵם עַל הַגְּבְעוֹת  
וְגַם כְמוֹ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַחוֹנִים בְּעַמְקֵי.

I seek a place that is comfortable, elevated and advantageous  
in order to look on my life for blessing and for curse.  
I am above and below. I am like Balaam on the heights,  
and like the Children of Israel camping in the valley (stanza 6 of "*Tiyul yisraeli*").

Balaam, of course, was also a contrarian, sent to curse but not able to resist blessing. The Balaam narrative is one of the early instances of the contrarian personality after Abraham's negotiation over Sodom and Gomorrah. The poet ends the unit:

But I am also like a sleepless man  
who is constantly shifting positions in order to sleep,  
but I am also like a lover. But I. But.  
*Havel havalim*, said Qohelet, everything is *hevel* [vanity, absurd].  
But I say "*aval avalim*." Everything is *aval* [but].

And so it is that the poet of *Patuah Sagur Patuah* is able to say that in spite of the song's lyrics: "We sang 'who fired the shot, and who has been felled?' We are really asking: who was loved and who the beloved?" And the song "Who just woke up" (the verb נָעַר, also connected with young person) becomes a song full of longing in the mouths of young sentimental men and women—a lullaby to put the times to sleep (stanza 4). The operative concept is "but" or "however," something usually means one thing, now it means another, (connecting this contrarian quality to the frequent more empirical comments about the names of things). While everything is vanity, absurd (as in *hevel*) everything is really bowels, mourning, and pain. "*Hakol meayim, hakol hevel, hakol evel, hakol ke'ev*" (stanza 4 of the poem "*Yerushalayim yerushalayim lama yerushalayim?*").

Memory, repetition, and cycles appear concentrated in the miracles of children. The children as theme are addressed poignantly in the chapter “*Bni mitgayes*” (My son is inducted), where the fatherly advice is a continuation of the advice of the poet’s parents in an earlier section of the anthology. (His parents were prophets of one kind or another.) In an effort to summarize the entire collection or life in general, the poet introduces his daughter’s induction experience with the phrase from Qohelet (*sof davar* [When all is said and done], stanza 11) even forty pages after the first and most explicit contrarian note. After hinting at “the end of the matter,” which summarizes the entire cycle of memory, advice, and repetition, stimulated by his son’s induction, the poet reflects on Qohelet’s tolerance of life, after all, and agreeing, as it were, that in spite of all the discouraging facts of experience, we must enjoy life. “*Zeh kol ha’adam*” (this is what it is all about). Amichai converts this summary in Qohelet to his own summary by a surprising introduction of the collection’s title:

Open closed open. Before we are born  
everything is open in the world without him.  
While he is living everything is closed  
to him in his life. When he dies everything becomes open again.  
Open closed open. This is all that man is about. (stanza 4 of “*Ani lo hayiti ehad misheshet ha’milyonim*”).

Thus we experience an additional kind of argument with Qohelet, for the poet would summarize life differently than the ancient preacher did. Another literal link to Qohelet is in the remarkable little stanza 3 in the chapter-poem “*Shemot shemot, shemot shemot bayamim hahem bazman hazeh*,” (Names names in those days and at this time). The section recalls names of German comrades of the poet as boy, soldier comrades, and personal friends, and brings the entire collection back to Qohelet with such notions as:

ומה שְׁהִיָּה וּמַה שְׁלֹא יִהְיֶה  
יִפְגְּשׁוּ בְּצַבְעֵי הַדָּר אָדָם,  
כְּמוֹ שֶׁמֶשׁ הַשּׁוֹקֵעַת בַּיָּם שְׁלֵעוֹלָם לֹא יִפְגְּשׁוּ  
וְאִם יִפְגְּשׁוּ יִהְיֶה סוֹף הָעוֹלָם.

And what was and what will not be  
will meet in glorious red colors,  
like the sun which sets in the sea though they [sea and sun] never meet  
and if they do meet, the world will come to an end (stanza 4).



שְׁמִי יְהוּדָה, וְהוּא לְקוֹנֵחַ  
 מִמְּחֶסֶן כָּל הַשְּׁמוֹת. הָאֵבֶר שְׁלִי,  
 הַזְּקָפָה שְׁלִי, אֲבָל הַזְּרַע מִמְּאָגֵר הַזְּרַע  
 שֶׁאֵין לוֹ סוֹף שְׁחֹזֵר דְּרָךְ צֶאֱצָאִי  
 אֶל הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל.

My name is Yehuda, taken from  
 a warehouse of names. My organ,  
 my erection, but the seed is from the storehouse of seed  
 that has no end and returns through my offspring  
 to the great sea (stanza 3).

Each stanza in this chapter-poem suggests a connection between the lived experience of the poet and the metaphysical thematics of Qohelet.

History enters and sometimes trumps the personal reminiscences of this “one long poem” and in the short stanza just before the end of the final chapter on memory, Ecclesiastes gets the final word in a unit on Jewish history and, indeed, all human experience:

חֲפוּשׁ שְׂרָשִׁים בְּבֵית הַקְּבָרוֹת בְּוַרְשָׁא  
 כָּאֵן הַשְּׂרָשִׁים מְחַפְּשִׁים. הֵם מְבַקְּעִים  
 אֶת הָאֲדָמָה וְהוֹפְכִים מִצְּבוֹת  
 וְלוֹפְתִים אֶת שְׂבָרֵיהֶן לְחֶפֶשׁ  
 אֶת הַשְּׁמוֹת וְהַתְּאָרִיכִים, לְחֶפֶשׁ  
 אֶת מֶה שֶׁהָיָה וְלֹא יֵהְיֶה שׁוּב.  
 הַשְּׂרָשִׁים מְחַפְּשִׁים אֶת הָעֵצִים שֶׁנִּשְׂרָפוּ.

A search for roots in a cemetery in Warsaw  
 Here the roots do the searching. They break  
 Through the earth, and turn over the gravestone,  
 And caress the broken pieces in order to search  
 For names and dates,  
 To search out what was and what will no longer be.  
 The roots search out the trees that have been burned (stanza 11).

Thus a section of the book—an epitaph really—to the 300 plus poem units, ends with the “*amen*” and “*ken yehi rāzon*” of tradition, but not before bidding goodbye to Qohelet and “all the things that will be,” and before wrapping up the poetic fragments of the collection, which remind one of the fragment on the poet’s desk:

עַל שְׁלַחְנֵי יֵשׁ אֶבֶן שְׁחָרוֹת עָלֶיהָ "אָמֵן," שֶׁבֶר אֶחָד  
 נִצּוּל מֵאֲלָפֵי רַבּוֹא שְׁכָרֵי מַצְבוֹת שְׁבוּרוֹת  
 בְּבִתֵּי קְבָרוֹת יְהוּדִיִּים. וְאֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ שֶׁכָּל הַשְּׁבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה  
 מְמַלְאִים עִכְשָׁו אֶת פְּצֻצַת הַזְּמַן הַיְּהוּדִית הַגְּדוּלָּה  
 עִם שְׂאֵר שְׁבָרִים וְרִסְסִים, שְׁבָרֵי לוֹחֹת הַבְּרִית  
 וְשְׁבָרֵי מִזְבְּחוֹת וְשְׁבָרֵי צְלָבִים וּמִסְמָרֵי צְלִיבָה חֲלוּדִים  
 עִם שְׁבָרֵי כְּלֵי בַּיִת וְכָלֵי קֹדֶשׁ וְשְׁבָרֵי עֲצָמוֹת,  
 וְנִעְלָמִים וּמְשֻׁקָּפִים וְאִיבָרִים מְלֹאכּוֹתִיִּים וְשִׁנִּים תּוֹתָבוֹת  
 וְקַפְסוֹת פַּח רִיקוֹת שֶׁל רַעַל מְשֻׁמֵּד. כָּל אֵלֶּה  
 מְמַלְאִים אֶת פְּצֻצַת הַזְּמַן הַיְּהוּדִית עַד אַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים,  
 וְאֶף-עַל-פִּי שְׂאֵנֵי יוֹדֵעַ עַל כָּל אֵלֶּה וְעַל אַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים.  
 הָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת עַל שְׁלַחְנֵי נוֹתְנַת לִי שְׁלוֹהַּ  
 הִיא אֶבֶן אֱמֶת שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיוּ לָהּ הוֹפְכִין,  
 אֶבֶן חֲכָמָה מְכֹל אֶבֶן חֲכָמִים, אֶבֶן מִמְצָבָה שְׁבוּרָה  
 וְהִיא שְׁלֵמָה מְכֹל שְׁלֵמוֹת.  
 אֶבֶן יַעֲדוֹת עַל כָּל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁהָיוּ מֵעוֹלָם  
 וְעַל כָּל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁיִּהְיוּ לְעוֹלָם, אֶבֶן אָמֵן וְאֶהְבָּה.  
 אָמֵן, אָמֵן וְכֵן יִהְיֶה רְצוֹן.

On my desk there is a stone which is inscribed with "amen," a broken piece  
 Saved from thousands of broken pieces of headstones  
 In Jewish cemeteries. And I know that all of these broken pieces  
 Fill up the great Jewish time bomb  
 Along with the broken pieces and fragments, the fragments of the Tablets of  
 the Law  
 And the pieces of altars, and crosses and rusty crucifixion nails  
 Along with broken household vessels, and vessels of our rituals, and broken  
 bones,  
 And shoes and glasses and artificial limbs, and false teeth  
 And canisters emptied of their poison. All of these  
 Fill up the Jewish time bomb until the end of days,  
 And although I know about all of this, and about the end of days  
 This piece of stone on my desk gives me some comfort  
 A stone of truth that cannot be overturned [reference to overturned grave-  
 stones],  
 A stone of more wisdom than all other stones, a stone from a broken head-  
 stone more complete than completeness itself.  
 A stone of testimony to everything that has ever been  
 And for the things that will always be [as in Qohelet,] a stone of love and  
 finality.  
 Amen, amen, so may it be.

## 6. FINAL COMMENT: A KIND OF CATALOGUE AND REVIEW

Amichai draws on four central themes in the biblical book: circularity (the root סבב), recurrence of events or themes (the construction מה + ש + היה in one form or another), memory (the root זכר), the frustrations of life's absurdities and unfairness (the phrase הפל הפל), and there are three isolated references, two of which come from Eccl 12:13<sup>19</sup> and are particularly important for Qohelet, and one from Eccl 3:19. In many instances, these references are explicit, sometimes even mentioning *Sefer Qohelet*,<sup>20</sup> the book of Ecclesiastes, itself. At other times, they are implicit—strengthened in their presence because they relate to the explicit intertextual references that are more definitely established.

### 6.1 The Root סבב and the Theme of Circularity

The root סבב occurs in Ecclesiastes seven times within five verses, in Eccl 1:6; 2:20; 7:25; 9:14, and 12:5,<sup>21</sup> and makes frequent appearances throughout *Patuah Sagur Patuah*. The root סבב is central in Ecclesiastes in any event, but Amichai calls particular attention to its suppleness and its significance. Thus, when the root operates adverbially, as it also does in Ecclesiastes, its meaning and significance is magnified, within the text of Ecclesiastes itself as well as within relationship to Amichai's text of *Open Closed Open*. The primary, referenced verse from Qohelet is Eccl 1:6, הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ שָׁב וְעַל-סְבִיבוֹתָיו הָרוּחַ הוֹלֵךְ סָבֵב אֶל-צָפוֹן וְסוֹבֵב אֶל-דָּרוֹם (Southward blowing, turning northward, ever turning blows the wind; on its rounds the wind returns). In *Patuah Sagur Patuah*, the root is used to reference Qohelet explicitly four times, and implicitly on five occasions.<sup>22</sup>

1. Explicitly it appears in lines 13 and 14 on page 6 where Amichai's poetic narrator states: צִירָה עַל מְסֻבּוֹתָהּ דֹּלֶת כְּמוֹ הוּא הָאֵל אֲבָל / אַחֲרִית בְּלִי רֵאשִׁית בְּלִי / תִּסָּב סְבִיבוֹתֶיהָ עַל, וְהַחֻצָּה פְּנִימָה. "In its rounds

<sup>19</sup> Eccl 12:13 כל־הָאָדָם כִּי־יֹדַע כָּל־הָאָדָם שָׁמֹר בְּיֹהָוָה וְשָׁמַע אֶת־הַצְּוִיֹּתָיו יִרְאֵהוּ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת־הַצְּוִיֹּתָיו יִרְאֵהוּ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת־הַצְּוִיֹּתָיו יִרְאֵהוּ וְיִשְׁמַע אֶת־הַצְּוִיֹּתָיו יִרְאֵהוּ (The conclusion of the matter. Everything has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments. For this is the entirety of every man.)

<sup>20</sup> "עַל סְבִיבוֹתָיו סוֹבֵב כְּמוֹ הָרוּחַ / בְּסִפְרָה קֹהֶלֶת. אֲבָל כָּל יוֹם הָיָה חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ" (on its rounds like the wind / in the book of Ecclesiastes. But every day was new beneath the sun); Y. Amichai, *Patuah Sagur patuah*, pp. 59–60.

<sup>21</sup> S. Salisbury, ed., *Groves-Wheeler Westminster Hebrew Morphology*, CD-ROM, Release 3.5, (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001), *Accordance 7.4.2* CD-ROM, (OakTree Software, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> E. Berk, "Yehuda Amichai's Open Closed Open and Ecclesiastes: An Autumnal Intertextual Relationship" (Rabbinic Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles, 2008).

- it turns,” in turn creating an explicit intertextual reference to Eccl 1:6, הוֹלֵךְ אֶל-דָּרוֹם וְסוֹבֵב אֶל-צָפוֹן סוֹבֵב סָבַב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ וְעַל-סְבִיבוֹתָיו שָׁב הָרוּחַ. (Southward blowing, turning northward, ever turning blows the wind; on its rounds the wind returns).
2. The second explicit reference is found on pages 59–60, stanza 2, with the statement, עַל סְבִיבוֹתָיו סוֹבֵב כְּמוֹ הָרוּחַ / בְּסִפְרָ קֵהֶלֶת. The intertextual relationship continues with the stanza’s second, literal connection to Qohelet, אָבַל כָּל יוֹם הִיָּה חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ.<sup>23</sup>
  3. The third explicit reference is on page 75, in stanza 16, שְׁסוֹבֵב סוֹבֵב עַל / סְבִיבוֹתָיו (headstones stand in a closed circle / that turn and turn upon their rounds, a memory of the youths of the *Palmaḥ* / who were killed here). And later, שׁוֹב appears in the line “And they returned to train again.”
  4. The fourth explicit reference occurs on pages 82–83, in stanza 5, רוּחַ יָם נוֹשֶׁבֶת דְּרָךְ הַכְּסָאוֹת הָרִיקִים, / לֹא עַל סְבִיבוֹתָיו הָרוּחַ אֲלֵא מִשָּׁם לְשָׁם / אַחֵר (A wind comes up from the sea and blows through empty chairs, / not on its rounds, the wind, but rather from one place to another place).

**סבב** also operates as an implicit reference on five occasions within Amichai’s work.

1. The first implicit reference is on page 20, stanza 1. Here, Amichai’s poetic voice speaks not of Qohelet’s “wind,” but of the “eternal present” which is תָּמִיד סוֹבְבִים וּמְסֻבְבִים. (always turning and turning). It is much like the wind of Eccl 1:6, and it resembles the language of the biblical verse.
2. The second implicit reference appears on page 46, in stanza 5, stating, הַשְּׁנָה מְסֻבֶּבֶת סְבִיב חַיִּי, / וְחַיִּי מְסֻבְבִים (The slumber encircles around my life, / and my life goes around and around).
3. **סבב** appears a third time on page 50, in stanza 12. The poet states: בֵּין דֶּלֶת נִפְתָּחַת וְנִסְגָּרַת בְּחֻבָּטָה / וּבֵין דֶּלֶת מְסֻבֶּבֶת וּמְסֻבְבֶּת (between a door that opens and closes with a slam / and between a revolving door that revolves and revolves).
4. The fourth example comes from stanza 7, pages 69–70, “The Upper Galilee and the Lower Galilee,” from the poem “Israeli Travel:

<sup>23</sup> Eccl 1:9, מִה־שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁהָיָה וּמִה־שֶׁנֶּעֱשָׂה הוּא שֶׁנֶּעֱשָׂה, (Only that shall happen which has happened, only that occurs which has occurred; there is nothing new beneath the sun).

Otherness is Everything Otherness is Love” in which Amichai’s poetic “I” travels throughout Israeli time-space. In this stanza, he states,

בְּתַנוּעַת צְנֻטְרִיפּוּג הַזְמָן שְׁמִסְתּוֹבֵב וּמִסְתּוֹבֵב.  
וּבְשָׂרוֹן שׁוֹרוֹת בְּרוּשִׁים מְסָבִיב לְפָרְדֵּסִים

in centrifugal movement time that revolved around and around  
and in the Sharon, rows of Cypresses encircled the orchards.

5. The fifth and final example appears on pages 142–143, in stanza 6. The poet observes that Jerusalem is like a carousel going around, קְרוּסֵלָה מְסִתּוֹבֶבֶת וּמִסְתּוֹבֶבֶת ... הַסְּבוּבִים חָיִב לְשֵׁלֵם שׁוּב ... מְסִתּוֹבֶבֶת.

What goes around turning to go round again is first a revolving door, second a mule, and third the headstones that stand in a circle. But a greater context for circularity is the almost constant movement: “transport and carry things that are not ours / from one place to another place;” or “the blue highway” which “goes to the future” with those travelers “who go to the past” in a “guiding and crossing over / without a beginning, without an end.” The train tracks carry longings in rail cars. Soldiers are in training to destroy a bridge, then the young men are killed. The headstones are set in a circle near the bridge, and in circular fashion, they “return[ed] to train again” for their next mission: “the resurrection of the dead.” While the stanza overflows with multiple images of movement, the theme of circularity stubbornly remains in place.

## 6.2 The Construction of מה+ש+היה and the Theme of Recurring Events or Motifs

The second major Qohelet trope used by Amichai’s poetic voice which references Ecclesiastes is the מה+ש+היה construction. In the Tanak, ש followed by היה appears in only two Psalms and in the book of Ecclesiastes. Amichai’s poet makes uses of the construction quite often, in what we have identified as explicit and implicit reference to Eccl 1:9, מִה־שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁהָיָה (Only that shall happen which has happened, only that occurs which has occurred; there is nothing new beneath the sun).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> It might also be a reference to Eccl 3:15, מִה־שֶׁהָיָה כָּבֵד הוּא וְאֲשֶׁר לֵהֵיוֹת כָּבֵד הָיָה וְהָאֵלֵהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת־נִרְדָּף (What is occurring occurred long since, and what is to occur occurred long since: and God seeks the

1. Page 59, stanza 1: / אָבֵל אֲנִי רוֹצֵה לְשִׁיר עַל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁהָיוּ מֵעוֹלָם, הָיוּ וְדָאִי. / (But I want to write about the things which have always been, been forever. / For what has always been will always be, like the sun). (The following stanza, 2, on pages 59–60, contains a reference to the conclusion of the same verse, Eccl 1:9, אָבֵל כָּל יוֹם הָיָה חֲדָשׁ תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ,<sup>26</sup> [But every day was new beneath the sun].)
2. Pages 83–84 in stanza 7, הוֹ, הַנְּבוּאָה הַגְּדוֹלָה / שֶׁל מָה שֶׁהָיָה וּמָה שֶׁיְהִיָּה,<sup>27</sup> (Oh, the great prophecy / of what has occurred and what shall occur).
3. The third occurrence is on page 120 in stanza 6: מָה שֶׁהָיָה וּמָה שֶׁיִּכְוֹל (What was and what might have been).
4. The fourth use, in stanza 4 on pages 131 and 132, also contains the “sun,” perhaps of Eccl 1:9: וּמָה שֶׁהָיָה וּמָה שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה / יִפְגְּשׁוּ בְּצַבְעֵי הַדָּר / (And that which has occurred and that which will never occur / will meet in the colors of red citrus, like the sun that sets in the sea).
5. The construction appears for the fifth time on page 134, in stanza 8, וּמָה שֶׁיִּכְוֹל הָיָה לְהִיּוֹת מִתְאַחָה עִבְשׁוֹ / עִם מָה שֶׁהָיָה וְהָיוּ לְאַחַד בְּמוֹ הָאֶחָד (And what might have been to be is now joined together / with what has been and will be, joined as one like the one).
6. Sixth, a shortened version (without the מָה) appears on page 164, stanza 6: וּמִנְגִינַת הַרוּחַ בַּפִּחִית הַרִיקָה הִיא כָּל שֶׁהָיָה וְכָל שֶׁיְהִיָּה<sup>29</sup> (and the music of the wind in the empty can was all that was and all that will be).
7. The seventh appearance falls on page 177, in stanza 11: לְחַפֵּשׂ אֶת מָה / שֶׁהָיָה וְלֹא יִהְיֶה שׁוּב (in search of what has been and what will never be again).
8. Page 178, stanza 1 contains the eighth and final explicit reference, itself also an allusion to Eccl 1:10, / אָבֵן עֵדוּת עַל כָּל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁהָיוּ מֵעוֹלָם,

pursued). See also Eccl 3:22; 6:10; 7:24; 8:7; 10:14, which all utilize the מה+ש+היה construction which is on prominent display in Eccl 1:9 and 3:15.

<sup>25</sup> Eccl 1:5, וַיִּזְרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּבֵא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּקֹם מִמְּקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף זֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם (The sun rises and the sun sets, then goes panting back to its place, whence it rises).

<sup>26</sup> Eccl 1:9, מָה־שֶׁהָיָה הוּא שֶׁיְהִיָּה וּמָה־שֶׁנֶּעֱשֶׂה הוּא שֶׁיִּעָשֶׂה (Only that shall happen which has happened, only that occurs which has occurred; there is nothing new beneath the sun).

<sup>27</sup> Eccl 1:5, וַיִּזְרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּבֵא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּקֹם מִמְּקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף זֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם (The sun rises and the sun sets, then goes panting back to its place, whence it rises).

<sup>28</sup> Eccl 1:5, וַיִּזְרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּבֵא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וַיָּקֹם מִמְּקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף זֹרֵחַ הוּא שָׁם (The sun rises and the sun sets, then goes panting back to its place, whence it rises).

<sup>29</sup> Eccl 1:10, יֵשׁ דְּבַר שֶׁיֵּאמַר רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא כִּבְר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ (Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say, “Look, this one is new!”—it occurred long since, in ages that went by before us).

וְעַל כָּל הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁיְהִיוּ לְעוֹלָם אָבֵן אָמֵן וְאֵהָבָה (a stone of witness to all the things that have ever been / and all the things that will ever be, a stone of amen and of love).

Six implicit references to *מה + ש + היה* can be added to the eight explicit instances.

1. We see the theme of “that which exists, has long since existed” on page 49, stanza 12, ...<sup>30</sup> *כָּל הַתְּנוּעוֹת וְכָל הַתְּנוּחוֹת שֶׁבְּגוּפִי כְּבָר נַעֲשׂוּ מֵעוֹלָם*. (All the motions and all the positions that are in my body have already been done.... I am free, but everything has already happened).
2. The second implicit reference is a poem title itself, “הַדְּבָרִים שֶׁיְהִיוּ” (Those things which have always been), which echoes the language of Eccl 1:9 and 1:10.
3. The third reference is found on pages 70–71, in stanza 8:

וְהָיָה מָה שֶׁהָיָה לְפָנַי שָׁעָה  
וְהָיָה מָה שֶׁהָיָה בְּתוֹחַלַּת הַמָּאָה בְּמוֹשְׁבָה הַהִיא,  
וְהָיוּ עֲצִים שֶׁעָלִיָּהֶם רָעֲשׂוּ בְרוּחַ  
וְהָיוּ עֲצִים שֶׁעָמְדוּ בְּדַמְמָה. וְהָרוּחַ  
אוֹתָהּ הָרוּחַ. וְהָרַעַשׁ וְהַדְּמָמָה בְּעֲצִים.  
וּמָה שֶׁהָיָה וּמָה שֶׁיִּכּוֹל הָיָה לְהִיּוֹת  
הֵם כֹּלָּא הָיוּ, אֲבָל הָרוּחַ אוֹתָהּ הָרוּחַ  
וְהַכֶּסֶּא אוֹתוֹ הַכֶּסֶּא לְזִכְרָהּ וְלִשְׁפֹּט  
וְהַחֹרֵשׁ בְּתַמוּנָהּ מִמְּשִׁיךְ לְחַרֵּשׁ אֶת הַדְּבָרִים  
שֶׁהָיוּ מֵעוֹלָם וְלִזְרַע דְּבָרִים שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיוּ לְעוֹלָם.

And that which has occurred an hour ago has already been  
And that which occurred at the beginning of the century on that farm has  
already been,  
And there were trees that rustled in the wind  
And trees that stood in silence. And the wind  
Is the same wind. And the noise and the silence in the trees.  
And that which has occurred and that which might have been  
It is as if they never were, but the wind is the same wind  
And the chair is the same chair for remembering and for judging  
And the plowman in the picture continues to plow those things  
Which have always been and to seed things that will never be.

<sup>30</sup> Eccl 1:10, *יש דָּבָר שֶׁיֵּאמַר רְאֵה־זֶה חֲדָשׁ הוּא כְּבָר הָיָה לְעֹלָמִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִלְּפָנֵינוּ* (Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say, “Look, this one is new!”—it occurred long since, in ages that went by before us).

4. The fourth implicit allusion to Ecclesiastes can be found on page 105, in stanza 15, as the poet states that wars and loves, יַעֲשׂוּ לָנוּ שְׁלֹוּה וְיִתְּנוּ, של כל מה שְׁהִיָּה וְלִמְעַלָּה וְלִמְטָה, שֶׁל כָּל מֵה שְׁהִיָּה / לָנוּ בְּטָחוֹן שֶׁל גְּדֻנָּה, / לָמְעַלָּה וְלִמְטָה, שֶׁל כָּל מֵה שְׁהִיָּה<sup>31</sup> (Wars and loves ... make us steady and give us the security of a seesaw, / upward and downward, of all that has been).
5. Page 148, stanza 17 contains the fifth reference, וְאוֹלֵי לְהַרְיֵחַ אֶת מֵה שְׁהִיָּה (perhaps to sniff out what has been).
6. The sixth and final implicit reference is found on page 152 in stanza 25, וְכֻלָּם מְבַשְּׂרִים אֶת מֵה שְׁהִיָּה, (And all of them are heralding what will be).

Again we ought to remember that the implicit references rely upon the earlier, foundational presence of the explicit references to Qohelet.

### 6.3 הַפֶּל הַבֶּל and the Theme of Frustration with Life's Absurdities and Unfairness

Ecclesiastes' narrator, Qohelet, proclaims "Everything is *hevel*," in Eccl 1:2. הַפֶּל הַבֶּל is the third trope that connects *Patuah Sagur Patuah* with Qohelet. "*Hevel*," literally meaning "mist" or "vapor," is often used metaphorically in Ecclesiastes to convey a meaning of "incomprehensible," "ungraspable," or "vanity." As a summation, the verse distills and abbreviates complex, broader concepts into a singular and abstract synopsis. In other words, Ecclesiastes opens with an abstract summary concept and goes on to repeat the same statement in five later verses: Eccl 1:14; 2:11, 17; 3:19, concluding with Eccl 12:8.<sup>32</sup>

It first appears on page 69, stanza 6, where the poet states,

אֶבֶל אֲנִי גַם כְּמוֹ מְאֵהָב. אֶבֶל אֲנִי. אֶבֶל.  
הַבֶּל הַבְּלִים אָמַר קִהְלֵת, הַפֶּל הַבֶּל.  
וְאֲנִי אֹמֵר אֶבֶל אֶבֶלִים. הַפֶּל אֶבֶל.

<sup>31</sup> For two other גְּדֻנָּה uses in *Patuah Sagur patuah*, see page 143, stanza 6, ("Jerusalem is a see-saw") and page 152 stanza 24 ("I saw old seesaws and all the kids pushing onto the old see-saw / its colors peeling but not onto the new dogs / and shining but they are more joyous").

<sup>32</sup> S. Salisbury, ed., *Groves-Wheeler*.



but I am also like a lover. But I. But. *Aval*.

A thick haze,' said Qohelet, 'a thick haze, everything is hazy.'<sup>33</sup>

*Havel havelim* said Qohelet, *havel havalim*, everything is *hevel*.<sup>34</sup>

And I say *aval avalim*. Everything is *aval*. Everything is but.

Found in the stanza's penultimate line, this overt reference is a quotation of Eccl 1:2, הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הַבֵּל. <sup>35</sup> In his rewriting of the biblical verse, Amichai's narrator dramatically personalizes the biblical verse, literally reading himself into Ecclesiastes' text, creating not just a relationship between the two texts and their narrator's voices, but also an intertextual relationship (between the two texts and their narrator's voices, alongside their respective texts).

The word "but" takes many forms: conjunction, contradiction, preposition, adverb; even functioning as a noun. "But" is fluid in its ability to negate, contrast, emphasize, and even affirm. Therefore, the function and actual meaning of the word "but" is amorphous, fluid, and even ungraspable—very much like Qohelet's "mist," "vapor," or "*hevel*." By using the Hebrew word "*aval*," meaning "but," Amichai's poetic "I" remains engaged in an intertextual relationship and is able to preserve the biblical verse's form and meaning while radically transforming and personalizing the biblical intertext through his rewriting.

The second appearance of הַבֵּל occurs on page 147, stanza 14. It is an explicit reference as Amichai's poet observes that there are days in Jerusalem when: הַכֹּל מְעִים. / הַכֹּל הַבֵּל, הַכֹּל אֶבֶל הַכֹּל כְּאָב. / Everything is guts. / Everything is absurd, everything is mourning, everything is pain).

There is further interaction between the classic and contemporary text: stanza 27, page 153 from within the same poem, which ends similarly: "[B]ride's thighs and groomsmen's hairy thighs / everything is thighs; הַכֹּל יָרִימִים." The poet connects stanza to stanza and poem to poem while continuing to link his work to that of Qohelet.

<sup>33</sup> On page six of his introduction to Ecclesiastes, Fox first defines the literal meaning of הַבֵּל, as "breath" or "vapor;" followed by several of its possible renderings throughout Ecclesiastes: "vanity," "futile," "ephemeral," "incomprehensible," "absurd," and "senseless;" M. V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Bible Commentary; Philadelphia, Pa.: Jewish Publication Society of America, 2004), p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Eccl 1:2, הַבֵּל הַבָּלִים הַכֹּל הַבֵּל; this verse, along with the second half of the inclusio, Eccl 12:8.

<sup>35</sup> *TANAKH: A New Translation of THE HOLY SCRIPTURES According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, CD-ROM, Version 1.7, (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985), *Accordance 7.4.2* CD-ROM, (Altamonte Springs, Fla.: OakTree Software, 2007).

#### 6.4 The Root זכר and the Theme of Memory

“ומי יזכור את הזוכרים,” (And who will remember the remembers) appears as the title of the twenty-second poem of *Patuah Sagur Patuah*, pages 173–177, as well as at various intervals within this penultimate poem, in stanzas 1 and 2 on page 173; stanza 8 on page 176; stanza 10 on page 177.<sup>36</sup> As a title, it appears without the question mark, but when it appears as a line within stanzas, it functions as a question, thereby operating as both statement and question within the poem and cycle of poems. The importance of this syntax is reflected in how it relates as an implicit reference to Ecclesiastes’ verses, first and most prominently Eccl 1:11, and subsequently Eccl 2:16; 9:5, 15; 11:8, and 12:1. In these cases, there exists a strongly implied implicit reverberation of “who will remember the remembers?” with Eccl 1:11,<sup>37</sup> אֵין זְכוֹר לְרֵאשִׁימִים וְגַם לְאַחֲרָיִם שִׁיְהִיו לְאִי־הִיָּה לָהֶם זְכוֹר עִם שִׁיְהִיו לְאַחֲרָיִם (There is no remembrance of things past, nor of the things yet to come will there be remembrance among those who come still later).<sup>38</sup> Qohelet continues bemoaning the limitations of memory in Eccl 2:16, כִּי אֵין זְכוֹר לְחָכָם עִם־הַכְּסִיל לְעוֹלָם בְּשִׁבְרֵי הַיָּמִים הַבָּאִים הַכֹּל נִשְׁכַּח וְאִי־יָמוּת הַחָכָם עִם־הַכְּסִיל (For the wise man, just like the fool, is never remembered, inasmuch as in the days to come both will have already been forgotten. Oh how the wise man dies just like the fool!)<sup>39</sup> The theme of memory’s demise continues in Eccl 9:5, כִּי הַחַיִּים יוֹדְעִים שִׁיְמָתוֹ וְהַמֵּתִים אֵינָם יוֹדְעִים מְאוּמָה וְאִי־עוֹד לָהֶם שָׂכָר כִּי נִשְׁכַּח וְזָכָר (For the living know that they will die, while the dead know nothing and no longer have any recompense, for their memory is forgotten).<sup>40</sup> Amichai’s “And who will remember the remembers?” subtly and implicitly echoes Qohelet’s various qualities of memory.

#### 6.5 Ecclesiastes 12:13

The verse Eccl 12:13 is referenced twice by Amichai’s poetic voice. סוֹף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יִרָא וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שָׁמֹר כִּי־זֶה כָּל־הָאָדָם (The conclusion of the matter. Everything has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments. For this is the entirety of [every] man).

<sup>36</sup> The ultimate being, “The Jewish Time Bomb,” Y. Amichai, *Patuah Sagur Patuah*, p. 178.

<sup>37</sup> We have chosen to utilize Michael V. Fox’s translations of Ecclesiastes’ verses 1:11; 2:16; 9:5, 15, and 12:1.

<sup>38</sup> M. V. Fox *A Time to Tear Down*, p. 164.

<sup>39</sup> M. V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, p. 181.

<sup>40</sup> M. V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, pp. 288–289.

1. It first appears on page 127, stanza 4: פְּתוּחַ סָגוּר פְּתוּחַ. זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם. (Open closed open. This is the entirety of every man).<sup>41</sup>
2. A reference to the verse reappears on page 167, stanza 11, stating, סוּף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמַע. עַכְשָׁו גַּם יִלְדָּתִי / הִתְגַּיְסָה לְצָבָא (The end of the matter, everything has been heard. Now too my daughter / has been drafted into the army).

The verse, as it follows the epilogue Eccl 12:9–12, signifies that the book is at its end.<sup>42</sup> For the poet it expresses a sense of finality and inevitability as well.

### 6.6 Ecclesiastes 3:19

One final reference remains. It is an explicit reference to Eccl 3:19, כִּי מִקְרָה בְּנִי־הָאָדָם וּמִקְרָה הַבְּהֵמָה וּמִקְרָה אֶחָד לָהֶם כְּמוֹת זֶה בֶּן מוֹת זֶה וְרוּחַ אֶחָד לָכֹל (For in respect of the fate of man and the fate of beast, they have one and the same fate: as the one dies so dies the other, and both have the same life-breath; man has no superiority over beast, for everything is absurd). On page 171 stanza 6, Amichai's poetic "I" states, זֶה מוֹתָר זֶרַע הָעֵץ עַל זֶרַע הָאָדָם: / הוּא כְּמוֹ רַעֲשֵׁן שְׂמַח וְזֶה שִׁיר אֶהְבֵּתוֹ (This is its superiority, the tree's seed over the seed of man).

### 7. SUMMARY

We have explored the six major themes and linguistic constructions that bind Qohelet to *Patuah Sagur Patuah*: the root סבב, the construction + מה היה + ש, הפל הפל, the root זכר, Eccl 12:13, and Eccl 3:19 in thirty-one explicit or implicit allusions to the biblical book. We discussed seventeen explicit references and fourteen implicit references. The poetry collection is replete with over seventy thematic allusions as well, secured by the foundational strength of the explicit and implicit linguistic associations. Once one is provided with the catalogue of these explicit and implicit references, one

<sup>41</sup> Additionally, Michael V. Fox remarks that "*Kol ha'adam* means 'every man' throughout the Bible, 'not all of man,'" M. V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 362. In our rendering of זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם we have attempted to both maintain this fidelity to the biblical meaning as well as convey what we think the poet might have had in mind, given the common usages of each unit of the phrase in modern Hebrew.

<sup>42</sup> M. V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, p. 361.

literally reads Qohelet through Amichai, as much as one reads the poet through the ruminations of the biblical sage.

The poet concludes the thirteenth stanza of the fifteenth poem with his usage of the concluding words of religious books, “*tam ve'nishlam*,” (stanza 13, page 125). And he does so within only a few stanzas of referencing Qohelet’s concluding words, found in Eccl. 12:13, “*Zeh kol ha'adam*.” So too has our reading come to an end, “*tam venishlam*.”