AMICHA’S OPEN CLOSED OPEN\(^1\) AND NOW AND IN OTHER DAYS\(^2\): A POETIC DIALOGUE

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People waiting for someone begin to resemble those who are not waiting anymore. Silence covers them all. Depair is a lullaby. And while they are sleeping at night, God violates the ban of Rabbi Gershom and opens

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their souls to read what is written there,
like a letter. In the morning God tucks the letter back in
and licks the envelope shut.
They will never know He has read every word because
He seals the envelope with an artist’s hand,
like the military censor.

Literal translation:

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People who are waiting for someone begin to
resemble those who aren’t waiting anymore, silence
covers them all. Despair is a lullaby.
And at night when they are sleeping, God violates
the ban of Rabbi Gershom and opens
their souls to read what is written on them
like a letter. And in the morning He returns the letter
and seals the envelope
and they will not know that God has read it all
for He closed the envelope with great artistry
like a censor of letters.3

“People who are waiting for someone begin to / resemble those who
aren’t waiting anymore,” Amichai’s familiar voice is speaking in pseudo-
axioms again, this time from the pages of his last volume of poetry
published in his lifetime, Open Closed Open. This is the second of six
numbered poems, which together form a cycle titled “A Nightly
Promenade in Emeq Refa’im.” The statement quoted attempts to equate,
perhaps, those who hope with those who do not hope. This equation
sounds ominous when “Emeq Refa’im” in the cycle’s title is read not
only as a locus marker—the name of a Jerusalem street—but also as a
sign pointing to the literal meaning and ancient echoes of this name.4

3 Amichai, Patuah sagur patuah, 77. The literary translation is from Yehuda
Amichai, Open Closed Open, trans. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld (New York:
Harcourt, 2000), 77. All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

4 Wandering in Emeq Refa’im Street is the subject of an earlier cycle of
Amichai’s poems, titled “Four Resurrections in Emeq Refa’im Street.” The focus
of that cycle is different, but the preoccupation with the meaning of the street’s
name is prevalent. See Yehuda Amichai, Gam ha’egrof hayah pa’am yad petu’ah
ve’etsba’ot (The Fist Used to Also Be an Open Hand and Fingers) (Jerusalem and Tel
The words *emeq refa'ìm* evoke the underworld, the valley (*emeq*) of ghosts, or spirits of the dead (*refa'ìm*). The title's nocturnal stroll, then, is not a mere walk (perhaps from the speaker's, or Amichai's, actual dwelling, Mishqenot Sha'ananim) to the neighboring German Colony, but rather a visit in *she'ol*, the land of the dead.

This reading of the entire cycle of poems draws upon its frame—title and closure—as well as upon its plot. In the second poem and in others in the cycle, phantoms inhabit every site in the journey through the streets of the neighborhood. A once-upon-a-time home of a once-upon-a-time friend, scraps of paper turned tombstones, reverberations of music and dance from bygone parties all haunt the speaker as he wanders through the past. The sixth and last poem of “A Nightly Promenade in Emeq Refa’im” closes with “a train passing like a spirit who is rising from the dead.” *Olah me’ov* (rising from the dead) literally means “ascends by necromancy.” It is a clear allusion to the only biblical séance of necromancy, where the spirit of Samuel was brought up from the dead for King Saul the night before his last battle (1 Samuel 28). Emeq Refa’im, in this cycle of poems, is the underworld and a main street’s name in Jerusalem, simultaneously.

Although the second poem is an integral part of the cycle, it seems to deviate from the other five poems in terms of its relationship to the specific neighborhood and the almost macabre hold it has on the speaker/visitor. The impersonal assertion which opens it determines that human beings who wait resemble those who do not wait. The statement carries in its axiomatic formulation the air of universalistic truisms, independent of time and place. Humanity is divided in two: people who wait and those who do not wait. This division implies that the more similar these groups become, the harder it is to differentiate between them.

Although the statement sounds authoritative, its content is ambiguous if not illogical. How are the opposites (waiting/not waiting) similar? At what point does hope resemble despair? Is it when those who wait, or hope, begin to realize that the object of their anticipation will never materialize? Or is it when they understand that even if their desire is granted, it is only for a fleeting moment? Do the “people who are waiting for someone” look like “those who aren’t waiting anymore” because they are all asleep during the speaker’s nightly stroll? Are they similar because dreams of people of all categories share the same hopes and fears? Are the people “who don’t wait” the bereaved living-dead who stopped waiting or feeling because their loved ones had died or were killed in the war? Are the “nonwaiting” dead themselves? If so, “not waiting anymore” may be a euphemism for eternal slumber, and the living, at night, resemble the dead. “Sleep is one sixtieth of death,” states the Talmud (Berakhot
The poem's speaker seems to be a modern Ecclesiastics who knows the eroding power of time, the falsehood of boundaries between sleep and death, truth and lie, joy and sorrow, hope and despair.

The poem provides its own pseudo-rational explanation to its opening statement: "Silence covers them all. Despair is a lullaby." In other words, people (those who wait and those who do not) are similar because, like children at bedtime, they are covered and lullabied. Alas, not loving parents stand at their bedside, but silence (which covers them all) and despair (which sings them a lullaby). The cynical equation makes some sense: those who wait and those who do not look alike because, at night, they are under a spell. The omnipotent equalizers—silence and despair—have dominion over them all.

Amichai's fascination with equalizers and quasi-axioms is evident throughout his poetry. Those may be real or imaginary, and they often form deceptive similarities and rules. The poem at hand is unique in that it contains equalizing forces as well as a quasi-axiomatic formulation whose experiential and formal roots go back to a specific poem written five decades earlier. It is my contention that the second poem in "A Nightly Promenade in Emeq Refa'im," published in 1998, carries a multilayered intratextual relationship with the poem "Rain on a

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5 One example of Amichai's fascination with pseudo-equations is as follows: "And there is a tree that holds onto the earth with its roots / as if with despairing fingers, /so the earth won't sink down, / and beside it a tree pulled down by the same earth, / and both are one height, you can't tell the difference." See "Orchard," in Me'adam attah ve'el adam tashuv (From Man Thou Art and unto Man Thou Shalt Return, 1985) in Yehudah Amichai, The Selected Poetry of Yehudah Amichai, trans. Chana Bloch and Stephen Mitchell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 162. Quasi-mathematical equations can also be found frequently in Amichai's poetry. An example can be noted in "Derekh shetot nequdot over raq kav yashar ehad," in Amichai, Shirim: 1948–1962, 90.

6 About the thematic closeness between Amichai's early poetry and the experience of the War of Independence, see Dan Miron, Mul ha'ah hashoteq (Jerusalem: Keter, 1992), 273–78.

7 By "intratext" I mean another text from the same author's corpus to which the text at hand relates. In other words, any text in Amichai's corpus may serve as intratext in the reading of another text he wrote. This is different from "intertext," used later in this paper. By "intertext" I mean, following Riffaterre: "A perception of a tradition in the text, of an allusion to another author." See Michael Riffaterre, Semiotics of Poetry (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 85. Also: "A text remembered by the reader [which] warns him in advance of what he will find in the text that he is deciphering. When his expectations are confirmed,
Battlefield," the monumental poem from Amichai's poetic debut of 1955, *Now and in Other Days*. Only by reading the poems side by side will the later poem reveal its matrix. The fine line between sleep and death and the portrayal of the vulnerable adult as a child are at play in both texts. Universal powers serve as false equalizers in both. Yet, the most significant common trait of the poems is the restrained expression of deep sorrow through a specific structural scheme: syntax, prepositions, and adverbs. This well-wrought construction, although barely visible to the naked eye, may be unveiled through a close reading. A comparative analysis of the texts contributes not only to a better understanding of both poems but also to a deeper appreciation of Amichai's art of understatement.

The three opening lines of the second poem in the cycle "A Nightly Promenade in Emeq Refa'im" undoubtedly lend themselves to the structure of "Rain on a Battlefield." For the falling rain, as well as for the soldier who is facing his comrades, the dead and the living are equal; that

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is, rain keeps falling on them all and the feeling of friendship does not cease with death. Rain and friendship are, therefore, the equalizing forces in the early poem. Silence and despair, the equalizers in the late poem, also do not discriminate between waiting and nonwaiting people. The overarching forces, or equalizers—rain and friendship in the one poem, and silence and despair in the other—have a similar role in both poems. They are placed either as an introduction to or as a summary of the symmetrical formulations that define human categories. ("It rains on my friends' faces" precedes the division between the dead and the living, while "Silence / covers them all. Despair is a lullaby" follows the division between people who are waiting and those who are not waiting.)

The body of each of the statements employs the relative pronoun "who" (asher or she-) as a structural device—a creator of symmetry. "Who" is also a precursor of a quintessential characteristic of a group, as well as a precursor of the absence of that characteristic. Thus, with the power of the pronoun, the world is divided into categories: people who wait for someone / who do not wait, in the 1998 poem; or comrades who cover their heads / who do not cover, in the earlier counterpart. The "wanting category" (those who do not cover, or those who do not wait) is depicted in each of the poems in a "wanting" phrase. The living, therefore, "cover their heads with a blanket" while the dead "do not cover anymore"; the object of "not covering" is missing. Likewise, the "people who are waiting for someone" are described in full, while the others "aren't waiting anymore." The object of "not waiting" is, again, missing. The deficient phrases are syntactically correct and logically sound, yet through their deficient structure they subtly underscore the awareness of the deeper-than-formal asymmetry—that of loss and longing.

The schematic structure that I outlined here may be reduced to the following formula, which is true for both texts:

$$\text{When the equalizers (E) are present:}$$

$$\text{subject/noun (Xa) + relative pronoun (R) + verb (Y) + object/noun (Xb)}$$

$$\text{= subject/noun (Xa) + relative pronoun (R) + negation (N) + verb (Y) + adverb (A); i.e., if: "E," then: Xa+R+Y+Xb = Xa+R+N+Y+A}$$

Following is a schematic presentation that highlights the closeness between the original formula from "Rain on a Battlefield" (I) and its 1998 development (II).

I: if "E" then:

$$Xa + R \text{ (asher) + Y (mekhassim) + Xb}$$

$$\text{= Xa + R (asher) + N (einam) + Y (mekhassim) + A (od)}$$
II: if “E” then:
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X_a + R (\text{she}) + Y (\text{mehakkim}) + X_b = X_a + R (\text{she}) + N (\text{lo}) + Y (\text{mehakkim}) + A (\text{od})^9
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In each of the poems, the second, deficient, part of the quasi-schematic formulation depicts an essential human activity that became obsolete ("do not cover anymore" and "aren't waiting anymore"). The Hebrew expression kevar lo would often be employed in this context because it is the common literary, as well as spoken, way to convey the concept of “anymore” (for example: hu kevar lo gar po [he does not live here anymore])\(^{10}\). This is not the case in this pair of poems. Instead of the expected kevar lo, a much rarer form is used: negation + verb + od. The deference to the rare form is especially peculiar in the semicolloquial context of the later poem. A close reading, however, reveals that the partiality to od fits several purposes. Unlike the word kevar, the monosyllabic adverb od when it carries the meaning of “anymore” is always placed at the end, not at the middle, of a phrase. It is, therefore, more appropriate when the purpose is to convey irreversibility or to lament a being who was and will never return. As opposed to kevar's three consonant sounds, the single consonant sound in od emphasizes in its economy the nature of the decree. The curt pronunciation of that single consonant sound d aids in relating the idea of finality—unlike r (or l, m, n for that matter), the d does not continue reverberating.

Od plays the same role in both poems and is placed in a similar position in both: it seals the irreversible division to categories as it closes the second leg of the quasi-equation. However, in the earlier war poem, od is the final word, while in the later poem it closes the phrase but not the poetic line nor the poem. The later poem lacks, intentionally I believe, the ominous effect of tragic closure magnified by the position of od in the early “Rain on a Battlefield.”

By following the differences in the manipulations of od, a greater phenomenon is unveiled, namely, the transformation in Amichai’s poetics. Od is but one manifestation of one turn in Amichai’s writing of the last two decades—the move from declarative language toward understated,

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9 In the contemporary Israeli Hebrew of speakers of European origin, the pronunciation of the letters het (represented in the transliteration as h) and khaf (represented as kh) is identical. Thus, the words mekhassim (cover) in the earlier poem and mehakkim (wait) in the later poem are very similar in sound.

10 Kevar may also appear at the end of a phrase (hu lo gar po kevar). However, this form is less common, and its existence does not contradict the other qualities of od in this context.
The underlying schematic structure common to both texts is readily visible only in the earlier poem. The existence and position of two equalizing forces, the division to categories by means of the pronoun “who,” the deficient phrase depicting the “wanting” category, and the use of od as closure are all camouflaged in the later poem, while in the earlier poem they are blatantly clear. This may be due, in part, to the theme (the highly structured war poem reflects the order and discipline of a soldier’s world). But mostly, the masking of the organizing principles in the later poem is a reflection of how Amichai’s writing evolved. The shift in poetics is also responsible, at least to some extent, for the consistent low-key and refined choices in tone, vocabulary, syntax, and line divisions in the later poem.\footnote{For a detailed analysis of the shift in Amichai’s later poetics, see Nili Scharf Gold, Lo kaberosh (Not Like a Cypress: The Transformation of Images and Structures in the Poetry of Yehuda Amichai) (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1994), 69–71, 117–75. The issue of camouflage is further discussed in Nili Scharf Gold, “And the Vows Are Not Vows” [Hebrew], Siman Qeri’ah 22 (July 1991): 361–78; and in idem, “A Burning Bush or a Fire of Thorns,” Prooftexts 14 (1) (1994): 49–69.}

The tragic implications of the formulation created by Amichai in the earlier poem are defused in the opening segment of the later poem, which I see as a later variation of the same formulation. This three-line segment of the later poem overlaps the earlier poem in its entirety, but it lacks the dramatic impact of the early text. Not fallen soldiers but waiting people are in the foreground in the later poem. In addition, the power of the later equalizers is diminished. The rain that falls on all the comrades, living and dead, ignores the extreme polarity between them. Silence, the nocturnal equalizer, covers people in the midst of metamorphosis, when the contrast has already begun to fade. Furthermore, the existence of eight continuing lines beyond the quasi-axiom, and the seemingly peaceful content of these lines, aid in the repression of the trauma. In other words, the notion of death that dominates the battlefield in the rain is only implied in the promenade in Jerusalem’s German Colony.

The vocabulary is another testimony to the shift in poetics: while the poem from Now and in Other Days refers to its central figures as “comrades,” not “friends” (the rare synonym re’ay, not haveray), the poem from Open Closed Open employs the common expression for “people,” benei adam. True, re’ay is a linguistic staple of the period (the War of Independence, 1948),\footnote{The centrality of the concept re’ut (camaraderie, friendship) in that period is reflected in its frequent appearance, in all its inflections, in Pirhei esh (Flowers of Fire),} yet it is also a marker of the higher diction typi-
cal of Amichai’s early collections. The negation form and the relative pronoun follow the same path of lowering the language. The literary pronoun 
asher turns into the spoken she, while the inflection of the high present-tense negative ein (einam) is replaced by the colloquial use of lo.

It is against the background of these significant stylistic differences that the insistence on the use of the word od gains meaning. As a matter of fact, od is the only word that appears in exactly the same form and acts in a similar manner in both texts. Its ungrammatical nature in the context of the later poem demands the readers’ attention and directs them towards the five-decades-old intratext, “Rain on a Battlefield.”

Apart from the similarity in structure and the reemergence of od, there is a verb root common to both texts: k-s-h (kaf-samekh-hei; “to cover”). While its form varies in each of the poems, the very existence of this root attests to the tone of compassion underlying the texts. The early poem’s living soldiers “cover (mekhassim) their heads with the blanket”; the dead “do not cover anymore.” The covering blanket protects the living from rain but, in the same battlefield, may also cover the dead. Yet, the most common association that a covering blanket may evoke is a bed at nighttime. In the later poem, silence covers (mekhasselt) the people of slumbering Jerusalem. The soldiers in 1948, like the waiting people in 1998, resemble vulnerable children who need to be covered before sleeping.

The blanket of yesteryear is transformed in the later poem into another, even more child-oriented marker of sleep—a lullaby. The irony lies in the poem’s use of quintessential markers of sleep—the covering blanket and the lullaby—to cross the thin line between sleep and eternal rest. Like the blanket, the lullaby is a carrier of both life and death. It usually recalls baby and cradle, peace and calmness, but here it merely qualifies despair. In the metaphor “despair is a lullaby,” despair is the subject, and the lullaby only the vehicle. Although not explicitly mentioned, mourning and bereavement accompany this simply constructed but densely packed metaphor. But this is not all. The form of the verb root k-s-h (kaf-samekh-hei; “to cover”) appears in the later poem in the singular: sheqet mekhasseh (silence covers). In “Rain on a Battlefield” the same verb comes only in the masculine-plural form: mekhassim. Yet, this early word,

which became the quintessential poetry collection of the War of Independence. See Hayyim Guri, Pirhei esh (Merhavia: Sifriya t Hapo‘alim, 1949). Re’ut (camaraderie) is a revered entity also in popular songs of that period, such as “Ha-Re’ut” by Hayyim Guri and “Dudu” by Hayyim Hefer. The literary periodical of that generation was called Yalqut hare‘im (The Comrades’ Collection) (Israel: Bialik Institute, 1943–1946).
mekhassim, echoes in the late poem, in the phonetically similar verb “to wait” (mehakkim). The sounds mekhassim/mehakkim (cover/wait) reverberate in the readers’ minds and remind them of the hold that the past has on the present.

It is through these hidden linguistic fragments and the disguised scheme that Amichai signals to the reader familiar with his early verse that his 1998 “nightly promenade” in the German Colony traverses a war zone, perhaps that of the War of Independence. It is as though the spirit of the poem “Rain on a Battlefield” rose from the dead to join the ghosts (refa’im) who haunt him in Emek Refa’im Street.

And yet, as mentioned before, the second poem of the cycle “A Nightly Promenade in Emek Refa’im” is the only poem of the six that completely lacks a reference to the neighborhood or to the man who roams its streets at night. Instead, a very irreverent and intrusive God enters the scene. When everything is covered by silence and despair, this God invades the souls of those who are waiting for someone as well as the souls of those who are no longer waiting.

God’s appearance serves as a thematic turning point that affirms the syntactical division, the poem’s only device of formal structure. The first part of the poem is one long sentence, followed by a very short one. This is the three-line segment that parallels “Rain on a Battlefield.” The second part starts in the fourth line and is comprised of two four-line sentences, each of which begins with the conjunctive vav (and), as if to undo the syntactical and thematic separation: “And at night, when they are sleeping, God violates”; “And in the morning He returns the letter.” The third sentence—“Despair is a lullaby”—connects the two longer units. “Despair” recalls the opening’s people “who aren’t waiting anymore,” while “lullaby” is a precursor to the night scene that follows.

The poetic cycle’s speaker is replaced by God, who is not an observer, but rather an actor. His initial action is a violation of a well-ingrained prohibition. The ban (herem) to which the fifth line refers forbids the unauthorized reading of private letters. It is ascribed to Rabbi Gershom, the great eleventh-century talmudic scholar and molder of German Jewry. Amichai’s poetry often resorts to ancient writings—it wrestles with liturgical texts, medieval poets, biblical personalities, words, and ideas. However, the reference to a medieval rabbinic figure and to his legal reform is a novelty, or at least a great rarity. It may be that German roots, common to the poet and the rabbi, are at play. Perhaps it is a re-emergence of the German-born child who was

13 See the entry “Gershom ben Yehudah Me’or Hagolah” in Encyclopaedia Judaica.
raised to follow rules but wishes to break them. Here it is not a child, or even an adult, but God Himself who disobeys. He does so in the capacity of a substitute to the poem’s speaker/visitor. God’s defiance might be a fulfillment of wishes for the-child-that-was, but it might also be a tempered reappearance of Amichai’s personified and criticized God of earlier collections.

“God … / opens / their souls to read what is written on them / like a letter.” The word nafshotehem (their souls), the true object of God’s reading, appears in the text once. The unauthorized reading of letters, then, is a simile, yet it occupies the remainder of this text, thus reducing or disguising the severity of God’s deed. The image of the soul as a letter stems from ancient beliefs. According to the Zohar, the soul writes a nightly report of its daily deeds. Sleeping on the Sabbath, therefore, is a true pleasure (ta’anug) because no writing is required or even allowed. The poem’s introduction to the divine reading of souls as a violation of a ban ignores the folk tradition and highlights the sense of forced penetration. God breaks into the most private, intimate domain and reads people’s inner lives. At night He opens up souls like letters. In the morning He returns and restores those letters.

The departure of souls during sleep, only to be returned by God in the morning, recalls a text that Amichai probably memorized in childhood. Now, decades later, he suggests his own interpretation of it. In this poetic commentary, unlike in many of his well-known readings of liturgy, the verbal tracks of this intertext are carefully covered. The text is a short morning prayer, the first prayer many Jewish children learn to recite: “Modeh ani lefanekha melekh hay veqayyam shehehezarta bi nishmati behemlah, rabbah emunatekha,” which is traditionally translated as: “I am grateful to You, living, enduring King, for restoring my soul to me, in compassion. You are faithful beyond measure.” In addition to the poem’s premise of the soul leaving at night and then returning, traces of the modeh ani prayer are sparingly scattered and scrambled through it. Such is the explicit mention of morning as the time for the letters’ recovery, or

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15 I learned about this belief and issues related to sleep as death from Rabbi Professor David Weiss-Halivni and Rabbi Thomas Klein. See Zohar, Bereshit 83 and Zohar Hadash, Bereshit 28.

16 Following Rifaterre, scrambling occurs when a text contains words found in a segment of the intertext, but with the order changed. See Rifaterre, Semiotics of Poetry; Rifaterre, Text Production.
the presence in the poem of the prayer’s key verb root h-z-r (het-zayin-resh; “to return/restore”).

Toward the end of the poem the words ba’omanut rabbah render the “great artistry” of God in resealing the envelopes. Omanut, in Hebrew, means art, but its sound evokes another Hebrew word: emunah, or emunatekha (faith, or your faith). The pun is not coincidental, for the morning prayer concludes with rabbah emunatekha, meaning that God’s faithfulness is vast, great. The word rabbah (great, much) appears in both the poem and the prayer. Amichai reverses the position of rabbah and converts faith into art: rabbah emunatekha into omanut rabbah. The work of God, it seems, is done by the artist. Amichai’s protest is no longer as blunt as when he proclaimed in an early poem that if God were not so full of mercy there would be more mercy in the world.17 The 1998 Amichai almost identifies himself with the God who roams the streets of Jerusalem, breaks the rules, and later erases the evidence. Furthermore, God, who disguises, camouflages, and conceals his actions with great artistry, is like the poet. Camouflage is one of the deeper poetic principles guiding Amichai’s writing, and in his late verse it is even an openly discussed topic.18

Yet the illusion of restoring matters to their original state is destroyed in the poem’s conclusion. God “seals the envelope / and they will not know that God has read it all ... like a censor of letters.” But a censor leaves clear traces of violation; portions of letters are sometimes cut and envelopes carry the censor’s stamp. What motivates God to hide His nocturnal activities? There are at least three explanations for why God has to conceal the fact that He read people’s souls. The first possibility is that the returned souls are damaged. The second possibility is that after reading their souls He did not fulfill their desires. The third and more likely possibility is that upon his reading of the souls God did not bring back the dead loved ones for whom people stopped waiting. All souls are equal in His eyes, those who wait and those who do not; He is the greatest equalizer but, like the rain, He is indifferent to people’s fates.

The vocabulary, despite its colloquial nature, is somewhat uncharacteristically devoid of words stemming from foreign roots. The ban of Rabbi Gershom, the souls, and the echoes of the morning prayer render the poem a halo of antiquity. The word “censor” stands out in this almost religious-sounding poem. “Censor,” when it appears in the last line of the poem, creates a “linguistic scandal” of sorts, requiring the

17 “A Merciful God” and “This Is Your Glory,” in Amichai, Shirim 1948–1962, 69, 71.
18 See note 11.
reader's attention. However, if one considers this poem's relationship to "Rain on a Battlefield," the ungrammatical nature of "censor" is resolved. It is through this word and its association with military censorship that the world of 1948, with its army, battles, and fallen comrades, reveals itself in the poem. The people who are waiting and those who are no longer waiting exist, like their visitor, in the valley of ghosts, even if now they are the quiet dwellers of Jerusalem. The passing train, which rises from the dead and closes the cycle "A Nightly Promenade in Emeq Refa'im," recalls King Saul, not only for the fact that he resorted to necromancy, but also because on that night he was facing his last battle. The formula that opens the second poem of the cycle, although disguised, is not merely a structure but rather a confession made by the poet of his own "death" in 1948. It is a statement similar to that made by Amichai in 1980: "I fell in the battle in Ashdod / in the War of Independence." At the same time, the presence of God may also be read as some source of consolation, even faith or hope to retrieve what has been lost: perhaps the poet can restore souls, revive the spirits of the dead, through his art.

19 Yehuda Amichai, "Since Then," in Shalvah gedolah: she'elot uteshuvot (Great Tranquillity: Questions and Answers) (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1980), 90.