Contrapuntal readings of the exilic consciousness: reading Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish together

Sarah Brooks Zahed

University at Albany, State University of New York, muslimatu.sarah@gmail.com

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Contrapuntal Readings of the Exilic Consciousness: Reading Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish Together

by

Sarah B. Zahed

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Abstract

In the essay “Cultural Criticism and Society” in *Prisms*, Theodor Adorno asserts that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34). In this study, I examine what it means to write poetry after the Catastrophe and the difficult relationship between historical genocides and their literary representations. My project “Contrapuntal Readings of the Exilic Consciousness: Reading Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish Together” explores the scope and character of poetry post-1940s to late 20th century in relation to the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, at the margins of Arabic and Hebraic literary traditions. Both *Shoah* and *Nakba* mark a specific turning point in Israeli and Palestinian literary histories indicating a parallel development of national and exilic literatures within the context of migration, displacement, and nationalism, whose effect in the language of representation and poetry is inevitable. Within this framework, this dissertation explores how the literary roles of Israeli and Palestinian national poets, Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish, as poets associated with nationhood and post-Catastrophe became entangled and limited within the politics of nationalism. As survivors of these historical and political processes, both Amichai and Darwish as “national” poets had to work simultaneously within their state boundaries, representing their respective nations, while also reshaping these boundaries. Amichai’s position as the *dor ha-mdina* (statehood generation poet), and Darwish’s position as the *al-adab al-multazim* (the poet of resistance) complicate their relationship with their respective nationalisms and their literary commitments within the Israeli and Palestinian conflict. Nonetheless, their poems reveal how the boundaries of their relative nationalistic identities are consistently interrupted by the representation of their exilic consciousness that marks differences, heterogenous histories, and tense cultural and literary inter-relationships.
Therefore, as opposed to reading within the national horizon, the goal of this study is twofold: i) to challenge the nationalistic readings of these state poets through a Saidian contrapuntal reading: a mode of reading and resistance that confronts the inner movements, and contradictions to reveal the slippery characteristics of nationalism as a concept and practice present in Amichai and Darwish’s poems; and ii) to trace the contrapuntal development of exile through an Arendtian reading of the conscious pariah in revitalizing exile as a literary motif for new imaginings of self-determination and as a source for newer commitments and other representations than of nationalisms. Within this framework of Arendt and Said’s advocacy for the exilic consciousness, this dissertation demonstrates how these theoretical concepts materialize in Amichai and Darwish’s poetic worlds, where their histories, languages, and narratives dance contrapuntally, maintaining a perpetual state of exile, thus upholding heterogeneity and humanistic resistance. They are, in Adorno’s term “barbarians”—poets who articulate new poetics that challenge reification and conventions in their attempt to represent the unrepresentable fate of exiles post-Catastrophes.
Acknowledgments

I must begin by thanking my family for their love, patience, and sacrifice. I began my journey as an international student scholar. Years ago, I had to leave my language, home, family, and familiarity to pursue a work that I consider important. I have missed too many life events, impossible to count by fingers, and they have missed me during those events. In my absence, my nephews grew taller and my parents grew shorter. I am grateful for their love and patience and I owe this work to them.

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Note on Translation

“Translation is the most intimate act of reading.”


This dissertation studies the translated works of Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish, whose original language of publication is in Hebrew and Arabic. While it is important to read their work in their original languages, the scope of Amichai and Darwish’s literary audience broadened with translation, specifically into English. The relationship between their original works, poetic systems, translations, and the reception of their translated work is complex. There are series of contradictory positions unfolding in the process of translation. On the one hand, translation has deterritorialized the poets’ work by reworking the borders of language— from local to global. On the other hand, selective translation practices in English shaped a subordinated body of work that produces reductive, distorted, and diagnostic reading of the poets. In other words, translation in the English language has given Darwish’s and Amichai’s poems a universality that depart from the constricts of their relative literary, historical, and political contexts, and from the demands of tradition and commitments of their canons which are otherwise present in the Hebraic and Arabic renditions of their poems. Simultaneously, English translation has also misappropriated the poets’ work within a nationalistic framework and historical contingencies, almost forcibly, without fully acknowledging the poets’ poetic-political trajectory present in the oeuvre of their poems.

Most importantly, even though a work of (mis)translation has caused grievances to the poets’ (discussed at length in chapter two), it has also given an insight into Amichai and Darwish’s poetic processes, revealing the polyphonic dimension of their poetic worlds. In other
words, a contrapuntal poiesis that marks intertextuality and the movement of their poetic languages. If read closely, these movements reveal a contrapuntal history of Amichai and Darwish’s poems, poetic languages, and identities that converge and diverge with Germany, German, Hebrew, Yiddish, Diaspora, Israel, Arabic, Palestine, and the Palestinians. These historical and linguistic counterpoints, both highlighted and obscured by (mis)translations, has been instrumental in the readings of Amichai and Darwish’s exilic consciousness and their visions of nationalisms.
Nationalism and Exile: A Contrapuntal Approach

On the form and—what is most important—on the relation between poetry and reality, on the question of what we intend to mean by the concept of “revolutionary poetry”. Is it in relation to the person, the society, the reality, or must revolution take place in the language? There are two currents. I have chosen both.

Mahmoud Darwish, *Palestine as Metaphor* 110

Introduction

This dissertation studies Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry post 1940s to late 20th century, in the context of the rise of the nation of Israel, and the fall of the nation of Palestine, at the margins of Arabic and Hebraic literary traditions. Adorno’s often misunderstood and misconstrued dictum, “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34)\(^1\) remains pivotal in questioning the relationship between poetry and representation, specifically in the context of the Jewish literary imagination post Holocaust followed by the revival of the Hebraic literary tradition and the rise of Jewish nationalism. Adorno’s thinking about the threat and challenges of writing poetry after the Catastrophe and its demands for literary representation\(^2\) initiated this study. Bearing in mind the weight of the catastrophes is unequitable, yet, if possible, can the question be raised in relation to Nakba—the Palestinian Catastrophe—to explore how poetry responds to the inescapable aporetic human condition of the Palestinian dispossession? Both

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\(^1\) See Adorno’s essay “Cultural Criticism and Society” in *Prisms* (1955), where he states “cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today” (34).

\(^2\) In response and support of Adorno’s thinking, Paul Celan addresses both the need to document the crisis of modernity, following horrors of the twentieth century, and the need for inventing poetic language and form for representation. See Celan’s poem “Todesfuge” (Death Fugue).
Shoah  

and Nakba mark the need and development of a different entry of lexicon (such as the terms Shoah and Nakba) to underscore the difficult relationship between literary representation and the politics of their historical genocides. In the post-Catastrophic poetic landscapes of Israel and Palestine, Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish stand as two towering figures. Within this context, this dissertation explores an approach to reading the poetry of Israel’s and Palestine’s national poets Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish as post-Catastrophe poets.

3 See the development of the lexicon Shoah from Yiddish term churban in reference to the Greek work Holokaustan, commonly known as Holocaust in English. See “Shoah: How a Biblical Term Became the Hebrew Word for Holocaust” by Gilad, Elon, Haaretz.


5 In Israeli and Palestinian literary studies, both Amichai and Darwish are referred as State poets and National poets interchangeably. Although in the context of Israeli and Palestinian struggle for self-determination, the concept and practice of the terms “State” and “Nationalism” hold distinct features, these concepts are not fixed defined and should make a fascinating study in parsing the historical and political meaning of the terms in the context of Israel’s independence and the dispossession of the Palestinians. However, to briefly explain, the establishment of the State of Israel known as Medina Yehudit in Hebrew, was influenced by European nationalism, and transpired from Jewish enlightenment. On the other hand, the Jewish nationalistic movement, was initially an anti-colonial movement that worked towards self-determination and liberation of the Jewish people. The creation of the Jewish State in Palestine in 1948 was a Zionist call to give shape to Jewish identity under a Jewish State during which the basic by laws of the State stated: “the State of Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, in which it exercises its natural, cultural, religious, and historical right to self-determination” and “the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is uniquely that of the Jewish people”. Therefore, the Jewish State gave the legal rights to the Jewish people in Israel to exercise their nationalism. For a detailed reading, see Rabinovitch Simon, editor. “Basic Law: Israel – The Nation-State of the Jewish People.” Defining Israel: The Jewish State, Democracy, and the Law, Hebrew Union College Press, 2018, pp. 121–24. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvd7w82b.7. Accessed 22 Jun. 2022.

Under the historical and political circumstances of Israel’s independence and the Palestinian Nakba, Palestine developed the need for a nationalistic politics of self-determination and liberation that was previously eclipsed under the broader politics of Arab nationalism during and after the British Mandate of Palestine. Thus, the call for the State of Palestine was specific to Palestinians fight for national independence. The scholarship around Israeli and Palestinian politics included the terms “State” and “Nationalism” in various transforming political contexts including the advocacy for binationalism as a means of plausible political future of coexistence. See Edward Said, “One-State Solution.” The New York Times Magazine, 1999, pp 36. https://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/10/magazine/the-one-state-solution.html. Chapter two studies in details the implications of binationalism in Amichai and Darwish’s poetical works, and its influences in aspiring an equal recognition of both Jewish and Palestinian nationalisms as markers of their sovereignty and identity under one nation-state. The chapter further provides an in-depth analysis of Amichai and Darwish’s poetical worlds colliding and transforming with the evolution of the concept and practice of binationalism from Theodore Herzl, Gershom Scholem to Edward Said, Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler.

6 It is understood that Hayim Bialik is the national poet of Israel. However, Amichai’s popularity earned him the honor of the national poet, specifically after the establishment of Israel. Referring here to Nili Scharf Gold’s Yehuda
Both *Shoah* and *Nakba* mark a specific turning point in Israeli and Palestinian literary histories and the development of exilic literatures within the context of migration, displacement, and nationalism, which affected the politics of poetry and representation. Under these circumstances, “exile [becomes] the nursery of nationality”\(^7\) and the role of literature gets entangled and limited with nationalism. As a result, Amichai, Darwish and their poetic voices are forced to become weighted with nationalistic significance. In response to their relative Catastrophes, this project explores how for Darwish and Amichai exile does not operate as an antidote to represent or recover nationalism. In contrast, this project demonstrates how both poets empower exile, and exemplify the movements\(^8\) within their exile, to challenge normative characteristics of their nationalisms, and to offer their contrapuntal and heterogeneous histories.

In place of a nationalistic reading of their exile, a contrapuntal reading of the poets’ heterogenous and exilic consciousness reveals the generative potential of exile for the development of both poets’ experimental late style. Incidentally, these poetic experimentations demonstrate alternative readings of exile disconnected from the farce and force of nationalistic politics of self-determination towards a heterogenous land and humanscape. In other words, a close reading of their poetry will show how Amichai’s German-Jewish-Israeli consciousness and

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\(^8\) The tracing of the exilic movement refers to the poetic movement as well. Darwish explains to Najat Rahman how criticism in the Arab world “remains mostly an attempt at deciphering or explanation of meaning—it does not seek the movement of meaning, even though one of the most remarkable developments in Arabic poetry is its move away from referential meaning to signification, directing its attention to the movement of meaning rather the meaning itself” (*Exile’s Poet* 321).
Darwish’s Palestinian-Arab consciousness move in-between their exilic consciousness—an involuntary historical reality turned into a choice that both poets embraced to combat the disillusionment and the hypocrisies of nationalism. As such, exilic consciousness not only provides the poets with new style and innovation, but also with the possibility of envisioning a world that at best can be described as Said’s vision of humanistic resistance.\(^9\)

The heart of this study is to read Amichai and Darwish contrapuntally, which goes beyond a mere comparative analysis of both poets’ poetry. Much scholarship has explored the fraught historical, political, and literary relationship between Israel and Palestine, including works by Noam Chomsky, Ilan Pappe, Ella Shohat, Barbara Harlow, Gayatri Spivak; their work in critical race studies and post-colonialism paved the way for this dissertation. Also, more recent works by Hella Bloom Cohen, Daniel Monterescu, and Anna Bernard have been influential in developing this project. In *The Literary Imagination in Israel-Palestine: Orientalism, Poetry and Biopolitics* (2016), Cohen offers a reading of mixed romances between Israelis and Palestinians, and the question of hybridity and miscegenation within the framework of critical race and postcolonial studies. Cohen approaches her reading influenced by biopolitical theories of Roberto Esposito and the philosophies of twentieth-century anthropologist and creative nonfiction writer Gilberto Freyre to examine the multipronged rhetorical development of the hybrid figure and its relation to nation-building\(^10\) as well as the biopolitical theories of Roberto Esposito. In *Jaffa Shared and Shattered: Contrived Coexistence in Israel/Palestine* (2015),

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\(^9\) Said in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* agrees with Adorno’s argument that “there is an irreconcilability between aesthetic and the nonaesthetic that we must sustain as a necessary condition of our work as humanists” and that the “task of a humanist is...to both insider and outsider to the circulating ideas and values that are at issue in our society or someone else’s society or the society of the other” (72, 76).

Monterescu explores relational urbanism surrounding the city of Jaffa. Influenced by Albert Memmi, David Harvey, and Henri Lefebvre, Monterescu offers a study of “spatial heteronomy,” “stranger relations” and “cultural indeterminacy”\(^{11}\) that guides his project in exploring the urban space in the context of its political conflict with the aim of finding a sustainable and peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine. Lastly, in *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration, and Israel/Palestine* (2013), Bernard concentrates on the cultural transmission, circulation, and representation of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict within the framework of nation and narration. In lieu of Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, and Fredric Jameson, Bernard focuses on the representation of the nation by extending to the field of postcolonial studies and questions how Edward Said, Mourid Barghouti, Amos Oz, Sahar Khalifeh, and Anton Shammas approach national narration as a provisional political act for wider social liberation\(^{12}\).

This project is indebted to all the works mentioned above and the examples set by Judith Butler, Lital Levy, Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman, Salma Jayussi, Chana Kronfeld, and their committed scholarship in challenging the readings of Palestinian and Israeli writers and poets, individually and comparatively. While scholars have touted the importance of reading Palestinian and Israeli literatures *together*, very few have studied Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish in tandem. In fact, there are many anthologies dedicated to the representation of the literary works from Israel and Palestine such as *The Anthology in Jewish Literature* (2004) edited by David Stern, *Poets on the Edge: An Anthology of Contemporary Hebrew Poetry* (2009)

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\(^{11}\) See *Jaffa Shared and Shattered: Contrived coexistence in Israel/Palestine*, 2015, pp. 22.

\(^{12}\) See *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration, and Israel/Palestine*, 2013, pp. 16.
selected and translated by Tsipi Keller, and, *The Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (1992) edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi. Although these anthologies occupy an important space in the literary scene of the Jewish and Palestinian literatures, only recently, poets from both Israel and Palestine are selected to share a space in an anthology titled *Before There is Nowhere to Stand: Palestine/Israel: Poets Respond to the Struggle* (2012). The anthology opens with an introduction by the American Jewish feminist poet, Alicia Ostriker, prefacing the objective of the anthology, i.e., to introduce a poetic conversation between the Israelis and Palestinians. She writes that in the middle of traumatic and violent times of national independence and occupation that continues even today, both Jews and Arabs have stories to be told. Hence, the anthology brings poets from both sides to be a voice for themselves, sometimes for the Other, and sometimes for human solidarity. Among the list of poets whose poems contribute to this cause is Peter Marcus's poem "Dialog Beneath the Light." The poem plays with intertextuality as the composition of the poem. Marcus selectively quotes verses from both Amichai and Darwish and puts them into a dialogue to create a new poem and a new voice. Referring to Marcus's lyrical poem, Alicia Ostriker writes that "the story of Israel/Palestine is ugly, tragic, human [and] the book you hold in your hands exists to remind you that the story is not finished". Marcus's innovative and experimental poem "Dialog Beneath the Light" narrates the sufferings of exile, national identity, loss, and liberation through the poetic voice of both Amichai and Darwish; together. It is within the premise of Marcus's poem this dissertation seeks to continue the conversation of reading Darwish and Amichai not separately but together.

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13 Lost Horse Press is an independent nonprofit press established in the year 1998 to publish and promote the works of authors and poets who are usually ignored by mainstream publishing houses. See http://www.losthorsepress.org/about/ for more information.
Furthermore, only one doctoral dissertation and two articles have been published dedicated in reading the poets together: Lobna Ben Salem’ article “Humanizing the Enemy: Transcending Victimhood Narratives in Mahmoud Darwish’s and Yehuda Amichai’s Poetry,” and Morticia Addams’s article titled “Mahmoud Darwish and Yehuda Amichai in a Web of Opposition and Contradiction.” Most importantly, Sheera Talpaz’s dissertation titled “Resistance and Reluctance: On the ‘National Poets’ of Israel/Palestine (2018)” has been inspiring in the development of this project. Talpaz’s research focuses on the process and history of canonization of the three national poets of Israel/Palestine—Hiam Bialik, Mahmoud Darwish and Yehuda Amichai—and their interrelationships. However, Talpaz approaches reading Amichai and Darwish, and the development of nationalistic rhetoric from a comparative vantage point with the acknowledgement of the asymmetrical relationship between the two. At this scholarly juncture, this dissertation enters with a call to revisit the Saidian framework of contrapuntal criticism and hopes to contribute to the small but growing scholarship in Israeli and Palestinian literary studies by extending a different reading framework.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said develops contrapuntal criticism as a form of analysis that:

…should be modelled not (as earlier notions of comparative literature were) on a symphony but rather on an atonal ensemble; we must take into account all sorts of spatial or geographical and rhetorical practices—inflections, limits, constraints, intrusions,

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inclusions, prohibitions—all of them tending to elucidate a complex and uneven topography. (386)

In addressing the scope of comparative literature studies, Said describes the early twentieth century comparative criticism as a secular historical practice (50). Said explains the interrelationships between the practice of comparative literature scholarship and the influences of European nationalism and culture (51). Said argues that although nationalism did not produce stress amongst these secular scholars, the catholic tradition did, which is why, European scholars believed that “a comparative study of literature could furnish a transnational, even trans-human perspective of literary performance” (52). Thus, Goethe’s idea of Weltliteratur began to provide a center to group literatures; however, according to Said’s argument this “grouping” of world literature remained western. Furthermore, Said explains how comparative literature—a study of world literature—was a field epistemologically organized hierarchically, that glossed over the uneven distribution of power (colonialism or decolonization) that produces “world literature.” Said critiques forms of western comparative studies that “highlights, dramatizes, celebrates, a certain idea of history, and at the same time obscures the fundamental geographical and political power empowering that idea” (54). Said further argues that the objective for a comparative literary study for the European scholars was to advocate for a transnational literature while still maintaining silence of the non-European world (58). As such, for Said the way to redeem comparative studies is to engage in the studies of literature contrapuntally: “a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts”, which can offer alternative or new narratives (59). Thus, the ethical redemption of comparative studies, in Said’s articulation, is in contrapuntal criticism or a mode of reading: to see counterpoints as a double
characterization of both independence and interdependence. Said’s colleague and scholar, R. Radhakrishnan defines Said’s reading of counterpoint in lieu of contrapuntal criticism both “as a performance and representation, and a mode of making meaning that does not merely re-present a musical possibility that already exists…the possibility is the result of an invention, a particular form of musical imagining”\textsuperscript{17}.

Said revisits and develops his methodology of contrapuntal criticism in his last work \textit{On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain}. Taking Mozart’s composition and his use of counterpoint as an example, Said accentuates how counterpoint gives his music “added substance so that the E-flat canon in the second-act finale one experiences not only a remarkable sense of rigor but also a special ironic expressiveness well beyond the words and the situation” (\textit{On Late} 62). Note the emphasis on Mozart’s choice of counterpoint as a form of expression that “reveals them [musical notes] to be bound to one another in new logically consequent embrace” (63). Said refers to this form of contrapuntality as a “unique and interestingly plastic aesthetic space” that provokes a) the dislocation of expectation and b) creation of new kinds of thinking (117) which comparative analysis lacks.

Thus, in the context of the contrapuntal imperative, this project, “Contrapuntal Readings of the Exilic Consciousness: Reading Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish Together,” uses contrapuntal criticism as a lens to exercise a reading of Amichai and Darwish’s poems in revitalizing their exiles for new imaginings of self-determination that ambitiously inquiries into the possibility of detaching itself from the question of nationhood. The poets’ challenges of exilic consciousness, revealed in their love poems and elegies, demonstrate their desire to move

beyond the strict structures of exile’s relationship to nationalism. Exile, as a literary motif, then
develops distinctively as a source for newer commitments and representations other than of
nationalisms. The study engages a reading of Amichai and Darwish’s choice to embrace their
exiles and their counterpoints, as an appeal to a contrapuntal aesthetic, coinciding with the
development of more than two Catastrophic events—Shoah, Naksa and Nakba— that demand
new thinking on poetic representation.

Biographical Counterpoints

1948 and twentieth century politics transformed both poets’ lives. Yehuda Amichai
immigrated to Palestine in 1936 from Wurzburg Germany, one of the few Jewish families that
escaped before the Nazis took power.\(^\text{18}\) Amichai was born in a Jewish farmhouse in the south of
Germany, a village called Giebelstadt, where the poet could trace back four generations who
lived and died in Germany since the Middle Ages.\(^\text{19}\) Amichai fought in World War II then served
as a commando in the Hagenah underground during the establishment of Israel in 1948. He also
participated in a series of Israel and Palestine Wars in 1956 and 1973. Amichai’s poetry appeared
in the Hebrew literary scene during a time when the relationship between poetry and nationalist
ideology was intensively entangled. Amichai’s poetry in the 1950s was introduced as a reaction
against his predecessors the Shlonsky-Alterman school of thought who were highly nationalized
in their literary works, and yet, the reception of his poetic style and experimentation was

\(^\text{18}\) Amichai says “My family was, at that time, one of the few Jewish families from central Europe in Palestine. No
one was killed in the coming Holocaust”. (The Art of Poetry 21)

\(^\text{19}\) “My grandparents, and my great-great-great-grandparents all were born in Germany, reaching back, I think
to the Middle Ages” (The Art of Poetry 215).
overlooked for a nationalized interpretation\textsuperscript{20}. During such an ambivalent time, Amichai became one of the founding members of \textit{Likrat}\textsuperscript{21}, a modernist group magazine who published neoimagists’ works and manifestoes in the 1950s\textsuperscript{22}. Amichai’s breakthrough with an English audience came in the late 1970s with the translation of his poetry in collaboration with Ted Hughes. During this time Amichai became a visiting professor at University of California, Berkely and a poet in residence in 1987 at New York University. Amichai passed away in the year 2000 after suffering from lymphoma\textsuperscript{23}. During his lifetime, Amichai earned the status of Israel’s greatest modern statehood generation poet known as \textit{dor ha-mdina} and was revered as the national poet of Israel, after Hayim Bialik of course.

Meanwhile, on the other side—at their historical counterpoint—in the year 1948, Mahmoud Darwish and his family were expelled from his village Galilee in Palestine by the Israeli settlements. Darwish, like Amichai, was also born into a farming family. During the expulsion, Darwish’s family first fled to Lebanon gaining the status of refugees. This was the beginning of Darwish’s struggle with identity. Darwish’s family decided to move back to Palestine a year after the \textit{Nakba}, when Palestine was under Israel’s control. Galilee, Darwish’s village, was demolished and occupied by the Zionists and the inhabitants were forced to find new “homes” in Israel. In many of his poems and interviews, Darwish explains the complex

\textsuperscript{20} In the article “On the Political Significance of Amichai’s Poetry” Boaz Arpaly argues that Amichai’s poetry was not political in a topical sense, rather it is the historical context during the establishment of the State that gives Amichai’s poetry a political and nationalistic shape.

\textsuperscript{21} See a detailed discussion on \textit{Likrat} in Chapter Two.

\textsuperscript{22} See Chana Kronfeld’s chapter “Yehuda Amichai: On the Boundaries of Affiliation” in \textit{On the Margins of Modernism}.

\textsuperscript{23} Amichai was buried at Sanhedria Cemetery located in Jerusalem district.
relationship between his identity post *Nakba* and what it meant for a Palestinian to live under the Israeli regime. Sadly, Darwish, like many Palestinians, was forced into a new state category of identification known as the “present-absentees”\(^{24}\). Darwish started to develop his political stance after moving to Haifa, where he joined the Israeli communist party and worked as an editor to two of their newspapers, *Al-Ittihad* and *Al-Jadid*.\(^{25}\) In the following years, unfortunately, Darwish would be frequently arrested—a topic that heavily dominated many of poems—for being falsely accused of aggression or incitement against the Israeli authorities. At this political juncture, Darwish’s poem “Write Down I am Arab” became the flag bearer for Palestinian self-determination. By the late 1970s Darwish decided to embrace his exilic condition and live outside Israel. Although Darwish briefly participated as a member of the executive committee of the PLO, he resigned from the party in 1993 and continued his exilic travels in different cities. In 2008, after publishing many collections of poetry and prose, Mahmoud Darwish, the revered national poet of Palestine died in Houston, Texas. Darwish was buried next to Ramallah cultural palace, where a museum stands today in the honor of Darwish, the national poet of Palestine, who handwrote the declaration of Palestinian Independence and also left behind his poetry of ordinary grief\(^{26}\).

\(^{24}\) See Mahmoud Darwish “Gradual Exile” (232). Also, see Maya Jaggi’s article “Poets of the Arab World”, where Jaggi explains why Darwish and his family was considered as an “present-absentees”:

Because they were absent during the first Israeli census of Arabs, being seen as illegal "infiltrators" and "present-absent aliens", the family were denied Israeli nationality. They applied for identity cards but Mahmoud was refused a passport: "I was a resident not a citizen. I travelled with a laissez passer." At Paris airport in 1968, he says, "they couldn't understand: I'm an Arab, my nationality undetermined, carrying an Israeli document. I was sent back."

\(^{25}\) See Mohmmad Shaheen’s introduction to *Almond and Blossoms and Beyond* (viii).

\(^{26}\) The title of one of Darwish’s poetry collection *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* (1973).
This *bildungsroman* trajectory of Darwish\(^{27}\) and Amichai’s\(^{28}\) biographies accounts for a particular contrapuntal process: their shifting identities connected to landscape and languages; shifting poetic stances in relation to their Catastrophes; and their shifting exilic conditions. The poets’ biographies reveal the peculiar combination of exile as a reflection of their personal and historical circumstances which later in their work appears as their desire for an aesthetic invention. Adorno’s dictum, “poetry after Auschwitz becomes barbaric” (34), does not only reveal the forces of politics in connection to aesthetics, but also points towards the need for new language or representation of the living after the Catastrophe and the birth of their nations. Survivors of these historical and political processes, the national poets had to work simultaneously within their state boundaries to representing their nation, while also reshaping these boundaries. All this had a profound impact on both Amichai and Darwish’s struggle to find their poetic voice, identity, and agency within their given historical, cultural, and political contexts. In addition, this effected the reception of their poems. Amichai’s position as the statehood generation poet, and Darwish’s position as the poet of the occupied land coinciding with the Palestinian Intifada in 1987 and 2000, poetically pitted them against each other\(^{29}\).

\(^{27}\) In the interview essay “Exile is so strong within me, I may bring it to the land” with Helit Yeshurun, Darwish explains how the story of his childhood is inseparable with the story of his homeland. Darwish says: There is a parallelism and a unity in the tragic aspect of the matter. In 1948, when this great rupture of ours took place, I jumped from the bed of childhood onto the path of exile. I was six. My entire world turned upside down and childhood froze in place, it didn’t go with me. The question is whether it’s possible to restore the childhood that was taken by restoring the land that was taken, and that’s a poetic quest that gives rhythm to the poem itself (48).

\(^{28}\) Concerning the influences of autobiographical element in Amichai’s poetry, Glenda Abramson writes in *The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach*: “Israeli poetry relies heavily on autobiographical fact…Amichai’s poetry falls somewhere between both possibilities, autobiographical in appearance and mood rather in substance” (xvi).

\(^{29}\) Darwish, for example, said of Amichai, “[H]is poetry put a challenge to me, because we write about the same place. He wants to use the landscape and history for his own benefit, based on my destroyed identity. So, we have a competition: who is the owner of the language of this land? Who loves it more? Who writes it better?” Maya Jaggi, “Poets of the Arab World.” Guardian, June 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jun/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview19.
However, their poems reveal how the boundaries of their relative nationalistic identities are consistently interrupted by the representation of their exilic consciousness that marks differences, heterogenous histories and tense cultural and literary inter-relationships. Consequently, both of their poetic identities, as well as their poetic-speakers standing as representation of “national subjects” are often found splitting. The split, fractured and heterogenous selves, torn by historical forces, are gathered in their poetic-scape, where both poets’ poetic affinities with German, English, Arabic, Hebraic, and other forms of cultural vacillation destabilize the legitimacy of either poet’s nationalism.

Therefore, a contrapuntal reading of Darwish and Amichai’s exile, present in their poetry, underscores the dynamism of their exilic conditions resulting in a new language of poetics that is heavily dominated by biographical, geographical, and literary affinities, and reveals the slippery characteristics of nationalism as a concept and practice. To say the least, these counterpoints—reading in-between—expose the fluid and dynamic nature of their nationalisms and its trajectory: from essentialist identity politics, whereby the poets’ strategically advocated for their respective nationalities for self-determination, to a binationalist heterogeneity that shows the poets’ understanding of the consolidated nature of their entangled histories, and towards a humanistic resistance that promotes a form of cohabitation, thus revealing the paradox of the state poets’ exilic consciousness and their post national ambitions. To read Darwish and Amichai’s post national poetics is to take on the responsibility of an active reader. Reading, according to Said, involves questioning and focusing on all aspects: “the original privacy or the public place of the

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30 The phrase post national is used to express the poets’ mediation on identity and non-identity beyond the strict strictures of their relative nationalisms.
writer and examine how their work come to us, whether by curricular canon, intellectual or
critical frameworks provided by presiding authority” (Humanism 75). Said writes:

Immediately then, the constitution of tradition and the usable past comes up and that in
turn leads us inevitably to identity and the national state. Such an understanding makes us
believe that reading (heavily determined by nationalism) must ‘envelop a national story
with its carefully devised beginnings, middles, ends, its periods, moments of glory,
defeat, triumph and so on’. (Humanism 75)

A contrapuntal study of Amichai and Darwish’s poetry demonstrates how their poetry does not
present a grand narrative, nor do their acoustical and formal elements reflect such homogeneity.
Instead, while nationalism pits them against each other as “enemies,” Darwish says: “the enemy
is not an abstract figure. We interpenetrate each other, and we exchange roles. We live under
complex human conditions without any distance between them and us” (Palestine 22)31.

Therefore, as opposed to reading within the national horizon, Said proposes reading as a mode to
confront the inner movements, contradictions, and contentions (Humanism 75), thus moving
towards a contrapuntal reading, which he describes as a mode of resistance: “the ability to
differentiate between what is directly given and what may be withheld” (Humanism 76). In other
words, it is impossible to read Amichai or Darwish without witnessing the contradictions and
contentions materialized intertextually with the presence of an other, lurking and lingering in

31 Darwish refer this human condition poetically:
My ideal immunity lies in the preservation of my humanity, whether in my own words with regard to him
or in my gaze upon him. As to allowing him to dwell in me, constructing my imaginary, dictating to me his
own version of things, becoming my memory, this is another story completely. It’s clear enough that the
enemy is not happy merely with confrontation at a distance. He wants to be me, and speak in my name. We
could say, I and he, that our two dreams sleep in the same bed. (Palestine 22-23)
their poetry. The goal of this dissertation is to de-limit the nationalistic and historical readings of these state poets through a Saidian contrapuntal approach as a critical-oppositional framework. The aim is to study how by embracing their exilic conditions, both Amichai and Darwish strategically explore the historical contradictions, conflicts and abject asymmetries that resist the dangers of vulgar nationalisms.

The study takes 1948 as a point of departure, followed by the series of Israel-Palestinian wars post-1967, and the Palestinian intifadas, 1987 and 2000, as a culminating historical and political force that transformed and shaped the reception of Amichai and Darwish’s poems as national narratives, simultaneously followed by their resistances. In addition, the study is within the context of two literary historiographies: pre-statehood (Eretz-Israeli) to statehood (dor ha-mdina) literary influences for Amichai, and the trajectory from the poetry of Palestinian commitment and resistance (al-adab al-multazim) to Arab modernism for Darwish. Darwish describes how 1948 forced the fate of the Arabic poetry, specifically Palestinian poetry:

After 1948 we Palestinians who stayed in what became the state of Israel found ourselves in a state of defeat. It was a most perplexing time. There was nothing in the old forms of poetry that could help us express the state in which we found ourselves. Hence the need arose for a revolutionary form of expression for revolutionary poetry. This was a spontaneous response to events far beyond our control. (Bomb)

For Darwish, the evolution of the Arab verse coincided not only with the external historical forces but also his own formal lateness. Said explains in On Late Style how an artist in his life

32 In Full Severity of Compassion, Kronfeld highlights the absence of scholarship surrounding Amichai’s poetic dialogue with the Hebrew-Arabic Medieval Tradition, and especially with Palestinian poet, Darwish (198).
discovers new insights that pushes the artist to disregard conventions in order to create new styles. One way to recover Palestinian poetry’s politicization, according to Darwish, was to play with the figure of the anti-hero in his poems. Discarding the prophetic role, the visionary, the rebel, Darwish seeks to gain a form of poetic agency by reveling on the ordinariness of the human since “there is no longer heroism in the classical sense of the word, the new hero is the one who is looking for the tools of his existence, who tells of his questioning” (*Palestine* 149). Such shift in motifs corresponds with Darwish’s late poetic form shifting to open verse and prosaic experimentations.

On the other hand, Amichai’s unique motifs and poetic agency stems from mundane realia and experimentation of the poetic-self’s relationship with his past and God. Amichai’s God has turned into a metaphor and an allegory of his existential predicaments. Furthermore, Amichai’s late poetry is filled with the meditation of the acher, ‘other’ in Jewish tradition, and his poetic language evolves to demonstrate that relationship in its complexities. In studying Amichai’s use of language, Chana Kronfeld, translator of Amichai’s poems, comments “Amichai seems to suggest, with perfect seriousness, that dry ordinary language is the ultimate source of humanitarian wisdom and expressive power”\(^{33}\). In other words, Amichai’s poetry began to demonstrate an exercise of conscious abstinence from overt national sentiment and ethos, ornamentation, and high-flown phraseology with innovative figurative use of biblical allusions and everyday language filled with conceits\(^{34}\).

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33 Chana Kronfeld *Full Severity of Compassion* (277).

34 See Ziva Shamir’s “The Conceit as a Cardinal Style-Marker in Yehuda Amichai’s Poetry” (26).
Thus, to convey the magnitude of Catastrophes reflected on their human condition and poetic practice, both Amichai and Darwish improvised their poetic language with experimentations. One of Darwish’s translator, Ibrahim Muhawi, in introducing the translation of *Memory for Forgetfulness*, describes these poetic experimentations as “pure gesture in which writing itself becomes the dominant metaphor” (xxvi)\(^{35}\). Muhawi reads these experimentations as a convergence of different kinds of writings: “the poem, both verse and prose; dialogue; Scripture; history; myth; myth in the guise of history; narrative fiction; literary criticism; and dream visions” (xxvii). The readings of such poetic movements in Darwish’s work confirm the poet’s desire to enrich the capacity of the poem and to expand the “poetical universe…to renew itself and build a relation to history, to the language and the Other” (*Palestine as Metaphor* 52)\(^{36}\).

On the other hand, Robert Alter, translator of Amichai’s work, describes the poet’s use of dense allegorical language and traditional liturgy as a form of playfulness that exhibit the complexities of Amichai’s poetic influences effected by Catastrophes: genocide, migration, settlement, war, and conflict. Alter writes:

> From the beginning to end, Amichai is an extravagantly playful poet. The playfulness is exhibited in such manifestly exuberant poems as “The Visit of the Queen of Sheba”, but it also has an essential role in some of his saddest poems—about personal loss, about the death of his parents, about the Nazi genocide. A good deal of this playfulness is enacted through puns, acoustic effects, and allusions… (*The Poetry of Yehuda* xxiii).

\(^{35}\) See Ibrahim Muhawi’s introduction to Darwish’s work *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*.

\(^{36}\) See Darwish’s interview with the Syrian literary critic Subhi Hadidi, and in collaboration with Syrian poet and Editor Basheer al- Baker in the interview essay “No Dwelling for Poetry Except Outside Poetic Conventions” in *Palestine as Metaphor*. 
Kronfeld studies the intersection of blending traditions of Modernism, Middle Eastern and Eastern Europe customs present in Amichai’s work and describes Amichai’s play with the poetic form as contradictory whereby a certain poetic ambivalence prevails in his diction. Kronfeld describes how Amichai simultaneously “uses classical allusion, highly figurative language, and syntactic fragmentation” as well as “places antielitism at the center of his poetics, reduces both God and the scared muse to life-size, sometimes bite-size, dimensions, and succeeds in generating a truly popular poetic voice able to reach people in the work-a-day world” (*The Full* 143). Kronfeld goes to the extent of calling Amichai’s poetic practice “unpoetic” where “grammatical constructions, everyday trite phrases, and word etymologies are commonly thematized by the speaker” (*The Full* 148). Amichai’s play to overcome the linear confines of language deviates from the constrictive ideological framework of Israeli nationalism which he is also responsible for representing. Amichai utilizes ordinary language and intertextuality to critique the expected poetic tradition of a statehood generation poet and to mark a form of non-systematic, non-linear, fragmentation that the poet experiences not only in his personal life but also in his poetic voice. Kronfeld describes Amichai’s position as a “state of syncategorematic existence, a state between ontological and aesthetic categories, a state he calls beyna‘yim or “interims” (*The Full* 158). This dissertation studies these metaphoric in-between fragmented explorations and offers a framework of varying voices—a mosaic ornamentation of language, where multiple fractured voices are in conversation with one another.

Tracing these changes in poetic style, this study shows how the poets’ exilic consciousness keeps resurfacing in their poems through the topic of love (chapter one), grief (chapter two), and the banality of ordinary life (chapter three). In all three chapters, the dissertation addresses: a) the overlapping poetic and historical world of Amichai and
Darwish; their intersections and cultural affinities between Hebrew and the Arabic literary traditions; and b) the poetic implications of the national poets' in-between exile consciousness that becomes a catalyst for newer forms of poetic commitments. Therefore, this dissertation offers a contrapuntal reading to demonstrate how in the later stages of their poetic career, Amichai and Darwish’s poems offer countervalues and a call for a novel community, where they no longer disguise their exile consciousness under the forced language of patriotism and nationalism. Instead, both Amichai and Darwish reveal and release their fractured lived experiences through the topic and experiences of love, grief, and death, while prioritizing the ordinariness of the human condition, in order to challenge the heroic nationalist narratives. In their poems, both Darwish and Amichai embrace their inescapable exile fractured consciousness, thus revealing the multifaceted realities of their respective personal and poetic histories that move in multiple directions. The fragility of such movements demands the return of their poetry and their humanity that was overshadowed within a nationalist discourse. As such, a close reading of their poems tracks the poets’ literary movements and reveals how both poets abandon national sentiments, excessive ornamentation, and high-flown artificial language for a more prosaic experimentation in their poetic language.

**Exile and Exilic Consciousness**

The motif of exile, in Hebrew and Arabic literature, appears from historical circumstances, i.e., life in exile, displacement, migration or expulsion, and simultaneously

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37 The true scope of Arabic poetry and its development is vast and diverse. There are regional and cultural differences that have contributed to the literary studies of Arabic poetry spanning from Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and more. For this dissertation, I will focus, quite narrowly, on the development of Arabic literature pertaining to Palestinian literature and Palestinian politics.
represent a compulsion towards a mode of innovative thinking and reading. The development of the exilic motif in Arabic and Hebrew literature is discussed below.

Rafik Salem in his work, *Exile and Nostalgia in Arabic and Hebrew poetry of al-Andalus*, describes the dominant presence of Exile or *al-ghurba*\(^{38}\), as a literary motif in Arabic literature since the Jahiliyyah (pagan) times\(^ {39}\), manifested prominently as a nostalgia for their temporary dwelling places or *al-watan*\(^ {40}\)(3). During the Jahaliya times, the Arabs had to often move for food or water. These movements would happen in groups, and thus *watan* holds a social or communal value/weight more than marking a geographical place or border. As such, the classical concept of *al-watan* is close to nomadic exile; an indeterminacy that captures movement. Consequently, the experience of exile, in relation to *al-watan*, perpetually shifts with the physical movement of the Arabs as they travel from one place to another. In Arabic poetry, Salem explains, two relational motifs emerge from *al-watan*—*diyar* (dwelling place or home) and *atlal* (the ruins of the former dwelling)—out of which the poetic subject matter of *al-wuquf ala’l-diyar wa’l-buka ala’l atlal* (pausing and weeping over the ruins of the dwelling place) comes to occupy a significant role in Arabic poetry. Chapter two discusses at length the importance of such lamentations and its poetic characteristics as elegiac reminiscence/poetry for Darwish.

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\(^{38}\) Salem, Rafik M. (1987) *Exile and nostalgia in Arabic and Hebrew poetry of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain)*. PhD thesis. SOAS University of London. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00028839

\(^{39}\) *Jahiliyyah* indicates a pre-Islamic time period that preceded before Islam became the center of Arabia’s cultural, spiritual, and social life in 610 CE.

\(^{40}\) *Al watan* as a concept indicates neither a land nor homeland, rather can be loosely translated as any place where one stays for a period of time. Salem writes: “Classical Arabic dictionaries refer to the word *watan* as the gathering place of sheep and camels. Later on, the definition was expanded to include man and his dwelling place. It is worth pointing out that *watan*, according to classical dictionaries, does not have to be the birthplace” (4).
The concept of *al-watan* undergoes transformation from early Jahaliya to modern times. While earlier it was considered communal or limited to the concept of tribal bonds and neighborhood, with the advent of modernity the concept expanded and developed into nationalist narratives. Thus, the dynamic movement of a nostalgia for communities and its dwelling place got replaced and became fixated on a nostalgia for a nation or a country. Consequently, the experiences of homelessness, estrangement and exile underwent tremendous shifts as literary motifs, reducing them into a longing for a home tied to nationalism. It is important to note the shifting meaning of home equated with homeland and nationhood instead of community.

After the 1948 Catastrophe, Palestinian literature began to separate from the shadow of Arabic literature in general, indicating the need for representation, resistance, and agency for the dispossessed Palestinian population. Under such political and historical context, Palestinian poetry had a dual manifestation; one reactionary and conventional, and the other resisting and renovating. Therefore, poetic approaches, such as art for the sake of representation versus art for art’s sake, are caught in tension for the Palestinian poets. The 1950s and 1960s poets, in the advent of national awakening, regarded poetry to be functional for social and political motives. Contextually considered Marxist and or nationalist in nature (for instance Ghassan Kanafani, who founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist organization committed to the emancipation of the Palestinians), these poetic developments were commonly known as *al-

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41 Rafik Salem explains: The climatic and geographical conditions of the Arabian Peninsula rendered it unsuitable for cultivation or permanent settlement. Its inhabitants shifted continually from one place to another in search of pasturage and water. The philologist, Ibn Sayyida, therefore interprets *watan* as follows, ‘*al-watan* is any place where one stays for a period of time’. However, the concept of *al-watan* in the Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic period) seems to be social more than geographical, in that it does not designate specific boundaries, but relies mainly on series of family and tribal relationships” (5).
adab al multazim (committed literature). As such the elegiac and heroic genres became filled with social and national themes to the point of reading poetry as dogmatic. These political events map trends of Palestinian poetry and the development of Arab poetic consciousness, which vacillated between nationalistic commitments and artistic expression. The argument being that before nationalism, exile as a literary motif was tied to dwelling of the ruins, farewell to the place, or nostalgia of communities.

A major shift emerges in the 1970s when Adunis, the Syrian self-exiled poet, developed a movement termed Shi’r advocating art for art’s sake. Adunis’s exilic vision encouraged a form of detachment out of which, he believed, will develop a growth or regeneration. Shi’r poets responded to their political exodus by invoking a different aesthetic value that deliberately turns away from the rigid features of Arab nationalism. Poets including Ahmad ‘Abd al-Mu’ti-Hijazi, Nizar Qabbani, Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim treated Shi’r as a subversive cultural movement that supported the development of the concept of ru’iya to move and to see beyond the stagnation of political impulses, especially in literature.

As such, the poets of the 1970s in Arabic literature, developing from Shi’r poetics, moved away from the role of poet-prophet to establishing a playful anti-hero poetic persona

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(chapter three explores the impact of such anti-hero poet-figures). The language, poetic-imageries and allusions also shifted, while favoring experimental literary language to reflect the demand for a new aesthetics. Adjacently, Mahmoud Darwish moves away from the topographical histories and geographies of Palestine—the need to return—and towards an inner exploration of the self. For Darwish, the Palestinian Catastrophe, while creating political fragmentations and detachments, became both a force for nationalistic calling and a catalyst for regeneration. The regeneration is an adoption of Adunis’s *ruʿiya*, to see or move beyond the nationalistic calling towards an alternative expression that challenges nationalism by advocating pluralist, individualistic and secular forms of living and belonging. Thus, in Darwish’s poetry explored in all three chapters, there is a shift from the representations of collective identity, “we”, to the individual—the human “I.”

On the other hand, in Hebrew tradition, the classical concept of exile or *galut* is biblically tied. The Jewish mystics connected exile with the alienation in this world, i.e., the exile of the Divine Presence. Exile, according to the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrashim had a more spiritual character revealing the connection between exile and their desire to find a rationale to accept the exilic sufferings, while also “looking forward to see the end of the *galut*.” However, the classical rendering of exile changed because of two historical moments: the golden age of Jewish culture in Al-Andalus, and the European Enlightenment and the Jewish Haskalah. Both

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45 This is not meant to imply a simple binary or resistance and reactionary. Darwish... While on the one hand, the X lead to a stagnant Y, the


47 Ibid.

48 Poets such as Hayim Bialik, David Fogel and Benjamin Harshav were activists of the Haskalah movement of Jewish enlightenment (*Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture*, 3).
historical moments are crucial in the development of languages and Jewish exilic narratives marking the distinction between medieval and modern Judaism. The prominence of the Judeo-Arabic language during the Judeo-Arabic golden age\(^{49}\) underscores the complicated development of Jewish history and language that was influenced by Andalusian Arabic culture. As such, the Hebrew exile—\textit{galut}—as a literary expression and representation borrowed a lot from Arabic literary tradition discussed above. This form of exile is similar to the Arabic nomadic exilic experiences, where traders, travelers, poets are considered “strangers” since their work or search for food keeps them moving from one dwelling place to the other. Hence, in Medieval Hebrew literature there is an overlapping influence between the Arabic and Judaic concept of homesickness and its genre emerging from \textit{al-hanin ila al-awtan}\(^{50}\).

However, during the nineteenth century, the concept of exile underwent rich and complex changes pertaining to the Judeo-German traditions, emerging from European influences. Exile as a literary motif, under the revision of the \textit{Maskilims} and the Jewish \textit{Haskalah}, began to operate as a national and political motif. The Jewish Haskalah or the Jewish Enlightenment, emerged during the late 18th and 19th century as an ambivalent colonizing and decolonizing movement. The primary motive of the enlightenment project was to bring Jewish voices into the literary and cultural scene of Europe, i.e., to reform traditional Jewish education. The desire to modernize and secularize Judaism was opposed by Orthodox Judaism, since such a modernizing movement also indicated a form of assimilation to the European cultural standards that arguably weakens

\(^{49}\) Darwish refers to the Andalus in his poem “Eleven Planets” as a meeting place of all strangers in the project of constructing human culture.” See the interview with Helit Yeshurun’s “Exile is so strong within me; I may bring it to the Land” (51).

\(^{50}\) For extensive research on the intersections of exilic experiences in Arabic and Hebrew traditions, see Salem, Rafik M. (1987) \textit{Exile and nostalgia in Arabic and Hebrew poetry of al-Andalus (Muslim Spain)}. PhD thesis. SOAS University of London. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00028839
the position of Jewish identity and history. However, the other thread of this movement was to
revive Hebrew language, as a decolonizing movement, to create newer forms of community,
distinct from the Yiddish speaking diasporic community. As such, the Jewish *Haskalah*
advocated for the use of the Hebrew language to form an imaginary cultural Jewish cultural
consciousness, which later culminated into a political movement for Jewish nationalism i.e.,
Zionism. It can be argued that at the center of this movement resided the question of linguistic
purity. One of the main goals of the Jewish enlightenment was to preserve the purity of Jewish
language by revising Hebrew as the national language and removing Yiddish, Arabic, European
and Germanic influences. As such the spiritual, multifaced intertextual characteristic of *galut*
became distorted with nationalistic motives for a singular Jewish tradition.

Amichai’s treatment of exile in his poems show the contrapuntal development of exile as
a literary motif tracing from the classical concept to Arabic and German influences discussed
above. Far from the literal meaning of coming back or returning, Amichai’s exploration of the
exile motif parallels the Talmudic spirituality, i.e., to look forward to the end of the *galut*. As
such, in his poetry, Amichai does not treat exile as a metaphorical substitution for nationalism;
rather exile becomes the catalyst for an exploration of the inner self in relation to his own
German past and his Israeli identity and their irreconcilable in-betweenness. Unfortunately, the
rich and complex nature of the poet’s exilic conditions gets orchestrated by nationalistic fervor,
favoring a singular and institutionalized interpretation of exile tied to preserving unity and the
establishment of a Jewish homeland i.e., Israel. Archival work on Amichai reveals a handful of
bilingual poetic processes that question the relationship between Amichai’s poetic language and
its German-Hebrew influences. Unfortunately, eclipsing the contrapuntal features of Amichai’s in-betweenness and exilic consciousness, Amichai’s poetry is perpetually given a nationalistic shape. To this, Kronfeld argues that Amichai’s “rhetorical ontology [is] the principle of inter-categorical existence…that systematically challenges our tendency to reduce rhetorical and philosophical distinctions to neatly discrete binary oppositions”\(^5\). Amichai moves from the poetic structures of his earlier poems, sonnets, quatrains, and classical forms of couplet, to open verse, filled with elegiac and nostalgic lyricism. Glenda Abramson describes this movement of Amichai, towards open verse and a new poetics, as “deeply inwards” with elegiac tonalities.\(^5\)

Thus, within this framework of tracing the contrapuntal movement of the exilic motif in context of Israeli and Palestinian nationalism and their Arabic and Hebrew literary traditions, a contrapuntal reading of Amichai and Darwish’s poems reveal the poets’ treatment of their exilic conditions as a form of resistance. Therefore, for the poets, exile provokes a closer look at histories and their intersections and the end of *galut or ru’iya*, not as a form of “return” but to take a deeper dive into its condition and to imagine the possibilities beyond. For both Amichai and Darwish, their exilic experience stands in a complex entangled relation with their poetics. Exilic consciousness becomes generative for newer possibilities for co-existence, where a state of irreconcilable tensions is kept alive, without resolution i.e., without artificial synthesis, in order to imaginatively construct fields of coexistence or affiliation. In Amichai and Darwish’s

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51 See Rokem, Na’ama. “German–Hebrew Encounters in the Poetry and Correspondence of Yehuda Amichai and Paul Celan.” *Prooftexts* 30, 2010, pp. 27 - 97. Amichai wrote many of the initial drafts of his poems in German, and then into Hebrew.


poems there is representation of a fabricated poetic community whereby the Jewish soldier and
the Palestinian citizens occupy a space of dialogue, for instance, consider the poem “A Soldier
Dreams of White Lilies.”

All this corresponds to Edward Said and Hannah Arendt’s conception of exile as a mode
of resisting fascist totalitarianisms. Said believes resistance occurs in exile: “between forms,
between domains, between homes and languages”54. Similarly, Arendt argues that to avoid
fascist or totalitarian claims and to encourage cohabitation the status quo of statelessness is
imperative: there cannot be a totalitarian claim to one state, one language, or one nation55.

In the preface to Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt underlines the importance of
the Jewish question as the catalytic agent in nineteenth century politics: the rise of the Nazi
movement, the establishment of the third Reich, the question of Jewish and non-Jewish identity,
and genocide (xiv). According to Arendt, the consequences of the nineteenth century antisemitic
movement is the “western” ideological form of Zionism (xv). Arendt defines such form of
Zionism as—“the counter ideology”—an answer to antisemitism. Thus, it is not the Babylonian
exile that raises the existential Jewish question, rather it is the development of European national
politics, antisemitism, and the Holocaust defined as forms of totalitarianisms, which shaped the
Jewish struggle for nationalism. As such, Arendt makes an important observation that the
emerging concept and treatment of Jewish exile moved from a spiritual form to a political form
associated with nationalism. Arendt explains, in The Jewish Writings, that both “reform Judaism

55 In Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism, Butler explains that for Arendt “statelessness led her to
oppose any state formation that sought to reduce or refuse the heterogeneity of its population, including the founding
of Israel on the principles of Jewish sovereignty” (153) and that for Arendt the basis for binationalism that seeks to
undo nationalism would be a cohabitation emerging from dispossession, exile.
and Hasidism had been concerned solely with Jewish survival, renounced all hope of the restoration of Zion, and accepted exile as the ultimate and unchangeable fate of the people” (310), whereas western notions of exile and its demands for nationalism created the Palestinian exile.

This discussion of Arendt’s theoretical exploration of the concept of exile illustrates Arendt’s political theory—a contrapuntal historiographical and political reading of exile from pre-and post-antisemitic history. Arendt’s contrapuntal approach to exile highlights the different forms of exile that existed before and after the creation of Israeli nationalism. For Arendt, personal or political, the state of the exile and of being a conscious pariah, is crucial for agency; since, the critical distance of an outsider can resist conformity. Thus, Arendt believed that “the conscious pariahs were those who really did the most for the spiritual dignity of their people, who were great enough to transcend the bounds of nationality.”

Although different in historical context, Said approaches the concept of exile similarly to Arendt’s. In Reflections on Exile and Other Essays, Said turns to Adorno’s masterwork Minima

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57 Arendt develops two categories of Jewish identity as Pariah and Parvenu. Pariah means outsider and Parvenu’s are assimilators.

58 See Ron H. Feldman’s essay on “The Jew as Pariah: The Case of Hannah Arendt” where he describes Arendt’s marginal position as the conscious pariah that gave her critical insight to both Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. (Jewish Writings pp. xli-lxxvi).

59 Elisabeth Young-Bruehl explains how for “in Arendt s personal lexicon, wirkliche Menschen, real people were real ‘pariahs’” and that “her friends [referring to Rosa Luxemburg and Rahel Varnhagen] were not outcasts, but outsiders, sometimes by choice and sometimes by destiny.” (xv). To Arendt “social nonconformism is the sine qua non of intellectual achievement” (qtd. in Young-Bruehl xv).

Moralia, where exile is presented as a form of opposing the “administrated world”, a metaphorical or allegorical mode of existence that equips the exiled with insights that no longer lean on a redemption narrative (184). Said critiques the exile’s redemptive motif, particularly in the Jewish and Palestinian context, which creates statism and other insidious forms of relations emerging from the compulsion to join new parties or new movements, i.e., the state (183). For Said such redemptive approaches of exile compromise the critical and intellectual potential of the exiled. Thus, Said offers exile as “an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life…where the exile learns to cultivate a scrupulous subjectivity” (183). In fact, Said argues it is the exilic consciousness that allows the historian to grasp the contrapuntal human experience in its diversity, which would otherwise be filled with exclusionary practices. Said advocates exile for its conscious, nomadic, decentered, and contrapuntal perspectives that demand new thinking and innovation.

Within this framework of Arendt and Said’s advocacy for the exilic consciousness, this dissertation, “Contrapuntal Readings of Exilic Consciousness: Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish Together”, demonstrates how these theoretical concepts materialize in Amichai and Darwish’s poetic worlds, where their histories, languages, and narratives dance contrapuntally, maintaining a perpetual state of exile, thus upholding heterogeneity and humanistic resistance. They are, in Adorno’s term barbarians—poets who articulate new poetics that challenge reification and conventions in their attempt to represent the unrepresentable fate of exiles post-Catastrophes.

The dissertation is organized into three chapters with a postscript. The first chapter demonstrates the poets’ treatment of exilic love that addresses the complexities of the “in-betweenness” of lovers and its potential for newer forms of belonging. The second chapter
discusses the poets’ treatment of grief and death, in relation to their exilic consciousness and binationalism. And the last chapter explains why for Darwish and Amichai, their conceptual and poetic scope of binationalism no longer function as a form of newer imagined communities. Rather, the poets’ dive deeper into their condition of exile to express the need for new thinking that investigate their poetic approaches to a humanistic resistance.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter One: “Love After Catastrophe: Spaces in-between”

Love as a political category has been ignored by critics, including Alain Badiou, since an advocacy of love as a category for action can be seen as both naïve and dangerous.

Similarly, in The Human Condition, Hannah Arendt argues with strong conviction that “love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but anti-political, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces” (242). Yet, from her dissertation on Love and St. Augustine to other later works, Arendt continually meditated on the topic of love, which compelled her to coin the concept Amor Mundi—a love of the world. Thus, while it is true that Arendt admonishes love as hypocrisy and as antithetical to action, the sustained corpus of Arendt’s work stands as a testimony to the power and force of love. Arendt describes love as “one of the rarest occurrences in human lives, indeed [it]

61 See Badiou’s defense of love in In Praise of Love where Badiou writes: “I don’t think you can mix up love and politics. ‘The politics of love’ is a meaningless expression” (57). However, Badiou advocates for love for its creative and innovate force: “as an existential project: to construct a world from a decentered point of view other than that of my mere pulse to survive or re-affirm my own identity” (25).


63 See “A Meaning of Love in Politics: A Letter by Hannah Arendt to James Baldwin (1962)” where she says: “In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy”. https://bookhaven.stanford.edu/2019/08/the-meaning-of-love-in-politics-hannah-arendt-replies-to-james-baldwin/
possess[es] an unequaled power of self-revelation and an unequaled clarity of vision for the
disclosure of who, precisely because it is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with
what the loved person may be… (242).

Chapter one focuses on Arendt’s definition of love “as an unequaled power of self-
revelation” that destroys the in-betweenness (241). While Arendt argues that this separation is
the point where love becomes antipolitical (lovers resign their political and public presence), this
chapter argues that precisely at this juncture—at their separation from public life—Amichai and
Darwish’s treatment of love as an experience and a topic underscores a resignation that can be
thematized as restraint or resistance towards their overtly nationalized positions.

Amichai marks 1942, a turning point in his life, as the time of his first love affair, which
coincided with his first war. In fact, he began to write poetry just for her and confesses that all
his life Amichai was preoccupied in “sorting out love and war”64. Amichai resisted all
appellations, including “Love poet” or “Jerusalem Poet”65, and yet contra Amichai defines
himself “as a love poet while claiming love as an awareness of others—other antennae of feeling
or vision” (Interview 250). Similarly, Darwish’s critics, including Hasan Khader66, calls Darwish

64 Amichai confesses in an interview with Lawrence Joseph “my mind was on love while history was full of constant
danger, the news of murder, news of Holocaust” (The Paris Review 244).

65 Amichai admits:
Jerusalem poet”. I hate that. ‘Love poet’—as if I have some special expertise at love, it makes me sound
like a pimp! The concept of categorizing myself as a poet is repugnant to me—my reality is involved in so
many things around and inside me…I am though, a love poet in this sense: I have a strong sense of “the
other” in my poems, not too dissimilar from Montale’s. An awareness of others, often another, a woman,
enables me to perceive reality in still other, different ways—other antennae of feeling, vision. This way I
see and feel more too (“Interview with Lawrence” 250).

66 Hasan Khader is a Palestinian writer and literary critic, chief editor of the literary journal Al-Karmel which was
found and edited by Darwish in the year 1981.
a poet of love\textsuperscript{67}. Tracing Darwish’s poetic and aesthetic development from lyrical to more experimental prose-poetry, Khader credits the Palestinian love poet’s resistance towards a political reading of every Palestinian poem (\textit{BOMB}). Darwish’s mediation on the topic of love appear as a force of resistance that the poet defines as “assertion and a development”—a deliberate turn from other political issues of oppression and liberation. “Writing about love,” says the poet “was a form of liberating the human side of me” (\textit{BOMB}).

Thus, in connection to Arendt’s concept of love as a force that destroys the in-betweeness—that while it separates the lovers from the world, it also creates new forms of relationality with “unequaled power of self-revelation and clarity of vision” (\textit{The Human} 242)—Amichai and Darwish’s treatment of love reveals new modes of relationships, which challenge their given political and social context. The chapter closely reads love in various categories: love, eroticism, intimacy, and friendship.


\textsuperscript{67}Raja Shehadeh in his interview with Darwish confides:

I wrote a volume of love poetry. My first volume that is just about love. It could not have been written outside Palestine. Perhaps I needed to write on love in order to liberate myself from what is expected of me—that I am a Palestinian poet who must write about my return to Palestine. So I didn’t write about this. I wrote about love. My writing on love was also an assertion and a development. The Palestinian writer used to be unable to write about metaphysical subjects – love and death—because there were more pressing issues: oppression, occupation, resistance, and liberation. So writing about love was a form of liberating the human side of me (\textit{BOMB})

Chapter Two: “Death of the Binary: Heterogeneity of Binational Politics”

This chapter explores how for Amichai and Darwish grief and lamentation, as a spiritual and poetic mode of reflection, emerged from their exilic consciousness. Grieving becomes a conscious act of archaeological exploration of their Jewish and Palestinian identities, an understanding of loss that appears always in context and in relation to the other. The poets are grieving and lamenting the loss of a past, their childhood, landscapes, love, friends, and home that complicates the understanding of their present-given-identities. Caught in the web of such despair, both Amichai and Darwish instrumentalize grief to rediscover their personal and poetic relationship with their heterogenous past, which has been reduced to simplified binary readings: Israel versus Palestine, personal “I” versus collective “I.” Furthermore, the chapter explains how mistranslation and misappropriated reception, readings, and circulation of their work narrowed the focus of their grievances and of their rich, complex, heterogenous histories to that of nationalistic narratives. As such, their grief doubles, provoking the poets to explore the possibility for an aesthetic freedom from the chains of reductive nationalistic readings. In challenging these nationalistic formations of identity, this chapter traces the grief motif explored in their elegy poems, within the framework of Said and Arendt’s concept of binationalism. For Said and Arendt, binationalism relates to an exilic consciousness that empowers exile to destabilize normative standards of nationalism. Said insists in Freud and The Non-European that political equality for the Palestinians is crucially dependent on the understanding of the diasporic
characteristics of Jewish history and tradition. The chapter explains, in conjunction to Said’s reading of Moses and Monotheism as a political parable in reevaluating the relationships of identities, how both Amichai and Darwish’s elegy poems present a revisioning of their personal heterogeneous histories that challenge their national status, in Darwish’s words: “is the I-that-was the I-that-returned?” Such an exercise models a reading of lamentation according to the Arabic and Judaic tradition, as an invocation to move forward, for instance Darwish’s farewell to poetry of pain.

The poems and poetry books included in this are Mahmoud Darwish’s elegy for Edward Said Tibaq, and other elegy poems from Journal of an Ordinary Grief 1973, and In the Presence of Absence (2006) in conjunction with Yehuda Amichai’s “Seven Laments for the War-Dead” from Behind All This A Great Happiness is Hiding (1976), “Elegy on an Abandoned Village” from Shirim (1948-1962) and poems from Now in the Din Before the Silence (1963-1968).

Chapter Three: “On Butterfly’s Wings: The Unmaking of the Singular Self”

In continuation with chapter two, this chapter explores in depth the theoretical, poetical, and political implications of both Amichai and Darwish’s embracing of their exilic consciousness. This chapter presents a detailed contrapuntal analysis of how the poets’ exilic

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68 See Said’s reading of Freud’s Moses and Monotheism where he discusses how Moses’s identity as an Egyptian blur the notion of Jewishness (35). In wake of European anti-Semitism pre- and post-world wars, identity categories such as European and Non-European took a sinister turn and weight. 1948 and years followed by Israel’s establishment as a Jewish State in Palestine, which historically has been a diverse populated place, Israel relied on racial categories to create a divided structure. Said writes:

By defining itself as a state of and for the Jewish people, Israel allowed exclusive immigration and land-owning rights there for Jews” and that “Israeli legislation counter-venes, represses, and even cancels Freud’s carefully maintained opening out of Jewish identity towards its non-Jewish background (44).

69 See Mahmoud Darwish interview with Helit Yeshurun “Exile is so strong within me, I may bring it to the Land,” (67).
consciousness displaces the limitations of heterogeneous binational politics with an inward exploration of their exilic selves that desire and demand newer forms of aesthetic representation.

Thus, introducing the concept of an exilic aesthetic, present in Amichai and Darwish’s later works, this chapter studies how both poets replace and resist the legendary motifs of nationalistic consciousness with that of the ordinary and the human. Instead of recovering from their grief and lamentations discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter demonstrates how both poets resign from the expectation of a utopian consolation for their grief or a reconciliation of their heterogenous selves; thus, taking a deeper dive into their fractured exilic selves for a creative renovation. Corresponding with Said’s concept of late style, the chapter discusses how Amichai and Darwish perform their exile to maximize a revolutionary beginning, which for the poets paradoxically befalls on ordinary human life instead of the legendary heroes. Most importantly, such a late style exilic aesthetics express an inverted understanding of identity from grandness of nationalism, the self, and God to the banality of daily events as an antithetical trope to these grand narratives. Thus, there appears unique motifs in the form of the anti-hero hero, or the butterfly’s desire to absolve identity. The chapter discusses in detail how these motifs are also an extension of Arabic and Hebraic literary traditions that encourages anti-hegemonic readings.

The poems and poetry book included in this chapter close studies are Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry book *A River Dies of Thirst* (2009) and Yehuda Amichai’s last poetry collection *Open Close Open* (1998).
Conclusion

In the essay “What Shall we Do Without Exile” from *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Judith Butler writes: “Exile is the name of separation, but alliance is found precisely there, not yet in a place, in a place that was and is and in the impossible place of the not yet, happening now” (224). This dissertation seeks to address the (im)possibility of a “now” and an alliance met in counterpoints of the complicated and overlapping literary histories of the national poets Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish in the context of their relative Catastrophes, nationalism, and exile. Marginality, otherness, strangeness, and unfamiliarity are maintained in Amichai and Darwish’s treatment of their poetic subjects and motifs to uphold a hybrid, ambivalent, contrapuntal notion of interstitial exilic agency manifested in their performance of their poetry. Exile, for Darwish and Amichai, becomes a technique and a poetic metaphor as opposed to a political tool whereby the poets instead of seeking harmonized and coherent forms of national identities, empower creatively, poetically, and intellectually newer understanding of identity and humanity—the formation of kinship and community of strangers coming together in love, loss, grief, and death illustrated in all three chapters. As such, Darwish and Amichai’s treatment of exile in lieu of their experiences challenge the nationalized fixation of a collective memory and the nostalgic remembrance of a historical past that inauthentically upholds power and authority of a linear historical continuity, be it of the creation of Israel or the catastrophic destruction of Palestine. Edward Said in his essay “Bases for Coexistence” advocates:

> The simple fact is that Jewish and Palestinian experiences are historically, indeed organically, connected: to break them asunder is to falsify what is authentic about each. We must think our histories together, however difficult that may be, in order for there to
be a common future. And that future must include Arabs and Jews together, free of any exclusionary, denial-based schemes for shutting out one side by the other, either theoretically or politically. That is the real challenge. The rest is much easier.

Years later Said’s proposition of imagining a future of connections is still working at progress. This dissertation attempts to read the historical connections, and poetical affinities present in Amichai and Darwish’s poetry to provide a dialogue of poetic motifs and rhetorical tropes that stand as a testament to their poetic speakers’ ability to enter the place of the other, be it in love, grief, or in ordinary life events. Darwish and Amichai enters the place of the exile, and the other, through poetic narratives of their own personal displacements and dispositions and instead of only reconfirming their national allegiances, Amichai and Darwish’s poetic meditations invite a different mode of thinking about pain, love, unity, and Catastrophes. And, although both Darwish and Amichai grapple with a heterogeneous ambiguity in their poems, it is still not clear what kind of cohabitation, or an alternative construction of national belonging Said, Butler, Arendt, Amichai or Darwish advocate for. Perhaps, the argument is still contained within the discourse of a possibility—the coming of a community, in the process, in the making. And, while such a position of potentiality might not stand as strong as desired, yet the very recognition of it underscores something inherently important in the contentious nature of literary scholarship around Palestine and Israel.
Chapter One: Love After Catastrophe: Spaces in-between

No land for two bodies in the body
No exile for exile in these rooms
And exit is the entrance
In vain we sing between two abysses.

Mahmoud Darwish, “Rita’s Winter” from If I Were Another

Introduction

Rita, Mahmoud Darwish’s poetic muse, is the pseudonym of a Jewish woman the poet was in love with⁷⁰. In the poem “Rita’s Winter”, published in the year 1992, Rita expresses lovers anguish due to their inability to find a space to perform love. The exilic bodies of the lovers, exiled from their respective national belonging find themselves in an absence of a space—a land or a room. The lovers yearn for another form of exile or an extension of their current exile, where exile can operate as a space for the lovers to celebrate their union. Darwish describes this exilic space for lovers an interstitial space and an in-betweenness: between two abysses, in-between their exiles. Although it is a “vain singing”, a vain attempt that materializes into anything productive, Rita and Darwish, as lovers continue to sing between their exiles. This continuation marks a desire to resist the irreconcilable complexities that do not allow the lovers to unite, and yet, in their singing they come together as one, i.e., “we”. In a series of negative statements, the poetic-speaker deliberately obscures the speaking self, until the end of the stanza where the poet-speaker uses first person plural pronoun— “we”—to mark a fusion of him and

⁷⁰ Darwish wrote many love letters in Hebrew to Tamar Be-Ami who appears as Rita in his poems. See, Alona Ferber elaborate discussion on the love letters in the article “When the Palestinian National Poet Fell in love with a Jew”, Haaretz, 2014.
his lover’s exilic condition, a coming together of these exilic in-between spaces. The lovers
personal lives are not only entangled with each other, they are also entangled historically.

Two similar female figures, Ruth Hanover, and Ruth Z., consistently appears in Yehuda
Amichai’s love poems as a romantic nostalgia for lost childhood, love, and friendship caught
between histories—the personal, the Jewish, the Holocaust, and the national. Both Ruths played
a significant role in the development of Amichai’s poetics throughout his life. Ruth Hanover first
appeared in Amichai’s poem in the year 1971, where he eulogizes “Little Ruth”—who was
“swallowed in the serpent’s maw of death”71—, referring to the horrors of antisemitic
concentration camps in Germany. In the year 1936, when Amichai’s family successfully
migrated to Palestine, and Ruth’s family migrated to the United States in 1940, the immigration
authorities refused Ruth’s application due to her disability. Amichai’s childhood friend perished
in a catastrophic death in the Sobibor death camp. Little Ruth’s status as a German-Jewish girl,
and her allegorical presence in Amichai’s poems symbolizes his complicated relationship with
his own past life left in Germany. On the other hand, Amichai’s romantic relationship with Ruth
Z. evolved under the British Mandate Palestine, a time when his romantic interests and Zionist
obligations merged at a counterpoint. Later, Amichai confesses under different circumstances
how the poet felt betrayed by both forms of idealism—his Zionism, and his romanticism72.

Thus, the tropes of intimacies between German-Jewish (Ruth and Amichai), Mandate
Palestinian-Israeli (Ruth Z and Amichai), and Arab-Jewish (Darwish and Rita), and their
romantic pursuits exhibit a dynamic reading of community, life, love, and belonging that is

72 See Philip Hollander’s review of Nili Scharf’s Gold’s, Yehuda Amichai: The Making of Israel’s National Poet, pp
228.
otherwise compartmentalized in a statist archival of Israel and Palestine’s national histories. The motif of interethnic or inter-national love opens a reading of intimate history in contrast to their national histories challenging their current status quo. The chapter will explore how the love poems represent a reading of the lovers embodied personal histories that stand distinctive to their imposed political and historical realities. The readings here will offer Darwish and Amichai’s poetic philosophical discussion on love laws and their call for a humanistic return to forming a community that involves living together.

In an interview with the Israeli poet Helit Yeshurun, Darwish raises concerns about the reception of his love poems, particularly Rita’s sufferings that are referred as “political speech instead of a human or tragic speech.” Darwish wants to resist the ways in which the context of the lovers pain and loss becomes politicized mainly because of Rita’s presence as a Jewish woman in his Palestinian poetic-scape. Darwish explains that Rita’s painful love expression demonstrates “an expression of a conflict, when the national difference prohibits bodies making love or from continuing the history of love” (Palestine 115). With this statement, Darwish underscores the complexities of loving across boundaries—between an Arab and a Jewish woman—and the treatment of the Palestinian and Israeli bodies regulated and governed in their private, public, and politic realms. As such, for Darwish, Rita as a leitmotif reworks the representation of love and romantic desire that often gets politicized disregarding their humanity. Rita’s poetic appearances symbolize Darwish’s meditation on the fictional relationship between Arab-Jewish or Israeli-Palestinian relationship and the plight of their human emotions and

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73 Darwish had multiple interviews with Helit Yeshurun. This was conducted in spring 1996 published in Hadarim, Tel Aviv, no. 12.

human relationships in their privacy, caught in a nationalistic tension, conflict, and their disorderly hierarchy.

Similarly, in an interview with Nili Scharf Gold, Amichai confides that among many love poems including “History Wings Beating, They Use to Say” is dedicated to Ruth Z. where the lovers find themselves in:

…days of great love and great destiny,
The foreign power imposed a curfew on the city and closed
Us for a sweet coupling in the room,
Guarded by well-armed soldiers.

For five shillings I changed the name of my forefathers
Of the Diaspora into a proud Hebrew name matching hers.

That bitch ran off to America, got married to
A dealer in spices, cinnamon, cardamom,
And left me behind with my new name and the war

With this poem, Amichai marks the complexities of building romantic relationships during their diasporic existence in the pre-established Israel. Unlike, Darwish’s lovers mentioned in the poem above, Amichai’s lovers secured a place—"a sweet coupling in the room”—for themselves only to be left betrayed by his lover in-between “great love” and “great destiny”, in-between his newly adopted diasporic name and identity\(^75\), his past personal lineage, and the impending

\(^{75}\) Amichai’s last name was Pfeuffer till 1947 when he met Ruth Z and fell in love and changed to Amichai which means “my nation/people lives as act of nationalistic solidarity. According to Ruth, it was also a kind of betrothal; the couple chose the name together, “looking for a Hebrew name that would melodically complement both ‘Yehuda’ and ‘Ruth.”’ See Nili Scharf Gold Yehuda Amichai, *The Making of Israel’s National Poet*. 
coming war. The structural arrangement of the poem, filled with line breaks and white spaces, emphasize the continuation of Amichai’s poetic thought in pauses, between lines that evoke an emotion caught in-between. Both types of poetic line breaks, end-stopped and enjambment, the intended or unintended placement of white space where the sentences fissure, compel the readers to pause with the poetic-speaker to dwell with him in his in-betweenness. At the end of the poem, the speaker comments on the influences of the external features of the lovers political lives, such as diaspora, migration, and war that left the poet-lover with wounded ambiguities for loving across boundaries and borders. Amichai writes:

“History’s wings beating” as they used to say then, which
Almost killed me on the battlefield, blew
A pleasant breeze on her face in her safe place.

And yet, the poet-lover:

… put
My personal bandage above my heart,
The silly heart that still loved her
And the wise heart that will forget.

With this ending, Amichai resists the pressures of his political world to dictate his emotions. There is a lack of complete surrendering to events; instead, the poet separates himself and the complexities of his emotions, in-between loving and forgetting. Like Darwish’s lovers being prohibited from loving due to their oppositional national status within the Israel and Palestine’s conflict, Amichai’s lovers share similar fate although not as oppositional but for other national differences related to war, and migration. However, in both contexts, both poets’ treat love
primarily as a human experience, and as a romantic and private category marked by their exilic
tensions and in-betweenness.

In response to their love poems, Darwish confessed his desire to be introduced to the
Israeli audience as a love poet⁷⁶ instead of being labelled as the “National poet” or “the poet of
resistance”, whereas Amichai vehemently resisted the label⁷⁷. One of Amichai’s ongoing
conflicts with the reception of his poetic work was to work against the capitalization of the
Jewish experience only through the lens of the Holocaust⁷⁸. Like Darwish, Amichai explores
love as a poetic trope other than its politicized context—Shoah, Nakba, Naksa. While their love
poems do address issues of fascism, geographical and cultural displacement, genocide, and
Catastrophes, both poets primarily celebrate and agonize love as a human experience. In fact,
both poets explore the topic of love as a part of their ongoing process in bridging their exilic
consciousness—where love sentimentally hovers as a haunting nostalgia of the past against their
present, uncovering a personal, intimate, heterogeneous histories — with their national
consciousness that is burdened with responsibilities and romanticization of a return to the
homeland.

⁷⁶ Mahmoud Darwish Palestine as a Metaphor, pp. 141.

⁷⁷ Amichai remarks: “love poet [?]—as if I have some special expertise at love, it makes me sound like a pimp”, in

⁷⁸ Amichai voices against the strict categorization of Israeli writers and poets work as “Holocaust writer”. Chana
Kronfeld writes that in personal communications, Amichai would sarcastically identify himself as a Sho’an Miktzo
(Professional Holocauster) to condemn any exploitation and trappings of religious and patriotic fervor for
nationalistic gains. See chapter “Reclaiming The Revolutionary Amichai” from The Full Severity of Compassion:
The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai (54).
Love is Otherness

Through rhetorical figures such as Rita, Little Ruth, and Ruth Z. Amichai and Darwish explore the intimate histories of childhood love and loss in their contextual exilic realities involving migration from Germany in 1936, the establishment of Israel and the dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948, followed by series of conflict and the first Intifada in 1987. Far from their presence as biographical gossip, Rita and both Ruths metonymically represent the complex correlation Amichai and Darwish had between their personal poetic expressions and the misrepresentation of their personal emotions by critics and within the context of their status as national poets. For instance, Barbara Harlow’s *Resistance Literature* sheds light to the perils of assaulting the complex configurations of Palestinian literature and poetry that gets simplified as a resistance and reaction against Zionist settler colonialism although such forms of resistance is a necessary part of Palestinian literature. Constricted within this perspective, Darwish’s love poetry loses its objectivity due to patronizing condescension of his poetic craft as symbolic and historical representation for Palestinian rights.

On the other hand, Amichai’s commitment to the *Likrat* circle, instead of illuminating his work, foreshadows it as if all Statehood Generation poets are to be confined within a similar set of pathos, logos, and ethos. A close reading of Amichai’s love poetry illustrates a mediation of

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79 Chana Kronfeld caution readers to avoid reading Amichai’s love poems, as some critics have done, as biographical gossip. Instead, Kronfeld writes “As in the poetry of the Ha-Nagid on which Amichai’s autobiographical poems are modeled the personal often serves as an opening narrative exemplum taken from familiar life events, which functions in the course of the test as a springboard for poetic, metaphorical elaboration and far-ranging philosophical meditation” (*The Full Severity* 21-22).

80 Barbara Harlow makes a case for Palestinian resistance literature marking the important distinction between literature written under occupation and literature in exile and how the poetry of Palestinian resistance has challenged the conventional criticism (*Resistance Literature* 72).
liminality or in-between-ness. Amichai’s in-between-ness is reflected in every aspect of his childhood, his life as a poet, a military soldier, and a human being who wants to live and love. Subtle and yet dominant, we can observe that Amichai’s poetic oeuvre (including his novel and two short stories) “refuses to fetishize the Shoah through their theological model of apocalyptic history”.\(^8\) Such (mis)readings ignore the poets’ poetic contemplation on the topic of ethnic integration, and the politics of their literary representation that advocates for a radical understanding of human experiences caught in conflict. Darwish, experiencing similar poetic categorization by his critics, addresses this complexity:

> To my great regret, when critics refer to me in this way, they want to say that I am the poet of a community; they attempt to confine the text to the domain of the political. However, in our lives, politics is not an affair of parties, it’s rather one of the names for destiny. I stand in the middle, on the borders between the public voice and the personal voice… Each time I write a love poem, they say it’s a poem for the land, that “Rita” is Palestine. “Rita” is an erotic poem, but they don’t believe me. (Palestine 114)

Under such circumstances, Darwish’s status as the voice of Palestine and lover of Palestine eclipses his human response to love that is not entirely separate but distinct from his national or moral duties. In other words, not all Darwish’s love poems is a homage to the homeland, and not all Darwish’s beloved is a metaphorical representation of Palestine. Rather, Darwish distinguishes his use of romantic expression—a lyrical stylistics—to represent the lost humanity, and the complexity of his relationship with Rita, Israel, and Palestine. As such what does it mean

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for Darwish to write love poems concerning an Israeli woman during the ongoing dispossession of the Palestinians?

Ironically, it is Darwish’s first love poems that have earned him the status as a resistant poet. Subbi Hadidi, in the essay, “Mahmoud Darwish’s Love Poem: History, Exile, and the Epic Call” charts Darwish’s poetic history where Darwish actively resisted the various confinements of his poetic voice. Darwish began his poetic career with the collection titled *Lover from Palestine (Ashiq min Filastin)* in 1966 where Darwish idealizes Palestine as his beloved. At this juncture such metaphoric analogous use of love with the homeland was radically distinct from the Arabic tradition of love poetry (*Exile’s* 100). Hadidi writes “[i]instead of being introspective, as it is the case in the Arabic poetic tradition, Darwish’s love poems contemplate history. Instead of describing the calm of a lover’s meeting, his poems evoke the pains of exile” (*Exile’s* 100). Darwish’s use of “myth and symbols from Middle Eastern and ancient Greek sources, the epic dimension he gave to everyday life, the role of women as symbolic of the land, the capacity to mix romantic lyricism with revolutionary mood” distinguished him from other Palestinian love poets including Samih al-Qaim, Tawfiq Zayyad, and Salem Gibran (*Exile’s* 100-101). However, Darwish suffers from strict categorization from his readers and critics who overlook the poet’s consistent commitment to aesthetic experimentation clearly demonstrated in his poetic collections *Eleven Planets (Ahada ‘ashara Kawkaban)* published in the year 1992 and *The Stranger’s Bed (Sarir-al-Ghariba)* published in 1998, where Darwish approaches love from the lover’s exilic point of view. Both collections were written during major historical changes in the Israeli and Palestinian conflict including the first Palestinian Intifada starting in the year 1987

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and the Oslo peace accords in 1993. Fady Joudah, translator of Darwish’s poems, comments on the essence of the poet’s latestyle experimentation (discussed in detail in chapter three) present in his lyric love poems as “an entire life in dialogue that merges the self with its stranger, its other, in continuous renewal within the widening periphery of human grace” (If I Were vii). Darwish’s mediation on the self and the Other is fraught in an intimate entanglement—a quotidian lovers existentiality—that intersects with the larger questions of humanity and community, the balance between the individual, the collective and the universal.

Amichai expresses similar concerns on the topic of war, childhood, pain, pleasure, profanity, utilizing love as a framework to humanize and emphasize the human experience of historical and political events. Like Darwish’s lovers, Amichai’s lovers vacillate in-between the pain and pleasures of loving within their exiles where love becomes a metaphor for void, absence, eroticism, and spiritualism. Amichai’s earlier love poetry written between 1948 and 1968 reveals a structured form where love and religion are intertwined. On this topic Glenda Abramson writes that:

Love and religion are virtually inseparable in Amichai’s early verse, almost as if he has taken as a paradigm the peshat and derash of the Song of Songs together in an ideological unity. This is not entirely foreign to Hebrew poetry, for some medieval

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83 See, Fady Joudah’s introduction to If I were Another (viii).

84 According to Merrimack Valley Havurah, in Traditional Egalitarian Torah Study and in the Spirit of Conservatism Judaism, Peshat is described as “taking the text at face value, in context” whereas Derash is the process whereby while studying the Tanach one must allow to discover with the ability to create new meanings. See blog, https://merrimackvalleyhavurah.wordpress.com/2017/03/12/peshat-and-derash/ for a detailed discussion on Peshat and Derash. I argue Derash formally aligns with Arendt’s theoretical conception of “natality” (new beginnings). Also, Amichai’s use of Peshat and Derash in his love poems offers a reading that involves new discovery of meanings.
Jewish poets utilized the love poem as their metaphor for worship of God (“The Love Poetry” 223).

However, Abramson further elaborates that in the poetry of the late 1970s and 1980s Amichai’s treatment of love “becomes detached from emotion to adhering a more abstract quality, akin to a metaphor for many life experiences” (“The Love Poetry” 223)\(^85\). In fact, in many poems, Amichai materializes love to advocate the embracing of an otherness—a love that seeks to be trans-national, trans-cultural and humane—the lack of which causes death of humanity\(^86\). For instance, in one of Amichai’s poignant *kinot*\(^87\) from his last poem collection *Open Close Open* titled “Once I Wrote Now and in Other Days: Thus Glory Passes, Thus Pass the Psalms”, Amichai writes: “Otherness is God. Otherness killed Him. The truth is, / Otherness killed Ruth” (*Open* 131), or in the poem “Names, Names, in Other Days and in Our Time” Amichai laments on the death of his beloved Ruth stating: “Ruth Ruth Ruth, little girl from my youth—/now she’s a stand-in for Otherness. /Otherness is death, death is Otherness” (*Open* 131). In both verse statements, Amichai marks Otherness—its signification as a differentiating sign—that separates people from God and from each other, a recognition if ignored can brutally end with death. In other words, Amichai emphasizes the paradox of Otherness, the horrors of an Otherness (in the form of antisemitism) that caused Ruth’s death, as well as the power of an Otherness that is


\(^{86}\) It is worth mentioning here that death appears as a motif in Amichai’s love poems in various interpretative capacities, one that includes the reading of death as an orgasmic play between lovers, and other times as a direct reference to oppression under fascist regime.

\(^{87}\) The word *Kinot* refers to lamenting in Hebrew tradition.
Godly (the savior of humanity). For instance, in the poem “Israeli Travel: Otherness is All, Otherness is Love”, Amichai writes:

Nearby there was a big orchard that two of us entered.
The two of us. We came out two others:
he-other and she-other together,
he-lover and she-lover together. And I said to myself,

Otherness is all. Otherness is love (Open 67).

Important to note here the use of Otherness as a signification different from the fascist abuse of othering; instead for Amichai this otherness leads to a pluralism—a movement from the self towards the Other. Here, the self and Other reflect a contrapuntal affinity whereby they both emerge from the process of differentiation and yet they are historically intertwined. Thus, in this poetic Eden, the he-other and the she-other maintain their own subjectivities but also appear together as two—a love in togetherness, and otherness. Similar to Edward Said’s own autobiographical predicament stated in his work Out of Place, where Said shows how the notion of his-Self evolved in response to the demand and presence of the Others met at historical counterpoints, Amichai’s lovers’ inseparability from one another provides the potential to reform new meanings to love, identity and kinship that includes an otherness.

Darwish also explores human plurality through the poetic concept of Otherness or strangers in relation to love and exile. Hella Bloom Cohen illuminates the various context in which Darwish refers to “strangers” including “Rita, the general beloved, the poetic self, the enemy/Israeli, and perhaps all of them in one” (72)\(^88\). For Darwish, exile is not only a political

status, a position of the outsider and of being barred from his homeland. Rather, exile, in relation to love refers to the recognition of an existential strangeness, an ontological condition whereby exile becomes the language of love, intimacy and kinship. Undoubtedly, and argued in all three chapters of this dissertation, exile functions in various ways in Darwish’s poems: as a human condition as well as a social, political, historical, and cultural context. However, in relation to love, exile operate as a metaphor for a simultaneous consciousness of belonging and detachment, reinvention, and resistance. In the landmark 1996 interview “Exile is so Strong Within Me, I May Bring It to the Land”, Darwish describes exile as “a broad concept and very relative. There is exile in society, exile in family, exile in love, exile within yourself. All poetry is an expression of exile and otherness” [emphasis mine] (49). Darwish’s recognition of exile to be more than a historical human condition compels a reading of exile as a resource for reimagining belongingness and humanism. Darwish says:

Because in the end we are all exiles. The occupier and I—both of us suffer from exile. He is an exile in me and I am victim of his exile. All of us beautiful planet Earth, we are all neighbors, we are all exiles, we are all walking in the same human fate, and what unites us is the need to tell the story of this story. (Palestine 50)

With this statement Darwish supplements exile to recognize and restructure the relationship between the occupier and the oppressed—the Self and the Other— to denote a site of possibility of relationality that disavows the given historical and political conditions. Therefore, the condition of being exiled, especially in love, reveals a potential for Darwish’s poetic lovers to “create dialogues among exiles of earth” and to “search for the otherness” where exile functions as “a meeting place of all strangers in the project of constructing human culture” (Palestine 51).
Thus, in *Mural* (2000), Darwish invokes the Arab poet Imru al-Qais \(^89\) stating “a stranger is another’s stranger’s brother” \(^90\) marking a kinship or relationality that appropriates notion of identity and belonging, identity and community formation beyond the norms of border identification. This polis is based on strangeness and a connection with an Otherness. Darwish illuminates the poetic model of Otherness in various of his love poems including the poem, “A Mask...for Majnoon Laila” from *The Stranger’s Bed* (1998). Darwish writes:

> I found a mask, so I liked that
> 
> I can become my other. I was less
> 
> than thirty years old, thinking the boundaries
> 
> of existence were words. And I was
> 
> sick with Laila like any other young man
> 
> when salt beams in his blood. When she wasn’t
> 
> present as body she was the soul’s image
> 
> in everything. Drawing me closer
> 
> to the orbits of planets. Distancing me from life
> 
> on earth. She is neither death
> 
> nor is she Laila. “I am you, Laila,
> 
> there must be a blue void for the endless
> 
> embrace” … (*The Butterfly’s* 97).

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\(^89\) Fady Joudah explains the important and complex poetic genealogical relationship this particular moment of intertextuality in Darwish’s poem exhibits. She writes:

Another significance of the poem stems from the mention of two literary characters placed in opposition: Imru el’Qyss, prince of Kinda, the great pre-Islamic (Jahili) poet, who sought Caesar’s help (to avenge his father’s murder) and failed and died as consequence of this option, and Sophocles, who rejected and mocked political authority and power. This coincides the looming failure of the 1993 Oslo peace accords (“Introduction”, *If I Were Another* xv)

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\(^90\) See *If I were Another*, translated by Fady Joudah, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009 (note 104).
Here, Darwish deploys less ornamented language to fashion his poetic speech that explores the blurring of his identity within himself and in relation to his lover where the poet-speaker states that: “I can be my other”, “I am you, Laila” (The Butterfly’s 97). Throughout the poem Darwish withholds poetic momentum using enjambments to subtly direct towards a mystery and anxiety where Laila, the archetypal romantic figure, transports the poet lover to other orbits of planets, a life distanced from earth. (This echoes Arendt’s concept of caritas and cupiditas that will be discussed in the next section). Slowly, through line breaks and poetic anticipation, Darwish reveals this place as “a blue void for endless embrace”. A similar theme is present in the poem “When You are With Me”, Darwish dramatizes the meeting of lovers:

When you are with me, I do not say:

Here and now we are together.

Rather, I say: You and I and eternity,

We swim in nowhere (The Butterfly’s 43)\(^91\)

Darwish’s lovers romantic encounters transverse borders to a multiplied, endless, experience of displacement heightening the sense of marginalization already experienced by the marginalized exilic lovers. Based on the discussion thus far, and reading Amichai’s and Darwish’s romantic tropes contrapuntally, it can be argued that both poets’ active poetic exploration of the Otherness highlights a poetic system whereby Otherness reconstruct a love haven of plurality. This love haven can be interpreted as a site for intervention—a poetic discourse on speculating possibilities

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of coming community: how do interethnic and inter-national lovers live and love in the world after Catastrophes?

**Amor Mundi: Love for the World**

Amichai and Darwish’s poetic themes of love as otherness coincides with the Arendtian framework of plurality. Arendt denotes that otherness is the necessary distinction required for politics of plurality. She writes:

> Otherness is an important aspect of plurality…an abstract form. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive becomes uniqueness and human plurality, is the paradoxical plurality of human beings.

*(The Human 176).*

Following the two metaphoric topos discussed thus far, Darwish’s “blue void” from the poem “A Mask…for Majnoon Laila” and Amichai’s “big orchard”, from “Israeli Travel: Otherness is All, Otherness is Love”—a topographical substitute for the Eden—a generative reading can be offered. From the theological stance it can be argued that the bonding between Adam and Eve—the he-lover and the she-lover—resulted in the catastrophic decentering of the heavenly and worldly life, the terrestrial life, and the historical life of people. Most importantly, their “transgressive” romantic pursuit became the conditions for a newer form of human history, relationality, and community. In lieu of this understanding, Amichai and Darwish’s lovers, like Adam and Eve, in their transgressive otherness desire for a renewed form of relationality, a reconciliation, a form of redeeming community inclusive of the Other. The central question is
then what does such a “loving” community, a *polis* in Arendt’s term entail? Hence, in addressing these poetic questions that reading of Darwish and Amichai’s poetry raises, Arendt’s concept of *Amor Mundi* becomes the essential framework.

On the advent of modernity and after the Catastrophes of the fascist totalitarian regimes, Arendt was keen to reconfigure human relationships, their individuality, and their natality, i.e., new beginnings of communities. Arendt addresses her principal inquiry of the political co-existence of human beings post Catastrophes, mainly in reading against Heidegger and Plato on thinking, labor, work, and action. Antonia Grunemberg in “Amor Mundi, or Thinking World After Catastrophe” elaborates Arendt’s argument for *Amor Mundi*:

In her reading of the Old and New Testaments, she challenged the Platonic texts and those of her teacher through a different understanding of world. From the act of creation emerged not Adam alone from whose rib Eve was created. Rather, God created Adam and Eve. He created two different human beings, not one and not two of the same kind. She expands this idea in her *Denktagebuch*: “The plurality that presents itself in its purest form in the series of numbers extending into infinity and producing themselves from out of themselves is originally not in the multitude of things, but in the need of the human being who, born as one, has need of a second in order to ensure the progression into the third, fourth, etc.” Human beings thus need each other; they enter the world always already in a web of relationships. The world consists of what happens between people.

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92 Arendt writes: “the polis is properly speaking, is not a city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose” (*The Human Condition* 198).

Plurality emerges in the constant dynamic between many individuals. It has its house in language; hence the plurality of voices constitutes the world (259).

Thus, Arendt weighs the manifestations of a plural life via understanding the scope of thinking and activity between people. One of the human activities, Arendt marks, is the “elementary relation between humans” that is not based on coercion but on need (dem Bedürfen), that it was, hence, essentially “Eros”: “Men get together as persons because they need each other (love).”

Arendt never fully defined Amor mundi except in negations: it is neither a godly nor an unworldly love. Dissecting Augustinian love in her doctoral dissertation titled Love and Saint Augustine, Arendt offers phenomenological readings of love or cravings as caritas and cupiditas, favoring cupiditas. Cupiditas, defined as the love of the world, Arendt argues, situates man in the world, where as caritas removes man from the world towards God, eternity, etc. This distinction between worldly love and unworldly love or human love and divine love is important to Arendt since for her it opens the discussion of man living now as opposed to becoming subordinated to a transcendent outworldly future. Arendt’s main contention with caritas is that it separates man from the living—home, community, citizenry—to that of an abstract eternal future or afterlife. Arendt explains “in the pure act of finding himself as part of God’s creation, the creature is not yet at home in the world” (Love 67); on the other hand, “rather is it through love of the world that man explicitly makes himself at home in the world, and then desirously looks to it alone for his good and evil” (Love 67). In such an act of love, man creates his own “dwelling in the fabric” (Love 68) “the world cannot be worldly until man’s making and loving occur independently of

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pure createdness” (Love 68). Arendt connects action with plurality that exist between men, in-between lovers, the space that leads to newer directions of human relationships. Thus, to claim that for Arendt love animates action seems fitting as she defines *Amor mundi* as:

> Acting in the World, it is a question of a world which is formed as a Time-Space in which human beings plural—not with and not next to each other—pure plurality is enough! (the pure between)— [the world] in which we then build our buildings, move in, want to leave behind something permanent, a world to which we belong insofar as we are plural, where we always remain strangers insofar as we are singular; only through this plurality can we determine our singularity. Seeing and being-seen, hearing and being-heard in the between. (qtd. in *Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger* 262)

Hence, Arendt’s new political space, after the fall of the totalitarian regimes, propels an understanding of human relationships coming as a community where action and politics occurs between men or spaces-in-between. Arendt treats this space as instrumental for the development of new political frames, new alliances, and relationships based on interests. Interest, Arendt defines, is the “world’s most literal significance, something which interest, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (*The Human* 182). While human action and speech come together in interest of themselves and the others involved, Arendt explains how such interests create a “web of relationships which exists wherever men live together” (*The Human* 183). The following sections will offer a reading of these in-betweenness spaces present in the romantic web of relationships in both Amichai and Darwish’s love poems. From different vantage points, the readings will offer an Arendtian model of community where love as the self-Other intimacy constructs or destructs normative cultural barriers present within the Israeli and
Palestinian conflict, and within Darwish and Amichai’s personal Palestinian and Jewish histories.

**Love in-between: A Counterpoint**

In an interview with Kronfeld in Amichai’s Bleecker Street Apartment in New York in 1984, Amichai said:

Love is the material that holds everything together, the glue for me, the most powerful expression of this sensibility is the poem “Inside the Apple, where the speaker is metaphorically the little worm inside the apple, handing on to his beloved who has come to be there with him. As together they hear “the knife/ Paring around and around” them he knows that she will stay with him “until the knife finishes its work.” (*The Full 21*)

The poem that Amichai refers to here is “Inside the Apple” published in the poetry collection *From Man You Came and to Man You Shall Return* (1989). In the poem, Amichai describes a condition of love where lovers are metaphorically restrained inside an apple and are just a moment away from their separation. The lovers privacy is hindered by external forces that keep the lovers apart. The apple represents both the speaker and his lover’s private world— an Elysium—, until the military power pulls them apart. In other poems from the same collection such as “Memory of Love—Image,” “Memory of Love—Terms and Conditions,” “Memory of Love— Opening The Will,” Amichai constantly evokes love in its various sentimental contexts where lovers:

cannot imagine

How we shall live without each other,
so we said.

And since then we live inside that image

Day after day, far from each other

In this context, for Amichai, love has transformed into a memory or an image, a stagnancy that turns into pain. The force of social, political, and historical factors compels the lovers to put forward “strange terms and conditions: if you forget me/ I’ll forget you”. Or, when his speaker says:

I’m still inside the room. Two days from now
I will see it from the outside only,
The closed shutter of your room where we loved one another
And not all mankind.

And we shall turn to our new lives
In the special way of careful preparations
For death, turning to the wall
As in the Bible.

The God above the air we breathe,
The God who made us two eyes and two legs
Made us two souls too.

In this poem, love oscillates in-between: inside and outside, open, and close. Amichai’s love is both private and public, physical, and spiritual, worldly, and Godly. The interplay of internal and external dichotomies, within which Amichai’s poetic persona experiences love sheds light on the mechanism of love, both attached (Cupiditas) and detached from the world (Caritas), while
delving deeper into the interiorities of lovers’ subjectivities. Although the lovers are caught within the dialectics of the worldly and the divine power structures, it is also seeking to transgress the dialectic web through “careful preparations” resulting in death that Amichai poetically refers to as the sweet orgasmic escape. As such, love emerges powerfully since it challenges the given dialectics of power structures.

Through Rita and other love poems Darwish mediates the many irresolvable in-betweennesses that sums up the poet speaker’s exilic experiences and their human relationships, such as the Self and the Other, the Palestinian Self and the Israeli Other, the male Self and the female Other, both lost and found in many avenues of love. Both Darwish and Amichai deliberately use sensuality to decenter the narrative from their worldly affairs to an imaginative ecstatic world. In Darwish’s love poems, two possible readings of the sensual motif can be offered: a) in both Israeli and Palestinian literary tradition the notion of the homeland is gendered in feminized terms\(^\text{95}\), thus the recurring image of the women in Arabic literature is not only associated with the landscape but also symbolically stand for the Palestinian resistance; b) Darwish resists the oversaturation of the female presence in association of the Palestinian cause by subverting the image of a women in his poetry through erotic or sensual representation instead of portraying women as martyrs for the national cause. The reading of the following poem will exhibit the latter argument. In the poem “Rita and the Rifle”, Darwish writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Between Rita and my eyes… is a rifle.} \\
\text{He who knows Rita, bows} \\
\text{And Prays}
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{95}\) See, Rhoda Kanaaneh’s work *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel* where Kanaaneh provides extensive research on the topic of literature of nationalism, gender, and sexuality.
To a god in those hazel eyes!

...And I kissed Rita
When she was small
And I remember how she clung
To me, and my arms were enfolded by
the sweetest hair

I remember Rita
As a bird remembers its pool
Ah...Rita

Between us we have millions of birds and pictures
And many trysts

A rifle...was fired at her (I Don't Want 49)

In the first two stanzas of the poem, Darwish is reminiscing his beloved Rita whose beauty would compel a submission to her. The poet lover idolizes her beauty and remembers the intimate details of their romantic exchanges and encounters. And yet, the lovers love is interspersed by the presence of a rifle. Darwish’s use of refrain—a sigh—“Ah...Rita”, heightens the lyrical significance of the poem—an onomatopoeic marker of loss and love: the sound of deep ache and pleasure. With repeated ellipsis, Darwish captures the presence of an in-betweenness that keeps the lovers world separate from their political context “between Rita and my eyes...a rifle”. Darwish sometimes can triumph over the gap incurred by political restraints symbolized by the image of a rifle, and other times Darwish is consumed by it. One moment of his triumph is described in the next stanza where Darwish describes Rita in a highly sensual narrative:
Rita’s name was a festival in my mouth
Rita’s body was a wedding in my blood
And I was lost in Rita for two years
And she has slept on my arm for two years
And we agreed over the loveliest cups, and burned
In the wine of the lips
And we were twice-born!
Ah…Rita

Darwish’s use of explicit language in the third stanza of the poem presents a harmony of desire and fulfillment. In the lovers union they found a new birth and beginning. And, yet:

What turned your eyes away from mine
Except two sleepy moments
And Hazel mists
Before that rifle!

The lovers’ new beginnings have been interrupted by a rifle. In the classical romantic trope of Layla Majnoon, the poet and his lover’s world clashes against their reality where the lovers are forced to separate before a rifle. As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the reading of this stanza becomes interesting when Darwish reveals that Rita is Tamar ben Ami, an Israeli Jewish woman since in this case Darwish and Rita are together. The Palestinian and the Israeli are not oppositional to each other, rather it is the rifle that stands in opposition. Darwish concludes the poem:

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96 Nizami Ganjavi’s poem Layla Majnun, the story of unfulfilled love, has been transported across various cultures, languages, and literatures. Its multicultural appearances and adaptations over the years from Arabic to Persian to Turkish and Indian languages have had significant influence in the development of the said literary traditions.
Darwish’s love for Rita, an Israeli woman, can seemingly problematize the poet’s solidarity with the Palestinian resistance: an act of betrayal to his national cause. On the contrary, Rita’s sensual presence instead of her political position, and the lovers romantic desire for union stand as a testimony to the desire of a world that is separate from the world that deliberately prevents the inter-ethnic romance to bloom. A romance that could empower a new birth—where lovers were “twice born”—a double beginning. Darwish plays how the lovers act with new beginnings and new birth by subverting notions of identities. Arendt refers to new birth and new beginnings as the necessary “miracle that saves the world… it is, in other words, the birth of new men and new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope…” (*The Human 247*). Darwish’s fictional Arab-Jewish intimacy resulting in double births, can be read almost as a bio-intervention, a form of subversion of the divisive narrative of the national bodies that are forbidden to intermingle. Important to note, Darwish’s mixed romance is not a utopia—his lover “fled” from the city, and yet, Rita stays behind in his poetry.

Amichai echoes similar evolutionary sentiments to love. Concerning Amichai’s love poems, Abramson writes that Amichai lovers “has discovered that the love with which he is particularly concerned is an evolutionary human phenomenon and not a transcendent or
metaphysical state” (“The Love Poetry” 237). In other words, “love is seen in relation to the banality of life, not its promised and imagined glory” (“The Love Poetry” 237). In fact, in the poem “Ruth, what is Happiness”, Amichai’s poet speaker acknowledges in plain prosaic verse:

Ruth, what is happiness? We should have
 talked about it, but we didn’t.
The efforts we make to look happy
Drain our strength, as from tired soil.

Let’s go home. To different homes.
“And in case we don’t see each other anymore”.
Amichai’s poet speaker and his lover are not dwelling in pure bliss. Love after catastrophic events and in the modern world of crisis entail a love that even in its eventual unfulfillment recasts a discussion of new existential modes, i.e., finding ways to live and love within their exiles. Like Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, both Darwish and Amichai’s lovers depart or separates in many directions that lead them to “different homes” or “two different paths”. Darwish writes:

Let’s go as we are:
A free woman
And a loyal friend,
Let’s go together on two different paths
Let’s go as we are united
And separate,
With nothing hurting us… (“We Were Missing a Present”)
Even though it captures a banality, both Amichai and Darwish’s lovers capture a movement in between loving and separating, remembering, and forgetting, past and present, the he-lover and she-lover—a mobilizing effort to reposition the stages of love within their historical and political confinements. Under such circumstances, the poets’ lovers, limited to their in-between spaces, strategically fuel their love in recognition of the other. Amichai confides in his interview with Lawrence Joseph that:

I am, though, a love poet in this sense: I have a strong sense of “the other” in my poems, not too dissimilar from Montale’s. An awareness of others, often another, a woman, enables me to perceive reality in still other, different ways – other antennae of feeling, vision. (250)

Furthermore, in the poem collection “Anniversary of Love”, Amichai tracks the movement of love from emotion to the erotic, the spiritual to the universal where the lover finds consolation in an in-betweenness:

Where will we be when these flowers turn into fruit
In the narrow in-between, when the flower is no longer a flower
And the fruit is not yet fruit. And what a wonderful in-between did we make
For each other, between body and body. In-between eyes, between waking and sleep.
In-between twilight, not day, not night (A Life of 416).

For Amichai, this in-betweenness is a space created by the lovers—a world within the world. Arendt describes this world or worldliness an “important aspect of plurality”, “to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it common, as a
table is located between those who sit around it; the world like every in-between relates and separates men at the same time” (*The Human* 52).

Similar to Arendt’s political philosophy of worldliness, Amichai prioritizes the in-between space for its potentiality to renegotiate the lover’s relationship between the self and the other, real time and private time, in-between waking and sleeping, and their intimate human experiences. This in-betweenness can be read as Said’s counterpoint where the given reality of the lover creatively intersects with imaginative possibilities: a counterpoint of love and personal histories that stand against the institutional context of Amichai and Darwish’s nationalisms. Thus, the lovers’ site—spaces they occupy in love—can be strategically read as a space of alternative representation of inter-national and interethnic relationships.

**Love as a Non-place**

Throughout their poetography, Amichai and Darwish’s treatment of love shifts its focus from an emotional fulfillment for their homeland towards a form of abstraction that emphasize the humanity of the lovers in a universal manner. However, such a shift in focus reappropriates the diverse relationship the poets had with their land, childhood, and their humanity. This relationship between their personal and political histories is caught in a dialectical continuity where both poets move back and forth from their relative Jewish and Arabic literary, historical, and cultural traditions. However, as discussed thus

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97 Sinan Antoon, Mahmoud Darwish’s translator, coined the term poetography in the introductory essay of *In the Presence of Absence*. Antoon describes poetography as the rebirth Darwish “first as others are, but the second time as a poet” (6).
far, exile sits at the center of all relationships, specifically in all Amichai and Darwish’s romantic pursuits. For instance, in the poem “The Hoopoe” Darwish writes:

…We said: We are only lovers,
we have often died and been elated. We are only lovers. Longing
is exile. Our love is exile. And our wine is exile. And exile
is the history of this heart. We have often said to the scent of the place: Petrify
so we can sleep. We have often told the trees of the place to strip off
the ornament of invasions so we can find the place.
And non-place is the place when its soul becomes remote from its history ...
Exile is the soul that distances us from our land, toward the beloved.
Exile is the land that distances us from our soul, toward the stranger (The Butterfly 49).

For Darwish love is an exilic place, a non-place, where lovers’ soul becomes separate from its history. Here exile does not function as a longing for homeland. Instead, of familiarity and rootedness this exile direct towards the strange—the beloved stranger. Darwish utilizes “non-place” as a rhetorical trope to describe the interstitial space exilic lovers occupy, a non-place that functions as an antidote of the geographical construction of nation-place towards an abstract community. This non-place is an ahistorical community of lovers where strict markers of identities dissolve as exilic souls creating a blurring distinction between the lovers. In his last work In the Presence of Absence (Fi Hadrat Al-Ghiyab) first published in Arabic in 2006, and translated in 2011, Darwish rephrases this concept of love saying:

It is not enough to love, for that is one of nature’s magical acts like rainfall and thunder. It takes you out of yourself into the other’s orbit and then you have to fend for yourself. It is not enough to love, you have to know how to love. Do you know how? You cannot
answer, because you cannot relive the ecstasies that shook you and scattered you all over
the lilac’s escapade, electrified you and tortured you with the scorching taste of honey.
You cannot recall the liveliest and sweetest modes of death’ when your “I” left you for
your woman, and you encountered your self, fresh as a ripe fruit in her” (112).

In his latestyle prosaic form, Darwish opens a relay of possibilities that love bring to the
experience which partly cannot be remembered and yet remains transformative. In this
experiential paradox, loving between the “liveliest and sweetest modes of death”, Darwish is
provoking binaries of the lovers identities, where the lovers “I” and “you” ceremoniously move
in-between themselves— “I only exist in you” (114). Darwish captures this moment as “the
magnetic pull that uproots a being from its being cannot be defined (115), a “nocturnal
reconnaissance” and a “mutual obedience” (115). Darwish envisage a collective self of lovers not
inherently driven in opposition rather in a mutual agreement “budding inside one another” (117).
Darwish categorizes this moment of love as “beginnings”, a beginning that makes you (i.e., the
lovers) forget other “beginnings” –aligning with Arendt’s reading of new beginnings—a coming
of communities relying on libidinal mode of life. An interethnic love that challenges singular
forms of living or a monolithic engagement towards unstable notions of mixing identities that
come together in “mutual obedience” (117):

…You both slip together from the highest heaven into a dewy drowsiness. You both
whisper in the shared silence and say nothing, but it is more lucid than anything. You
dream together, and separately, that this embrace might last forever, until you realize that
“forever” has a very short life span, and that eternity does not heed anyone. It often
circulates and shifts from one minute to another and from one state to another (In the
Presence 117).
For Darwish, the love that create new possibilities is also filled with complexities of human emotions. Darwish’s destabilization of identities through love is saddled with paradoxes and contradictions confined within the limitations of time. His lovers realize that their lovers “forever” are short-lived and thus their love exist in profound contradiction that Darwish labels as “present absence” (*In the Presence* 116). Darwish explores this contradiction in many of his poems almost doctrinally, a poetic exploration of “present absent” in relation to exilic history of the Palestinians who were held against returning to their homeland. After the 1948 and 1967 wars, Palestinians were categorized as unwelcomed people whose return obfuscated the notions of citizenry under Israeli’s occupation. Darwish marks the status of *persona non grata* as a present absent state where Palestinians grappled with their identities and sovereignty with serious consequences. However, in his love poems, Darwish’s “present absence” operate to break the idealism of love and fulfilment to a recognition of embodied feeling when love “sometimes appears as an angel with delicate wings that can uproot us from earth [and] sometimes charge at us like a bull, hurls us to the ground, and walks away”. “Love has an expiration date” (*In the Presence* 119) Darwish writes, but the termination of love is nonetheless transformative, a defense for interethnic relationship that avoid immediacy or fulfilment of love in the traditional sense.

A focus on the embodied feeling of the lovers is important to Darwish since it empowers the poet and his love poems as a humanizing vital space other than their political contextualization. The vitalism of love is neither utopic nor idyllic, rather, it “shifts, transforms and is impervious to identification; it is the completion of meaning with non-meaning…and it

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98 Thus, the title of one of Darwish’s interview essays with Helit Yeshurun published in *Hadarim* is “I don’t return, I arrive”, 1996.
resists repetition and negates the need to mend air with color” (In the Presence 118). For Darwish, these locations of non-meaning and resistance present within the act of loving presents itself as a creative force that puts lovers in a paradoxical relationship with the world. Similar to Darwish’s concept of “present absent” Arendt describes such concept of love as vita passive: “an independent mode of life”, where love turns into an “active mode of being alive” (qtd in Tommel 107). The conceptual incongruence in both figures of speech—Darwish’s “present absent” and Arendt’s “vita passive”—do not appear in their work only as a rhetorical play. Rather, these concepts retain their contradictions to denote a movement where love permits the lovers to escape their world into an intimate world of their own, thus “present absent”, or “vita passive”. Arendt writes:

If love seizes humans, it becomes the most humane [quality] that humans have, namely a humaneness that exists worldless, objectless (the beloved one is never object), spaceless…as lovers, every human being is—in an unimaginably ironic way—also the human being as such [der Mensch] (112)99.

This spaceless, worldlessness100, or non-place that the lovers occupy, poetically and philosophically argued by Darwish and Arendt functions as a metaphor for thinking

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100 A tangential digression: Jan Mohamad in “Worldliness- without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a definition of the Specular Border Intellectual” defines a specular intellectual different from the syncretic intellectual, and as someone who is not at home with more than two cultures. Rather, the specular intellectual:

while perhaps equally familiar with two cultures, finds himself or herself unable or unwilling to be “at home” in these societies. Caught between several cultures or groups, none of which are deemed sufficiently enabling or productive, the specular intellectual subjects the cultures to analytic scrutiny rather than combining them; he or she utilizes his or her interstitial cultural space as a vantage point from which to define, explicitly or implicitly, other utopian possibilities of group formation (67).
alternatively. These spaces open avenues for interethnic love to defy reification of their emotional intimacies with other forms of ideological readings.

Amichai approaches similar radical motifs in exploring the transient nature of love that is comparable to Darwish’s meditation on love – in its material, spiritual, transcendental realms. In the poem “Houses (Plural); Love (Singular)” from Open Close Open, Amichai describes lovers non-place, a no man’s land as the “zone of abandon” (90), a place that is politically negated for human interaction\(^{101}\). However, Amichai narrativize the zone of abandon as a place of interlinking, connectedness, and birthing of lovers whose living is pulsating through the act of love. Amichai writes:

In Hebrew, no man’s land is called “the zone of abandon”.

When we lived there, we were a man and a woman earnest in our loving,

We were not abandoned. And if we have not died, we are loving still (90).

Amichai’s zone of abandon operate as a space of daring associations and transgression, where the performance of a heteronormative love confronts the question of intimacy in one of the most dangerous political spaces. The image of the lovers who are not abandoned in their act of loving and living again reminds of Arendt’s political philosophy: Amor Mundi. Amichai’s lovers passion and action create an alternative framework of communing, even if it is in a non-place, a zone of abandon, a no man’s land, in-between borders. Arendt conceptually addresses similar concerns of humans relationships after totalitarian movements as Oasis—a political form of desert life (The Promise 202) and that the desert life can be transformed by the faculty of passion

\(^{101}\) The no man’s land in Jerusalem was the creation of the commander of Israeli’ forces Moshe Dayan, in 1948, creating boundaries between Jerusalem and Jordan. The area in Hebrew is known as Shetah Hahekfer. See Aviva Bar-am’s article “No Man’s Land published” in The Jerusalem Post, 2007. https://www.jpost.com/Local-Israel/In-Jerusalem/No-mans-land.
and action. Arendt writes “Only those who can endure the passion of living under desert conditions can be trusted to summon up in themselves the courage that lies at the root of action, of becoming an active being” (The Promise 202). Amichai’s lovers activity, even if it culminates to death, resurrects in erotic forms transgressive of the biblical narrative of resurrection.

Amichai writes:

…Ezekiel prophesized in his vision:

Bones coming together, bone to bone, skin over flesh and sinew—

Ezekiel didn’t go into detail. But the two of us continued his vision:

hips for hugging, soft inner thighs for stroking, twin buttocks, upper
and nether hair, eyes to open and close, lips chiseled, the tongue precise.

and we fleshed out his vision even further:

Two people talking, a summer dress, underwear hung out to dry,
a windowsill.

we will be ourselves, we will be ebb and flow, changing weathers,
seasons of the year, we will go on being,

we will go on and on (Open 90)

Amichai use of sensuousness in describing the lovers continued act, even after resurrection, calls for a reading of geography of human relations that has its own course separate from their historical, political, or theological context. Death or catastrophe is not marked as a tragic event for the lovers, rather, it is an event that has brought the lovers in sensuous new interactions that is continuous amidst the banality of living life.

Amichai’s blend of eroticism and religious motif, and other sacrilegious imageries are part of the poets subversive aesthetics that are easily discerned by critics as “empty prattle” or
“pseudo-intellectual inventiveness, whose sharp wit contains nothing more than strangeness, remoteness and fallacy” (103)\textsuperscript{102}. Whereas other critics including Kronfeld and Abramson describes Amichai’s subversive aesthetics as “an exploratory journey, of which Amichai questions about his society, God, religion, tradition and love are the milestones, provides the substance of his writing that has never resulted in a negation or rejection of values, only in ambivalence and the striving for clarity” (78)\textsuperscript{103}. The poem “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Why Jerusalem?” presents such provocative ironies between Amichai’s lovers and their existential context in Jerusalem. In section seven Amichai writes:

In Jerusalem, everything is a symbol. Even two lovers there
become a symbol like the lion, the golden dome, the gate of the city.
sometimes they make love on too soft a symbolism.
and sometimes the symbols are hard as rock, sharp as nails.
that’s why they make love on a mattress of six hundred thirteens springs,
like the number of precepts, the commandments of Shalt and Shalt Not,
Oh yes, do that, darling, no, not that—all for love
and its pleasures. They speak with bells in their voices
and with the wailing call of the muezzin, and at their bedside, empty shoes
as at the entrance of a mosque. And on the doorpost of their houses
It says

“Ye Shall love each other with all your hearts and with all your souls” (Open 138).

In context of series of catastrophic events that followed Amichai from the Holocaust to Israeli independence war in 1948 to the 1967 Jerusalem war, Amichai’s lovers are distortedly tied to

\textsuperscript{102} See “Sacrilegious Imagery in Yehuda Amichai’s Poetry” by Yoseph Milman.
\textsuperscript{103} See “Alienation and Fragmentation” in The Writing of Yehuda Amichai: A Thematic Approach by Glenda Abramson.
symbolism that politicizes the lovers in ways that do not authentically align with Amichai’s poetic universe. Hence, with complain, Amichai sarcastically degrades the lovers lovemaking with blunt and blasphemous irreverence. The irreverence is expressed by the idea of lovers making love on the 613 Mitzvot, i.e., the Jewish commandments as their orgasmic play coincides with the call for Azan. The amalgamation of pleasure with religion—an act of insolence—is the site of resistance for Amichai and his lovers. If the lovers happen to be forcefully read as symbolic representation of something political or agential, Amichai destabilizes such readings through provocative associations of lovers erotic encounter.

**Exile and Lovers Community**

Thus far, the chapter offers a close reading of Amichai and Darwish’s love poems to explicate the various ways both poets engaged in the discussion of interethnic and inter-national romances to invite potential ethical community forming. However, this community forming is neither Amichai nor Darwish’s deliberate poetic manifesto or poetic political philosophy. Rather, both poets underscore their vision for romantic engagements first and foremost as a humane event that may have other social, historical, and political implications but nevertheless remains primarily about private emotions. The destabilizing power of love in the broader narrative of Israel and Palestinian conflict is felt heavily in both Amichai and Darwish’s treatment of love, in relation to their relative exilic history. The poetic lovers empower their exilic bodies, performs exile and love to mobilize a fluid understanding of human experiences that cannot be contained within demographical and geographical borders. Hence, Ruth Z, Ruth Hanover, Rita, and other appearances of their beloved in Amichai and Darwish’s poems as pseudo autobiographical figures also stand as rhetorical possibilities of a more inclusive and humane community forming—a community that is not entirely premised on utopic polis. In fact, the reality that
parallels Amichai and Darwish’s poetic representation of Rita, Ruth Z and Ruth Hanover is horrific to say the least. The love between Rita and Darwish disintegrates in the bifurcated reality of Israeli and Palestinian conflict; the love between Ruth Z and Amichai ends with betrayal and migration that escapes the fruition of Israel’s establishment as a nation; and the love between Ruth Hanover and Amichai looms over the poetic landscape as a cherished childhood nostalgia. And yet, a reading of these figures and their related motifs of Otherness, in-betweeness, and non-place, marked by exile, testify to a rethinking and rekindling of kinship and community forming. Instead of love as a reading frame, the following chapter discusses in detail how the poet’s elegies for their beloved (not necessarily directly addressed to Rita or Ruth) explores Amichai’s and Darwish’s poetic communities that is heterogenous to say the least.

In summary, Amichai and Darwish’s conceptual and aesthetic framing of love, and loving in exile, engages Arendt and Said’s philosophical discussion on worldlessness (caritas) and worldliness (cupiditas) that projects the unavoidable dialectics or movement of lovers forming newer communities while escaping their communities. As such, reading tropes of love in-between lovers and in-between their exilic existence takes the poets’ lovers away from the world only to be thrown back into the world to challenge modes of habitation (worlding) and kinship while destabilizing the canonized readings of Amichai and Darwish’s poetic stance as nationalistic.
Chapter Two: Death of the Binary: Heterogeneity of Binational Politics

Despair can begin creation anew because it is capable of finding the necessary splinters, those of the first things of the first elements of creation. And this force, this impetuosity, reverses the roles, and in the despairing, one finds himself again in the position of strength.

Mahmoud Darwish, Palestine as Metaphor 21

Introduction

Grief and the struggle for poetic freedom are shared motifs in the exilic consciousness of both Amichai and Darwish’s poet-speakers. This is partially due to their shared historical experiences, though on “opposing sides,” and the misappropriation, mistranslation, and miscomprehension of their works. This chapter offers critical readings of their elegy poems, in their respective Arabic and Judaic literary traditions, and examines the impact of misappropriated readings of Amichai and Darwish’s poems that falls under the conventional lens of nationalism. The critics and translators’ misappropriated readings of the poets’ work exacerbate Amichai and Darwish’s desire for a poetic innovation and aesthetic freedom from the constrictive and ideological framework their works are put in.

Loss of Friendship and Aesthetic Freedom

On Edward Said’s death, Mahmoud Darwish dedicated an elegy to commemorate the influential Palestinian scholar whose critical work revolved around the emancipatory politics of
Palestine. Darwish originally titled his elegy “Tibaq” that has been translated as antithesis, Counterpoint and Contrapuntal in various translated rendition of the poem. While “Counterpoint” conforms to the tradition of the Arabic elegiac poetry marthiya, Darwish also reworks the form by including non-traditional and multifaceted formal poetic techniques involving dialogues, memory flashbacks, imagined conversations and more.

To understand the formal aspects of Darwish’s elegy, a brief analysis of the Arabic elegy and its function in postcolonial nation building during the early twentieth century is necessary. Yaseen Noorani in the essay "A Nation Born in Mourning: The Neo-classical Funeral Elegy in Egypt” explains how in Arabic elegiac tradition the neoclassical marthiya follows a narrative arc that begins with effusive mourning and then segues into a recitation of the deceased's virtues—a biographical recounting of the services that he has rendered [in building] his community or nation (54). After the presentation of the public figure's virtues and contributions, there is a return to the grief that the reader encounters at the poem's opening, but at this stage in the conventional marthiya the mourning is less emotional. The "controlled and somewhat detached

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104 Tibaq is a rhetorical device present in the Holy Quran. In the Quran, the purpose of Tibaq is to highlight the antithetical ritual states present in the Quranic narration of God’s creation where the binaries such as haram and halal, profane and sacred, war and peace are not merely oppositional but that they in fact play off each other. See Refqa Abu-Remallah’s essay “Novel as Contrapuntal Reading: Elias Khoury’s Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam” in The Holocaust and the Nakba where he explains that “at the heart of the concept of tibaq is not simply the reiteration of dichotomies or binaries but also the possibility of the existence of the thesis/antithesis as simultaneous irreconcilables” (297).


grief,” as Noorani describes (49), sets the tone for the elegiac poet's depiction of the deceased living on through the mourners' renewed commitment to a political cause. In “Tibaq,” Darwish neither detaches from grieving nor does he simply present Said as the national hero, a national loss, or as the voice of the underrepresented. As the title of the elegy presents, he puts Said in a series of binaries, where Said is pitted against his “enemies” who now resides in the very home he grew up in. Through these unconventional appearances of antithetical encounters, Darwish highlights Said’s call for an exilic intellectual whose position as a non-resident forces him to contemplate a new political sentiment to reframe and redefine his loss of a national identity.

Therefore, as the poem discusses concepts of identity, nationalism, and exile—topics that heavily dominate continued research of both Darwish’s and Said’s work—“Counterpoint” offers a conversation between Said and the poet-speaker on the role of poetry, art, acceptance, and resistance in Palestine. These topics reflect the uneasy, complex, and shifting relationship Palestinians have with their political reality post Nakba. The poem exposes intersections between the personal and the public; the force of passion and the need or lack of political correctness; their friendships and unbiased opinions; the privileges and struggles of their positions in the Palestinian society. Abiding with the elegiac genre of the traditional marthiya, Darwish publicizes his personal mourning while also grieving the loss of Palestine as a nation.

In both form and content, Darwish’s “Counterpoint” confronts the reader with binaries that do not simply oppose each other but construct an organized interplay (Culture 51). Part dialogue and statements, part recollection and re-imagination, the poem’s elastic form performs a

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107 Darwish creates a fictional representation of Edward Said as the poet-speaker of his poem “Tibaq.” From here on, I will italicize Darwish’s poetic speaker Said in order to differentiate him from Said—the Palestinian scholar.
poetics of multiplicity that defies the confinements of a single structure, a single narrative, and a single identity. As such the poem contrapuntally moves from Said and Darwish’s point of view, on topics such as the role and politics of aesthetics, freedom and oppression, meditations on life and death, the fragment and the whole, formation and disintegration of the “I” and “you,” the subject’s interiority and the exteriority, the prosaic narrative, and the poetic rhythms, etc. Both formally and thematically, Darwish’s contrapuntal composition of the poem and his poetic scholarship is in solidarity with Said’s methodology. In fact, throughout their academic careers and their commitment to Palestine’s self-determination, both Said and Darwish continued to influence each other’s work. Clearly, such parallelism is a commentary of maintaining isnad, where both of their poetic and philosophical systems correlate with their scholarly practices to culminate a vision for a life in liminality, i.e., a life that looks at the formation of identities and subjectivities at their historical intersections or counterpoints, as opposed to a conventional nationalistic determinism. Thus, in “Counterpoint,” Darwish poeticizes and reclaims these historical intersections, in order that he might be able to bid farewell to the poetry of pain and “invent hope for speech, /invent a direction, /a mirage to extend hope/ [a]nd sing, for the aesthetic is freedom.”

In their friendship, Said offered his literary appreciation of Darwish’s work. In the essay “On Mahmoud” Said describes Darwish as “the wandering exile,” travelling extensively around

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109 In Arabic tradition, isnad is highly important since authenticity is verified through chain of authorities attesting the claim, event, statement, argument, etc. See Britannica's definition of Isnad for a brief in-depth understanding of isnad in relation to Islamic history.
the world yet having “a commanding presence” in both the nations of Palestine and Israel “for obvious reasons” (113). Although Darwish mentions in “Tibaq” his desire to liberate his poetry of pain towards an aesthetic of freedom, Said describes Darwish as “a wonderful technician” who uses “incomparably rich Arabic prosodic tradition in innovative, constantly in new ways” (“On Mahmoud” 114). In appreciation, Said offers his reading of Darwish’s qasida or ode titled “Eleven Stars Over Andalusia” where the poet-speaker grieves over the “extraordinary downward spiral of Palestine’s fortunes, which like Andalusia’s went from a grand cultural apex to a terrible nadir of dispossession, both in actuality and metaphorically” (“On Mahmoud” 114). Said reads the title of the poem “Eleven Stars” as an allegorical reference to the Quranic stories about the Prophet Joseph’s gift of prophesizing the future. Said claims that Darwish’s poet speaker has been endowed with a similar divine gift of vision to interpret the coming events. The most important aspect of Said’s reading of Darwish is the recognition of the poet’s poetic system (form and language) described as Adorno’s late style “in which the conventional and the ethereal, the historical and the transcendent aesthetic combine to provide an astonishingly concrete sense of beyond what anyone has ever lived through in reality” (“On Mahmoud” 115). And, despite Said’s poetic appreciation of the novelty in Darwish’s poems, Darwish persistently expresses his desire to release his poetry from the chain of events, i.e., to bid farewell to the

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110 Qaisidah is an elegiac form of poetry present in Arabic, Persian and other related Asian literatures. For a definition see https://www.britannica.com/art/qasidah.

111 In Quran, chapter 12, Prophet Joseph says “O my father! Verily, I saw (in a dream) eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me.” In response his father said to him “O my dear son! Do not relate your vision to your brothers, or they will devise a plot against you…and so will you Lord will choose you O Joseph, and teach you the interpretation of dreams, and perfect His Favor on you and on the descendants of Jacob—just as He once perfected it upon your forefathers, Abraham, and Isaac. Surely your Lord is All-Knowing, All wise. (Quran 12:4-6)
poetry of pain. This comes as no surprise since Darwish’s poems were shaped by the Arab press and its politics, leading him to earn titles such as “The Poet of the Resistance” or “The Poet of the Occupied Land”. Darwish’s translator, Mohammad Shaheen argues that such labels constitute misreading and mistranslations of Darwish’s poems to which the poet expressed his disappointments (I Don’t Want 2). Thus, one of Darwish’s lifelong poetic goals was to counter the analogous image he and his poetry had with Palestine and deconstruct his poetic language and subjectivities from the overtly nationalistic reading patterns.

The desire for an aesthetic freedom heavily dominates the poetic imagination of Yehuda Amichai as well. In one of his correspondences with his friend Paul Celan, Amichai confessed how he envies Celan’s aesthetic freedom that “does not render word and image objective (with extremist subjectivity!).” In contrast, Amichai regrets that his poetry “holds forth in what’s real and is prompted pragmatically by events… [his] images are only the clatter of chain links that tie

112 In his interview with the Lebanese poet Abbas Beydoun and in context of the poem “Eleven Stars” or “Eleven Planets”, Darwish says:

When I assert that one must rid poetry of all that is not poetical, I obviously do not mean that one must cut oneself off from the real, from events, from the concrete moment, but must simply reduce the political, patriotic, and social functions that one asks of poetry. (Palestine as Metaphor 28)

113 Darwish himself once claimed that “the poet, by definition, is a politician during the state of emergency.” See Abdul-Rahim al-Shaikh, "The Political Darwish," Journal of Arabic Literature pp. 93-122. However, in interview with Najat Rahman, Darwish confesses his embarrassment and depression reading academics and critics reading his poems. He complained how the critics would never carefully read his poems, and that there was mostly “an attempt at deciphering or explanation of meaning—it does not seek the movement of meaning, even though a remarkable development in modern Arabic poetry is its move away from referential meaning to signification, directing its attention to the movement of meaning rather than meaning itself.” (Exile’s Poet 321)

114 Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman’s edited critical essays on Mahmoud Darwish titled Exile’s Poet is an excellent attempt to dismantle such politically charged misreading of Darwish. Also, Darwish’s translator Mohammad Shaheen writes:

Once I said to Mahmoud Darwish that translation, like exile helped promote poet and poetry by liberating both from the grim reality of locality which tended to impose constraints on the person and persona. He laughed in appreciation and added that he never accepted any financial reward in return for any recital he gave of his poetry in the Arab world. Perhaps he was overcautious to think that the kind of abuse his poetry would be subjected to might extend to monetary donations. (I Don’t Want This Poem to End 9)
[him] to life’s happenings.” In other words, Amichai expressed how over determined his poetic language has become as his poems are drawn analogous to the formation of Israel. Such contortion of Amichai’s poetic subject, language, imageries, and themes become even more visible in the translated readings of Amichai’s poems. For instance, the poem “Seven Laments for the War-Dead” published in *Behind All This A Great Happiness is Hiding* (1976) has been translated in telling ways. The two translated versions of the poem are in Barbara Harshav’s *A Life of Poetry* published in 1995 and Chana Bloch’s collaboration with multiple translators, *The Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* published in 2015. Harshav’s translation offers only three laments instead of all seven, whereas Bloch’s translation provides all seven of the elegies. While it is difficult to make any definitive claims as to why Harshav omitted translating all seven of the elegies, a translated comparative reading of the poems, both what was included and excluded, provides insight into Amichai’s poetic world that has been narrowed by readers, scholars, and translators. Both versions include section 5 where the poet-speaker eulogizes the death of his friend Dick who “fell / A bit to the north, near Huleikat” (Harshav 251). However, in the next two sections, which are omitted in Harshav’s translation but present in Bloch’s translation, the poet-speaker reflects on the meaning of war, loss, sorrow, and death at the cost of building a nation. Such omissions misrepresent and misappropriate Amichai’s poetic identity, whose in-between state of consciousness grieves for the loss of his friend and guiltily asks “how long/can you go on building the homeland/and not fall behind in the terrible/three-sided race/ between consolation and building and death?” (Bloch 223). Hence, Harshav’s ending on Dick’s death, without the poetic reflection on the ethical costs of war and nation building, upholds a

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nationalistic narrative, while reducing the function of an elegy in accordance with the Judaic tradition where lamenting is an integral part of the subject’s self-reflection process. Bloch’s inclusion of the subsequent verses, in not reducing Amichai, destabilizes the grand narratives of nationalism: i.e., “a flag loses contact with reality and flies away” (Bloch 224), and reveals the speaker’s lament as an ethical reflection. “On Laments and Lamentation” Scholem defines Job’s lament as “a unique state of utter self-reflexiveness” (112)\textsuperscript{116}, an event of self-reflexivity that is not directed to any being (112). Scholem classifies lament “rhetorical in nature and can present and re-present the same unanswerable question in an endless self-destructive and self-referential cycle” (112). Although lament appears to be self-destructive, Scholem argues, the impossibility of an answer to lament is redirection to “pure language” (128)\textsuperscript{117}. Thus, Harshav’s omission of the other sections of Amichai’s lament, present in Bloch’s translation, obfuscates Amichai’s lamentation as a mode of self-reflection that destabilizes nationalistic interpretation of his elegy poem “Seven Laments for the War-Dead.”

Similar to Darwish’s misappropriation as “The Poet of the Occupied Land,” Amichai is also misappropriated in two ways for varying purposes, either in support of nationalist-hegemonic discourses of the state or in the discussion of religious rituals\textsuperscript{118}, i.e., Amichai’s poetic “I” is construed to identify either as a nationalist or a religious bard. (The Full 29). To


\textsuperscript{117} i.e., a messianic conception of some total lack, or total unification; but, can also be thought of as marking a strategic void that would disrupt grand narratives and ontologies and allow for the possibility of other language, other consciousness; and hence, in theorist like Said can become a trope for strategic essentialism.

\textsuperscript{118} Prominent scholar on Israeli literature Chana Kronfeld explains how Amichai’s poems (both in English and in original Hebrew) are appropriated as nationalist-hegemonic discourses or the discussion of religious rituals. (The Full 29)
defy such generalized categorizing of his poems, Amichai deliberately chose to speak of the personal, and thus his poems are filled with the lyrical “I” while also poetically commenting on the allegorical, historical, and theological character of Israel emerging as a nation-state. Therefore, in the poem “Seven Laments for the War Dead,” while eulogizing the death of Mr. Beringer’s son and an unknown soldier, Amichai’s poet-speaker reminisces about an old zoology textbook from his German past life and compares the loss of his beloved friend in “the sands of Ashdod 1948,” to the migration of birds to warmer climates (The Poetry 221-222). The transparency of war associated with migration, nation building, death and loss materialize into an aching reflection where the poet-speaker sees the “mix[ing] of one sorrow with another, like history” (The Poetry 224). Moreover, Amichai’s poetic “I” grieves in “three languages: Hebrew, Arabic, and Death” (The Poetry 223) revealing the contrapuntal and polyphonic nature of his historical, linguistic, and political realities that cannot be separated by mythical-national narratives. By stating he grieves in three languages, Amichai poetically marks the interconnection of the Jewish and Arabic histories in parallel to the histories of death—the genocide, the dispossessions, and the destruction of human lives both under Nazi regime as well as wars followed after the migration to Palestine and the establishment of Israel. Thus, the historical and political intersections of Hebraic and Arabic traditions influence the cultural and the humane experiences such as of death—empowering death to stands equally as a linguistic register and as a poetic language for Amichai. It seems nearly impossible for Amichai’s poetic-speaker to ignore his heterogeneous reality of his past German life, migration, wars, and loss of friends in the building of the homeland. Consequently, Amichai’s poet-speaker exists in liminal spaces of his past memory, his childhood, his present reality, and a future imagination.
Therefore, how can we read elegiac poetry as the material site for an aesthetics of freedom from overtly nationalistic readings that both Amichai and Darwish desire? This chapter will trace the contrapuntal intersections of each poet’s history and their respective national histories, that converge, diverge, contradict, duplicate, and reveal heterogeneous and contrapuntal tensions existing in both the content and form of Amichai and Darwish’s elegy poems, and in the translation practices of their poems. Tracing these tensions in their poems that stand as counterpoints—intersections of overlapping poetic histories— a counter reading can be offered that challenges the ideological readings of their poems as National poets of Israel and Palestine, as well as outline of their poetic reflections. Due to the nature of their national conflict, — structural domination of the Israeli establishment and the dispossession of the Palestinians— Amichai and Darwish’s elegiac poetic world reminds us that it is near to impossible to construct a homogenous literary myth of national histories without mentioning the presence of their others119. This chapter analyzes Amichai and Darwish’s poems to reveal how these coerced encounters present in their elegies highlight the contrapuntal intersections of each individual’s loss, grief, and exilic consciousness, which disrupts their status as national poets while at the same time enriches a different system of national possibility. Can grief reveal a different truth of their national and poetic realities that may empower these poets’ poet-speaker to re-evaluate the meaning and possibilities of national identities and nationalism in Israeli-Palestinian context?

119 In Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism, Judith Butler frames these coerced encounters as “forms of proximate living” (104).
Although nationalism heavily dominates Amichai and Darwish’s poetic discourse, Said’s final reflections on binationalism have not been adequately utilized as a critical lens to approach these poets’ poetry. Scholars and critics such as Kronfeld, Shaheen, Gold, Rahman and others provide excellent contributions on these two poets’ scholarship. Although, some of these scholars separately highlight the multifaceted nature of Darwish and Amichai’s poetic subjects and identities, they do not directly engage in a contrapuntal reading of their poems. Only Butler reads Darwish’s poem with Said’s theorization of binational politics as a necessary reading framework to revise nationalism while addressing the future of Israeli and Palestinian scholarship. Therefore, taking this lack as a point of departure, binationalism becomes crucial in Amichai and Darwish studies.

First, while Said defines binationalism as “not a two-state solution, but to a single state, one that would eradicate all forms of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race and religion” (“One State”), it is still hard to explain and imagine what Said possibly meant by binationalism. To simply argue that binationalism is the “co-existence” of Palestinians and Israelis living together is a reductive and un-resourceful political categorization since such binational identity does not necessarily include equality of relationships. In reading the concept of binationalism,

120 Judith Butler proposes in her essay, “‘What Shall We Do Without Exile’ Said and Darwish Address the Future” (2012) that: “Said developed new ideas about the one-state and two state solutions, the meanings of binationalism, and the prospects for the future. It would be possible to write (and someone should write) a larger piece on his growing worries about nationalism, and the nation, and his questions about what self-determination for Palestinians in the context of binationalism might actually imply” (30). Butler revisits the notion of binationalism in the chapter titled “Versions of Binationalism in Buber and Said” published in Martin Buber: His Intellectual and Scholarly Legacy, 2018.
Butler warns us against the wretched forms of binationalism that already exist in Israeli-Palestinian national politics where newer forms of settlement are taking place every day creating antagonistic modes of living together (*Parting Ways* 4), and unequal citizenry among the Israelis and the Palestinians. This form of “living together” or in Said’s words “co-existence” is a form of binationalism that seeks to dismantle Israeli’s colonial power and military force and entail a politics of “co-existence” on equal sovereign grounds—a newer form of nationalism built on heterogeneous identities and plurality. Therefore, the most important element in understanding the theorization and politics of binationalism, professed both by Said and Butler, is to understand the importance of creating a symmetrical and democratic relationship of power between Palestinians and Israelis by eradicating all forms of structural and systematic inequalities. Thus, the binational framework focuses on the history of the heterogeneous population of Israel and Palestine that negates mythical narratives of homogenous nationalism.

Second, both Butler and Said question whether nationalism, in the context of Israel and Palestine, is an appropriate category. Meaning, if nationalism gathers people in one place and time, establishes boundaries and borders, secures, and develops modes of democratic self-governance and sovereign territory (“What Shall” 31), then Israel’s nationalism founded on the “illegal practices of land confiscation” (“What Shall” 31) obscures the democratic essence of nationalism. In other words, Israel’s nationalism is contingent on the continued historical effacement of Palestine and the Palestinians. In the article “One State Solution” Said explains

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121 Israel’s establishments as a nation state, apart from its theological and Zionist importance, was a human right demand—a demand that provided the Jewish population democratic access to sovereignty and citizenship. However, Israel’s establishment as a democratic nation-state is arguably democratic since it has established itself through land confiscation. For more insights, see Judith Butler’s revised chapter titled “‘What Shall We Do Without Exile?’” in *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, Columbia Press, 2014.
that the paradox of a Judaic nationalism is that while it tries to erase its plural others, i.e., the Palestinian Arab population, it does so by involuntarily witnessing their presence. In this context, Said explains:

Israel's raison d'etre as a state has always been that there should be a separate country, a refuge, exclusively for Jews. Oslo itself was based on the principle of separation between Jews and others, as Yitzhak Rabin tirelessly repeated. Yet over the past 50 years, especially since Israeli settlements were first implanted on the occupied territories in 1967, the lives of Jews have become more and more enmeshed with those of non-Jews. […] Israel has built an entire system of "bypassing" roads, designed to go around Palestinian towns and villages, connecting settlements, and avoiding Arabs. But so tiny is the land area of historical Palestine, so closely intertwined are Israelis and Palestinians, despite their inequality and antipathy, that clean separation simply won't, can't really, occur or work. ("One State")

Said argues that the history of Jewish settlement in Palestine reveals a national politics that is far from being singular and is in actuality far more hybrid and complex. The State of Israel cannot ignore or avoid the presence of its Other and there is no way to distill or simplify the interactions that occur between them. It is no longer a binary nexus, Said explains122. Multiple aspects of

122 In the article “One State Solution” published in The New York Times Magazine 1999, Said writes:

Palestine is and has always been a land of many histories; it is a radical simplification to think of it as principally or exclusively Jewish or Arab. While the Jewish presence is longstanding, it is by no means the main one. Other tenants have included Canaanites, Moabites, Jebusites and Philistines in ancient times, and Romans, Ottomans, Byzantines, and Crusaders in the modern ages.
identities arise from the status of refugees, exiles, Diasporas for both the Palestinians in relation to themselves and to Israelis. In this context, Said writes:

The problem is that Palestinian self-determination in a separate state is unworkable, just as unworkable as the principle of separation between a demographically mixed, irreversibly connected Arab population without sovereignty and a Jewish population with it. The question, I believe, is not how to devise means for persisting in trying to separate them but to see whether it is possible for them to live together as fairly and peacefully as possible.

The proviso of “living together,” in Butler’s words “cohabitation,” is an attempt to challenge the nationalist framework of Israeli’s occupation and military subjugation of the Palestinians and move towards mobility and the equal politics of self-determination. Thus, binationalism can provide a framework that challenges nationalistic, singular concepts of self-hood towards plurality. Butler reminds us that “relationality displaces ontology” and that this displacement becomes the “obligatory passage beyond identity and nation as defining frameworks” (Parting Ways 5). Instead, Butler argues, “this establishes the relation to alterity as constitutive identity [emphasis mine], which is to say that the relation to alterity interrupt’s identity, and this interruption is the condition of ethical relationality” (5). Close readings of Amichai and Darwish’s elegies will reveal these movements of ethical relationality that destabilize nationalist narratives while revealing their exilic consciousness that displays their contrapuntal histories and identities.
Returning to close readings, in the poem, “Counterpoint,” while the poet-speaker mourns the death of his beloved friend, the poem also traces the interplay of a series of binaries present in the fabric of Palestinian lives filled with conflict and collision. Both the poet-speaker and his friend see the contradictory nature of their existence where the line between “past and tomorrow” and the “victim and the torturer” are blurred. In fact, more explicitly, Darwish’s poet speaker asks Said how he would define his identity, to which Darwish’s Said confesses:

I am from there, I am from here,
but I am neither there nor here.
I have two names that meet and part,
and I have two languages, I forget
with which I dream. For writing I have
an English with obedient vocabulary,
and I have a language of heaven’s dialogue
with Jerusalem, it has a silver timbre
but it doesn’t obey my imagination. (Almond Blossoms 87)

With this confession, the poem enters a dialogical form where the poet-speaker and his friend move back and forth with questions and answers. The sporadic back and forth movement that continues for the next few stanzas engages the reader in a movement that is not simply dialectic but multiply so. While Said dwells on the conflicting nature of his split existence, in two or more spatial, temporal, and linguistic spaces, what becomes an important reading location is not the
strict distinctions between those spaces, but rather the juncture\textsuperscript{123} where Said’s “two names ‘meet’ and ‘part’”. The meeting and parting, in other words counterpoint, should become the focal point for a reading; through which we can see Darwish’s portrayal of Said with honest vulnerability articulating humane experiences of an exilic scholar dreaming in one language (Arabic) and writing in the other (English). The “here” and “there” relationship expressed by Said exposes how subjects and their events travel, circulate, and enter scenes of exchange, breaking the logic of conformity, uniformity, or linearity. Said’s discord between two and more cultures, languages, spaces gestures to a form of living—i.e., life of liminality—that is more complex and less singular. “Counterpoint” reveals this complexity of the heterogeneous Palestinian history that Said’s exilic consciousness experiences. Thus, his exilic consciousness decenters single identity and opens it to plurality. The poem offers a reconceptualization of identify as self-invention.

Readers are compelled to look at Darwish’s poet-speaker’s grief from multiple directions. The shifting of the speaker’s position in the poem—Said and Darwish taking turns—maintains a democratic and contrapuntal mode, where neither the speaker poet nor the elegiac subject speaker dominates, agrees, or disagrees. The voices do not subscribe to any hierarchy and appear sometimes as a recollection, an argument, an unfinished thought, or belief-statements. The polyphonic nature of the elegy, defying the traditional \textit{Marthiya} format, characterizes this mourning quite differently as the deceased and living do not have a clear separation. Rather,

\textsuperscript{123} In the chapter “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” from \textit{Nation and Narration} (1990), Bhabha stresses the importance of reading “between borderlines of the nation-space… [to] see how the ‘people’ come to be constructed within a range of discourses as a double narrative movement” (297). He adds “People are not simply historical events or part of a patriotic body politic,” instead liminality exposes how “people will no longer be contained in that national discourse of the teleology of progress” (301). See The \textit{Location of Culture} (1994) for an in-depth understanding of interstices.
Darwish presents the mourning of the living and the dead in solidarity. The interplay of the dialogues characterizes the mourning as anti-hegemonic, where no one grief can dominate over the other. Due to the contrapuntal nature of the poem, the loss can be read in various ways. Sometimes the loss appears as a loss of a friend who enjoyed Mozart, played tennis, and read the New York Times, while other times the loss is directly linked to the loss of a homeland—Palestine. On the topic of identity, the poet-speaker asks Said to comment on what identity means to him again. Said replies:

Self-defense…
Identity is the daughter of birth, but in the end she’s what her owner creates, not an inheritance of a past. I am the plural. Within my interior my renewing exterior resides…yet I belong to the victim’s question. Were I not from there I would have trained my heart to rear the gazelle of metonymy, so carry your land wherever you go, and be a narcissist if you need to be.

…

He loves a land then departs from it.
(Is the impossible far?) He loves departure to anything.
In free travel between cultures, the researchers of human essence might find enough seats for everyone. Here is a periphery advancing.
Or a center receding. The East is not completely East and the West is not completely West. Because identity is open

to plurality,
it isn’t a citadel or a trench.

…
He loves a land then departs from it
and says: I am what I become and will become.
I will make myself by myself
and choose my exile. (*Almond Blossoms* 87)

It is not enough to simply read these stanzas as poetical musings on identity, but rather the poetics subscribe to Said’s theoretical and political scholarship on the concept of identity. The call for a politics of alterity and plurality outlined in these stanzas often gets buried under the nationalistic politics of Palestinian self-determination and the anti-colonialist discourse of the Palestinian struggle that occupies both Said and Darwish’s work. If contrapuntal reading is to read the center and periphery and its relationship, here the poet-speaker reminds the readers that Said believes the relationship between the periphery and the center is in a flux, exposing the politics of plurality—a plurality that can only be recognized through an exilic consciousness and an intellectual secular interpretation. In the essay “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community” Said highlights how the exilic form of living requires a secular interpretation since there are no “single explanations… no single origins… no simple dynastic answers… no simple discrete historical formations or social processes” (*Reflections* 147). Instead, Said writes:

> A heterogeneity of human involvement is therefore equivalent to a heterogeneity of results, as well as of interpretive skills and techniques. There is no center, no inertly given, and accepted authority, no fixed barriers ordering human history, even though authority, order and distinction exist. The secular intellectual works to show the absence of divine originality and, on the other side, the complex presence of historical actuality. The conversion of the absence of religion into the presence of actuality is secular interpretation. (*Reflections* 147)
Heterogeneity is also revealed in the way the poem renders location as the context moves spatially. The poem discloses the poet-speaker and his friend’s exilic consciousness, as the poem moves from New York (which the poet-speaker confuses with the city of Sodom or Babylon) to reminiscing on other times and places where both friends met, while simultaneously longing for the Galilee Mountains, Talbiya, and Jerusalem. The mentioning of multiple spaces within the textual space of the poem demonstrates the vacillating condition of multiple locations that an exile, who “blows with the wind, a wind with no ceiling and no home,” experiences. However, on the topic of home, Said’s fictional return to his home reveals that the historical, political, and social reality of what constitutes home is of multiplicity. In the poem, Darwish’s Said is standing in front of the door of his childhood house, coming face to face with its current resident, but not entering. The Said inquires:

Would they ask:
Who is that prying foreign visitor? And how
could I talk about war and peace
among the victims and the victims’ victims,
without additions, without an interjection?
And would they tell me: There is no place for two dreams
in one bedroom? (Almond Blossoms 87)

This section of the poem reveals Said’s life of liminality, his in-betweenness, in two categories—domestic space and identity. Unfortunately, Said stands at the door and recognizes himself as the “prying foreign visitor” in the familiarity of his own childhood house in Jerusalem. The familiarity is of no comfort since the Said’s “I” is no longer a resident of that house. His identity as a “foreign visitor” operates in correlation to himself and to the current “hosts” of this house. The notion of being “foreign” is only applicable with its antithetical identity marker “the hosts.”
And although they are structured in binary oppositions, they also manifest in a multiple
dialectical circuit. Several things are occurring at the same time within this circuit.

Firstly, the subjective “I” of the Said is experiencing a shift in his identity; the childhood
“I” is standing face-to-face with his current experience of being a “foreigner” as he returns to his
homeland. The “I” is no longer familiar in relation to himself and its Other, as he has become a
“foreigner.” He is experiencing his “foreignness” in his own home not only through the imposed
interaction he is having with its current residents, but also experiencing it within his own
interiority as an exiled returnee. Therefore, the shift in his identity is not only occurring outside
himself but also within himself.

Secondly, this “I” in relation to “they” is not caught only as binary oppositions. But in a
paradoxically homogenous multiplicity, as both the “I” and “they” hold similar identities as
“victims” of histories. Their experiences and histories are intertwined in the doubling effect of
similitude. Said quickly realizes, as he comes face to face with its Other, that their histories are
intertwined, entangled, contrapuntal and that they are all victims, “among the victims and the
victims’ victims” and that it is not possible to talk about war or peace “without additions, without
an interjection.” Therefore, like their histories of victimization, their identities are also
intertwined, overlapped, conjoined in duplicated experiences, “among the victims and victim’s
victim.” This historical mimetic begetting reflects both the multiple nature of the lived
experiences of the Palestinians and Israelis pre and post 1948 and the unfortunate staging of
themselves against each other as political and historical “enemies,” where one’s “I” is reliving
““theirs” experiences. And “additions” and “interjections” are necessary to highlight the
historical counterpoint at which these identities merge and diverge resulting in newer forms of
fragmented identities.
Lastly, this shift of identities is taking place within a specific location—the house—where the Said became the guest in his own home. The intimacy of his childhood house has been replaced with unfamiliarity and the hosts, i.e., the current residents, do not give Said any recognition beyond “prying.” Darwish’s Said says how “they,” i.e., the residents, remind him that “there is no place for two dreams/ in one bedroom.” The choice of this location—bedroom—, where this interaction is taking place, functions as a metonymy for their respective notion/dream of homeland. This space heterotopically mirrors the outside world inside the bedroom. Although, the interactions between Said and the residents of the house are antagonistic, it is also occurring intimately in the bedroom—clearly a space that metaphorically functions as a space of intimacy. Although intimate, their interaction is by no means harmonious or homogenous as “they” (the residents) reply to Said that “there is no place for two dreams/ in one bedroom.” Thus, the dualistic nature of “two dreams, in one bedroom” opens discussion around the heterogeneous nature of their exilic consciousness.

There are similar motifs and images in Amichai’s elegies, leading to the question: Can there be a contrapuntal reading of Said’s exilic consciousness present in Darwish and Amichai’s poems? Although published years earlier, Amichai’s “Elegy on an Abandoned Village” (Elegya al kfar natash) published in Shirim (1948-1962) can be a point of departure to understand the (mis)appropriations of Amichai’s exiled poet-speakers’ heterogeneous identity. The (mis)appropriation begins with the translation of the title of the poem from Hebrew to English as “abandoned village,” which Kronfeld argues is a serious mistranslation that eclipses the complexities and subtleties of Amichai’s poetry. Kronfeld claims that Stephen Mitchell fails to

Moreover, the poem is limited in its availability in English. The poem “Elegy on the Abandoned Village” is also not included in Robert Alter’s edition of Amichai’s translated works, or in Benjamin and Barbara Harshav’s The Life of Poetry. Such omissions remind us of Said’s theoretical commentary on the Empire’s slippages and
capture the weight of the word *natush*\(^{125}\) in his translation of the word as the “abandoned village” (*The Full 34*). The title of the poem, *Elegya al kfar natush*, should compel readers to focus on the spatial and the extra-literary criteria in the analysis of the poem. However, selective reading of Amichai’s poems make it possible to gloss over these telling details. Like Darwish’s poet-speaker in “Counterpoint,” Amichai’s poet-speaker is also mourning and offering an elegy on the tragic destruction of a village that forced its inhabitants to abandon their homes. Kronfeld writes that in the Hebrew literary tradition, *kina* is often female centered and seeks to acknowledge a form of truth regarding a tragic event, believing that such “acknowledgement is the condition for the subject having any epistemic claim or retaining the option for an ethical inner life”\(^{126}\).

However, such ethical relationality present in Amichai’s poetry—as for example the use of *natush*—is overlooked, because although Amichai’s poem corresponds to the Judaic tradition of lamentation, his elegies are also heavily influenced by Raina Marie Rilke’s rendition of the modern elegies. Hence due to its modernist elegiac sensibilities, Kronfeld argues, the poem lacks any direct “articulation [of] its ethical message via a linear, realist narrative,” thus making it possible for “the critics to either ignore it or to universalize it” (*The Full 35*). Focusing on the

\(^{125}\) Daniel Monterescu defines *Rekhush Natush* as the real estate previously owned by Palestinians: Real Estate Acquisition Law; 1950s the Knesset’s Absentee Property Law. See *Jaffa Shared and Shattered: Contrived Coexistence in Israel/ Palestine*, pp. 316.

\(^{126}\) Kronfeld provides us with the Hebrew original for such a claim “Ki rak be-charev le-mechetza navin,” translated as “For only in [or: by means of] the half-destroyed do we understand.”
omissions—mistranslation, ignoring of Jewish elegiac tradition, lack of or selective translation—of the poem reveals how systematically scholars in Amichai’s studies ignore the contrapuntal quality of Amichai’s poetic histories that converge and diverge with Darwish’s Palestine. Amichai’s poetic praxis for the collection *Shirim 1948-1962*, even though early in his poetic career, is inclusive of Arab inhabitants and their representations. The poem reveals how the poet does not ignore mentioning the affect the villagers, their apparitions, their presence, fragrance, laughter, and wailing has on the poet-speaker’s exilic consciousness.

Nili Scharf Gold’s misreading of the poem “Elegy of an Abandoned Village” in *Making of Israel’s National Poet* overlooks everything discussed thus far. While Gold’s scholarship contributes to the appropriation of Amichai as Israel’s most revered poet i.e., national poet, her misreading, as Kronfeld argues, supports the conventional view of Amichai as either the statehood generation nationalist poet or a religious bard as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter. However, as Gold’s misreading emanates from scholarship that is heavily dependent on Amichai’s love letters to Ruth Z, her work also, undermining her own argument, disrupts the conventional view. Gold argues that these letters reveal that the “Elegy of the Abandoned Village” *Elegya al kfar natush* does not necessarily refer to the abandoned property of the Palestinian villagers due to Nakba. Despite clear references to the “fig tree” and “blue walls” evident of Palestinian agricultural and historical presence, Gold reads the poem as having no

127 Amichai translated *Shirim* in English but after his co-translation, he believed that the poem no longer belonged to him but to the translator.

128 Gold notes that “Amichai’s letters to Ruth Z. (August 31, 1947- April 11, 1948) will be housed at Hayisre’elim Harishonim (First Israelis Archive), Heksherim: The Research Center for Jewish and Israeli Literature and Culture, Ben Gurion University of the Negev” (*The Making* 399).
political valence associated with the catastrophic dispossession of the Palestinians\textsuperscript{129}. Instead, Gold argues that since the poem was first written in German:

> Contrary to its accepted interpretation, rereading the elegy in this new context shows that it laments a number of abandoned landmarks in the life of the poet: a topographical, human, and linguistic. As is true in much of his work, Amichai’s abandoned village is in fact a composite of many distinct elements of his past: an empty Arab village that Amichai visited in 1948, a Jewish settlement in the Negev whose evacuation in the 1947 preceded in 1948, a Jewish settlement in the Negev evacuation in 1947 preceded any expulsion of Arabs, and Jewish Wuerzburg, the community that was abandoned by both people and God. (*The Making* 315)

Gold referring to Palestine as an “empty Arab village”, Kronfeld argues, is an apparent misrecognition of Palestinian references and a “symptomatic case” of disavowing the political valence that Amichai clearly articulates within this poem (*The Full* 305). In her confrontation with Gold’s scholarship Kronfeld writes:

> …she [Gold] admits that “Amichai’s choice of the word *natush* recalls the term’s post-war of Independence usage in the expression *rekhush natush*, which denoted property that had been abandoned by Arabs who had either escaped the country or been driven away. All of this does not prevent Gold, however, from rejecting altogether the poems analogy between Jewish and Palestinian loss, right after acknowledging that the poem’s

\textsuperscript{129} See Kronfeld’s detailed argument and reading of the poem in the chapter “Reclaiming the Revolutionary Amichai” in *The Full Severity of Compassion* (34-35).
language asserts it. The rest of her reading simply erases the poem’s ethical and political focus on the Palestinian Nakba (The Full 305).

Through this erasure via a misreading, Gold offers a linear, diachronic, approach to the understanding of Amichai’s poetics/semantics. In rest of the book, she invites her readers to see the conflicting selves—Amichai’s poet-speakers historical relationship with his present-self and past-self, before migrating to Israel/Palestine,—automatically resolve with Amichai’s poetic maturity. Tracing Amichai’s autobiography and the evolution of his language, similar to Darwish and Said linguistic predicament present in the reading of “Counterpoint”, Gold explains that the “first kernels of this poem were planted … long before its initial publication” and that “the elegy bears the mark of Amichai’s mother tongue as well as the landscapes and experiences in his German hometown” (The Making 315). The fact that Amichai’s first conceptual of the poem was in German, later in Hebrew and translated into English shows a unique position where Amichai’s poetic “I” is neither only the ethical voice for the Palestinians, nor a self-immersed poet’s lamentation for personal loss. Rather, Amichai’s poetic “I” represents heterogeneity, as he confesses in the poem Jerusalem 1967: “I played hopscotch/ of the four strict squares of Yehuda Ha- Levi\(^{130}\): / My heart. Myself. East. West.” This third position allows for a reading that traces and tracks Amichai’s poetic self, poetic subjects and their subjectivities as constantly shifting with different temporal, spatial, historical, and political dimensions.

\(^{130}\) Here Amichai refers to the greatest Hebrew poet Yehuda Halevi who lived in both Muslim and Christian Spain but left for Israel in the 1140, while rejecting the hybrid cultural influences of the Jewish-Arab in European Muslim Spain. Later dissatisfied with life, Halevi migrates to Israel writing many poems celebrating the Holy land and vehemently opposed the opponents of his Zionist ideas. But what is important to mark here is the polyglot cultural and historical account of Halevi life that resembles the exilic consciousness of Amichai’s whose life and languages were always in a flux. See https://www.britannica.com/biography/Judah-ha-Levi to know more on Halevi.
In order to mark these disparate threads a close reading of the poem, *Elegya al kfar natush*, will reveal Amichai “I”’s heterogeneous position. The poem begins with violence: the splash of wine on a girl’s face and although the girl’s face is wet with wine “the destruction” is described as sober. Kronfeld interprets this translated word, sobriety, as a calculative act of destruction; one not borne out of drunken delusion (*The Full* 35). The title of the poem indicating the setting of an abandoned village, alludes to the calculated destruction of Palestinian life (historical accounts of Palestinians abandoning their villages in the year 1948, due to the arrival of Jewish settlers). While the “wine” likewise symbolizes connection to the land, it floats as an ambiguous symbol. On the one hand, the image of the girl’s face splashed with wine could be playful antics at a picnic i.e., celebrations of life in settlement, or it can stand as a metaphor for the calculated destabilization of Palestinian villages and the bloodshed of the Palestinian people.

Next, the poem reveals how thick wooden beams have replaced the presence of the “life of forgotten people” (Kronfeld provides the original phrase: *bney adam nishkachim*). The elegy speaker is mourning the loss of history and the lives of these forgotten people: who are they and where did they go? The speaker feels a “distant love” is “echoing like a thunder, into the ravine.” Kronfeld translates the “hurling and echoing” from the original as “the ululating Palestinian women (*yelel nashim*)” (*The Full* 34). *Yecele*, howling or ululating, is a specific form of expression in both Arab and Hebrew culture that signifies celebration of life. The absence of such ululations causes the poet-speaker to feel sad and estranged, expressed as: “like some stranger/ in a strange city, who reads in a book of addresses and names, / I stand and choose a

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131 See Elizabeth Downer’s article “Here’s the History of how Israel became a world wine powerhouse” for more understanding of winery and the historical and agricultural connections to Palestine.
hotel, temporary: here” (Mitchell’s translation in *The Selected* 42). The elegy speaker’s strangeness echoes Said and Darwish’s exilic consciousness, the rift between belonging and never-belonging; and while they all feel a similar sense of strangeness that connects them to a larger understanding of humanity, all of them—the poets (Amichai and Darwish), their poet-speakers and Said—hold different positions to this feeling of being an exile. Both the occupier and the occupied, the colonizer and the colonized, the invaders and the refugees, irrespective of their positions of power, share the pain of being an exile, a stranger.

In the second section, the poet-speaker recognizes that his presence cannot occupy the spaces of “the dreamers and the whisperers in the grass, / who fell in their love.” The speaker is constantly invoking the wind to mitigate the presence/absence of the wailing women, the dreamers, the whisperers, and the lovers of this place, where a blanket of enormous snow has set in. The speaker grieves their absences and asks who will be “shaking us/ who?” Resonant of Darwish’s *Said*’s exile for whom “the wind is the compass / of the strangers north,” the wind in Amichai’s elegy keeps bringing in something new in each part of the poem. The wind is the carrier of the exile’s past history to his present alienation—“the wind never stops.” Followed by series of binaries the wind travels the in-between spaces of weakness and strength, of darkness and light while the rest of the landscape is filled with people picnicking, laughing, and enjoying their “money brought from far away.” In the concluding section, although the people who are now in this place enjoying, the poem warns us that the “the rest is not simply silence” but a “screech”—a noise that juxtaposes the silence of biblical Israel’s with modern Israel, i.e., cars and trains. In this section, the speaker’s lamentation intensifies as he says:

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132 The speaker-poet does not romanticize silence or death.
…Oh, night without a Jerusalem,

oh, children in the ruins, who will never again be birds,

oh, passing time, when newspapers that have yellowed already

interest you again: like a document. And the face of last year's

woman lights up in the memory of a distant man.

But the wind keeps forgetting. Because it is always there (The Selected 42).

In forgetting and remembering, the speaker is haunted by the loss of the village, villager and has

lost himself in this loss. Worrying, he asks “Should I wait here for God’s voice, or the scream of

a train/between the hard-pressing hills?” asking for God’s intervention. With an ambiguous

relation to the Judaic tradition of lamentation, the suffering, and the submission of Amichai’s

poet-speakers echoes an ambiguous faith for God’s intervention: the ambiguity over what will

“intervene”—God or Industrial development. Such invocations for God’s or universe’s

participation are a conventional characteristic in both the Hebrew and Arabic elegiac form

through which the poet-speakers are creating a connection between their material and the

spiritual world projecting their trust and faith in God. However, Amichai’s poet speaker is

offering a counter theological reading of his material existence amongst the ruins of an

abandoned village. In line 41-44, he witnesses birds, children “closed and opened", each into

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133 In “Structure and Meanings in Lamentations”, Professor of Bible Exposition, Homer Heater writes that the

“artistry of lamentations has been pressed into the service of practical theology. The trauma of the loss of the temple

coupled with the awful suffering of the people during and after the siege resulted in a serious reexamination of faith”

(315). See Robert Gordis’s “A Commentary on the Text of Lamentations,” to understand how important lamentation

is in the Judaic tradition starting from the burning of the Temple, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, as

well as as on the national devastation that followed the calamities.

134 Years later Amichai titles his final poetry book Patuah Saguar Patuah translated as Open Closed Open where he

revisits his recurrent thematic interests that dominated his poetic career with a creative approach. Chapter three

discusses these poetic innovations at length.
song and muteness”, girls turning into “fig trees,” and stones marked with fragmented histories.

All of these witnessed objects and events function to create an inclusive narrative of this abandoned village and its villagers in relation to the poet-speaker’s identity. The events where Amichai chooses to use the pronoun “I” is also interesting, as for instance:

And like some stranger

in a strange city, who reads in a book of addresses and names,

I stand and choose a hotel, temporary: here.

…

…Sometimes/

I must use my love as the only way to describe it,

and must hire the wind to demonstrate the wailing of women.

…

Should I wait here for God's voice, or for the scream of a train between the hard-pressing hills? (The Selected 42).

Each of these times, Amichai’s poetic “I” is bouncing back to him with an aching recognition that his “I” is strange due to the place where he is located. His mourning is both for himself, his own feeling of being lost and the loss of the village. As described above, the poet wants to hire the wind to breeze through the fractured and liminal spaces of the ruined village while realizing that nothing of this space that he and his friends occupy belonged to them and “as the sparrows rise from the garbage, see what’s written on stones”, the poet-speaker comes to this realization that “you weren’t the one who wrote it”. Thus, following the Judaic elegiac tradition, the poem ends the mourning by acknowledging its responsibilities. The poet-speaker reflects:

For only in the half-destroyed do we understand
the blue that covers the inside of rooms, like doctors
who learn by the bodies gaping in front of them. But we
will never know how blood behaves when it's inside,
within the whole body, when the heart shines into it, from
far away, in its dark path. And girls are still
hidden among the fresh laundry hanging in the air
that also will turn into rain among the mountains
sent to scout and uncover the nakedness of the land;
and uncovered it; and stayed in the valleys, forever (The Selected 42)

Through the use of metaphors involving doctors and the patient’s body gaping in front of them, the poem questions the ethical and political relevance of his and his friend’s presence in a land that has been half-destroyed, where the girls are still hiding in that land, for forever. Thereby, the poet-speaker reveals the poetic “I” vacillating as it encounters the history of the place i.e., the history of a Palestinian abandoned village.

**Poetic Histories**

The heterogeneous characteristics of Amichai and Darwish’s elegy poems, poet-speakers, their identities, and their nationalisms are misappropriated and mistranslated because of their poetic histories. A reading of Amichai and Darwish’s poetic histories, i.e., their career biography in relation to their nationalisms, modernisms, and exilic consciousness, show the complexities of the national politics of Israel and Palestine present in their elegies. Additionally, their poetic histories clarify the ways in which their liminal exilic consciousness is pressed between their nationalism and modernism, between their past and present, leading to a desire for an aesthetic freedom for their poems.
Before *Shirim*, Amichai’s published his first book of poetry, *Now and in Other Days*, in 1956. Around this time he was a member of a short-lived Hebrew literary group *Likrat*, meaning “towards,” which included such members as Nathan Zach, Moshe Dor, and Arye Sivan.\(^\text{135}\) *Likrat* represented their literary revolutionary aspirations to generate a “progressive” poetics and politics; ones which would lead Hebrew literature away from the Palmach\(^\text{136}\) generation’s literary aesthetics. Therefore, the *Likrat* circle’s poetic activism involved writing against former poetic giants such as Avraham Shlonsky, Nathan Alterman, Lea Goldberg, etc. Although how far the literary group “progressed” from the previous generation’s poetics is debatable; nevertheless, Amichai’s poetic character shifted from the Palmach generations poetics. For instance, Amichai, shifting from the Palmach’s use of the collective pronoun “we,” favored a poetic “I” that is “masculine-singular subject position” ("Harshav’s *Likrat*” 90). Kronfeld states that an analysis of this shift is insightful to understand the ways in which the Statehood generation poets, particularly Amichai’s, were (mis)appropriated for “statist national narratives” ("Harshav’s *Likrat*” 91), while obscuring its “revolutionary beginnings, beginnings that no doubt were neutralized” ("Harshav’s *Likrat*” 91). Therefore, Kronfeld explains:

A more nuanced historicized reading of the *Likrat* manifestos and published work reveals that what is at stake for these poets is not a rebellion against literary precursors but a critique of ideology, and of the institutional regulation of ideology in all realms of private and public life, including literature. ("Harshav’s *Likrat*” 91)

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\(^{135}\) See Chana Kronfeld’s article “Harshav’s Likrat: Toward a New Poetics and Politics of the “Statehood Generation”. https://arcade.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/Dibur-v02i01-article09-Kronfeld_0.pdf

\(^{136}\) Kronfeld explains that the “Palmach, acronym for “Strike Forces,” was the fighting force of the Hagenah, the underground military organization of the Jewish community in British Mandate Palestine (1941–48)” (*The Full 89*).
The 1950s literary critics of Israeli and Hebrew literature criticized Likrat’s literary production “accusing them of betraying both collectivist values and the national project of establishing a ‘literature of origins’ with their poems which cast a ‘foreign shadow’” (Harshav’s Likrat 92). Amichai and Zach were accused of mimicking the “westernizing Anglo-Saxon delusion” and “ideational nothingness” while compromising their national commitments to being patriotic and “truly” Israeli (Harshav’s Likrat 92).

Though Amichai’s poetry was influenced by western or European modernism (influences of Rilke and others), these influences were not foreign. Rather, Amichai’s European influences present in his poems mark an embracement of his Ashkenazi-Israeli identity. In Hebrew and Israeli literature, native born Israeli poets such as Shlonsky were favored, since they did not have any “foreignness” that might question or compromise their nationalistic literary aspirations in the rise of a new nation. On the contrary, Gold reads Amichai’s foreignness as an impasse of in-betweenness, where Amichai’s poetic character experiences a disparity between his inner and outer “I” but is strategically fulfilled through “camouflaging” (The Making 15). Unlike Kronfeld’s understanding of Amichai’s diasporic fraction, Gold concludes that Amichai used camouflaging “to forge a personal mythology that would befit a national poet without discarding his formative experiences” (The Making 19) and thus, when needed the poet could abandon his poetics of camouflage with an ease due to his “growing Israeliness” (The Making 23). Gold’s reading supports conventional scholarship, which views Amichai’s poetry as nativist; effectively ignoring the foreign elements in his poetic motifs: memory, trauma, longing for childhood, his elegies for his homeland, his friends and loved ones, i.e., Ruth Z. However, a reading of “Elegy of an Abandoned Village” revealed the contradictory nature of Amichai’s poetry, discussed above. The foreign elements present in Amichai’s poems highlights the struggle to situate
himself with the statehood generation poets while remaining authentic to his immigrant history. This tension marks the diasporic nature and consciousness of Amichai’s poems and reflects a similar tension to Darwish’s exilic consciousness as a dispossessed Palestinian. Both poets’ exilic conditions force them to engage in nationalism, and yet simultaneously their poems thematically destabilize the concept of the oneness of national identities. With a shifting conceptual understanding of nationalism, national life, and national identity, Amichai’s poetry reflects the ways in which the lyric “I” suffers from the burden of national/collective representation. A burden that superficially imposes on his poems, a responsibility to uphold the modern Israeli identity through the reproduction of national narratives. In other words, statehood generation poets are pressured to represent the “State” and camouflage, conceal, struggle, and repress the diasporic character of their poems. This pressure is necessary for a uniform history and poetic identity of Israel, emerging as a modern nation-state and creating a mythical totalizing of Israel’s national identity. Any foreign elements, any diasporic character in the poetry, would undermine such a uniformity of nationalisms.

In contrast to Amichai’s history, the years 1948-1966 were crucial for the Palestinians and Palestinian literature to resist the occupation and catastrophe brought by the formation of Israel. At this historical and political juncture, oppressed by physical, cultural, social, and political dispossession, Palestinian literature had to evolve to express its exilic conditions. To reflect the vital role of literature for the Palestinians during these years, prominent Palestinian resistance literary hero Ghassan Kanafani coined the term “Adab al-Muqawama fi Filastin al-Muhtalla,” translated as “Resistance Literature in Occupied Palestine”137. During these

tumultuous times, at the age of 23, Darwish became Palestine’s hero with his popular poem “Bitaqat Hawiyah” translated as “Identity Card” published in his first poetry collection titled Olive Leaves.

“Identity Card” spoke to the Palestinian identity and plight. The poem is a strong and clear declaration of the poet-speaker’s identity: “I am an Arab.” The “I” of the poem is angry because of the interrogation conducted by “you” who has systematically robbed the poet-speakers ancestor’s vineyard (line 43) along with his village, his national life, and his identity. The poem’s tone is purposefully aggressive, aching with the loss of home and homeland. But despite its angry tonality of an oppressed Palestinian under the Zionist regime of Israel, the poem uplifts the Palestinians to remain resilient in their resistance. Darwish’s ability to give voice to the Palestinian struggle post Nakba in this early poem led to his lifelong labeling as the “Poet of Resistance” for the Palestinian cause. However, neither the nature of the Palestinian resistance nor the affirmation of Palestinian identities is simple. Grounded on this struggle for self-determination under the Zionist regime, in After the Last Sky, Said comments on the emergence of the dialectical nature of subjectivities and argues:

All cultures spin out a dialectic of self and other, the subject ‘I’ who is native, authentic, at home, and the object ‘it’ or ‘you,’ who is foreign, perhaps threatening, different, out there. From this dialectic comes the series of heroes and monsters, founding fathers and barbarians, prized masterpieces and despised opponents that express a culture from its
deepest sense of national self-identity to its refined patriotism, and finally to its coarse jingoism, xenophobia, and exclusive bias. (40)

On the surface Darwish’s poetic “I” is in an antagonistic relationship with its foreign invaders “you.” The binary is clear, the relationship is divisive and the power dynamic between the “I” and “you” is asymmetrical. However, the poem also reveals that behind all this aggressive anger, the poet-speaker clearly states his non-hostile intentions. Therefore, the emotive force of the poem is not directed towards any specific form of attack, but rather appears to be strategic essentialism to affirm one’s existence while faced with historical erasure. Darwish writes:

Therefore,

Write at the top of page one:

I do not hate people,
I do not assault anyone,
But…if I get hungry,
I eat the flesh of my usurper.
Beware…beware…of my hunger,
And of my anger. (“Identity Card”)

The conjunctural clause of the concluding lines of the poem is dependent on “if” and stylistically Darwish’s ellipsis functions as a pause or a hesitation, which marks how anger is used as a strategy to survive.

Sadly, with this poem, Palestine’s hero, and national poet Darwish became Israel’s cultural, literary, and national opponent. Since the inception of the poem until today, Israel’s hostile
critique of the poem and the poet “Identity Card”\textsuperscript{138} is notorious to such an extent that, in 2016
the Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman compared Darwish’s “Identity Card” with Hitler’s
\textit{Mein Kampf}\textsuperscript{139}. However, Said argues that the relationship between the Palestinian “I” is not
simply antagonistic or hostile with the Palestinian others, i.e., Israel. Rather, Said argues that the
Palestinians suffer from the experience of othering on its own, without Israel. He writes:

For Palestinian culture, the odd thing is that its own identity is more frequently than not
perceived as ‘other.’ ‘Palestine’ is so charged with significance for others that Palestinians
cannot perceive it as intimately theirs without a simultaneous sense of its urgent importance
for others as well. ‘Ours’ but not yet fully ‘ours. (\textit{After} 40)

The complexity of disintegration of the “I” due to self-alienation, described by Said, is reflected
in Darwish’s collection of prose poems titled \textit{Yawmiyyat al- Huzan al-Adi} translated as the
\textit{Journal of an Ordinary Grief}. In this collection, Darwish grieves for what has been lost—time,
memory, language, self, life; due to his imprisonment because of the misreading and
misappropriations of his poems as political and national threat by Israelis\textsuperscript{140}. In (mis)translating
this collection of prose poems, Ibrahim Muhawi overly simplified the pronoun “I” to stand for a
collective Palestinian identity. However, again, a close reading of the collection reveals that the

\textsuperscript{138}Darwish never recited this poem publicly. Darwish’s translator Mohammad Shaheen writes that when Darwish
was asked to recite “Identity Card,” he would respond with flat rejection and a biting humor (12). Darwish would
play with the Arabic word “Sajjil” meaning to write to “Sajjalt”, claiming the poet has already done his part, now it
is someone else’s responsibility (\textit{I Don’t Want} 12). This rejection to recite “Write down, I am an Arab” can also be
read as a rejection for normative understanding of identities which was no longer applicable for Darwish’s changing
relationship with his exile.

\textsuperscript{139} See James Glanz’s article “Israeli Defense Minister Compares Beloved Palestinian Poet to Hitler” to read on
Avigdor Lieberman’s comment on Mahmoud Darwish.

\textsuperscript{140} Palestinian scholars researched on the continued vulnerability of Palestinians poets and artists due to Israeli’s
misappropriation of their poetic and artistic work as an incitement for violence. For more on this topic, see Bassam
poetic “I” appears in a multiplicity of relations. Such a multiplicity corresponds with Said’s theorization regarding the (dis)formation of Palestinian subjectivities under Israeli regime. For instance, listing and documenting the historical trajectories post Nakba, Darwish’s poetic “I” is constantly shifting its character, from affirmative claim “I am an Arab,” to the confused consciousness of the “present-absentees,” or fractured interiorities caused by trauma and nostalgia. The Palestinians who returned post Nakba were labelled as “present-absentees” denying them any legal right to the land. Under such acute sense of alienation emerging from both the Jewish establishment/settlement and the legal re-naming and re-translation of the Palestinian landscape from Arabic to Hebrew, Darwish’s poetic “I” loses touch with its own reality. A scene from the prose poem from the chapter “The Moon Did Not Fall into the Well” demonstrates the complexities of the Palestinian speaker attempting to identify himself and his reality. In the prose poem, the Arab poet-speaker ‘speaking’ in Hebrew (12), affirms his Arab identity while sitting in a cafe in a land taken over by Jewish settlements. Shortly after his affirmation, he expresses his alienation (The Journal 15). The troubled “I” does not know how to mitigate and reconcile the multiple fractures existing in its exilic poetic selves due to the histories of pre- and post-Israel’s establishment. Such a use of “I” reflects the shared sense of

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141 Darwish writes: “They called us “present-absentees” so we would have no legal right to anything. At the same time, we found out that thousands of these returnees were shoved into trucks as soon they were arrested and immediately dumped on the border like damaged merchandise. We knew that hundreds were shot dead so that others would stop thinking of returning. We also knew that my aunt’s husband, who tried to steal in from Lebanon, had not yet arrived. Which was more painful, to be a refugee in someone else’s country or a refugee in your own?” (The Journal of Ordinary Grief 14).

142 Darwish writes: “Here is my identity and yet how alienated I feel! My alienation here is a positive thing because its causes are beyond my control, and because I am present in person. The torment that charges my relationship to the hallowed and forbidden earth is thereby transformed it a potential rejection” (The Journal of Ordinary Grief 15).
interiorized alienation due to historical circumstances that Darwish shares with Amichai, despite supposedly being on “opposing sides.”

Furthermore, in the chapter titled “The Homeland: Between Memory and History” from *Journal of Ordinary Grief* the poet-speaker creates a contrapuntal affinity by citing the Israeli writer S Yizhar’s historical novel *Khirbet Khizeh*, a story that deals with the expulsion of Arabs and Arab Villagers post 1948. In this section of the prose poem, through intertextuality, Darwish’s poetic “I” converses with Yizhar’s “rare cry of conscience” (*The Journal* 31); while demonstrating a contrapuntal affinity with an Israeli writer’s marking of the Palestinian expulsion. While in an inverse relation a couple paragraphs later, Darwish’s poetic “I” describes an Israeli soldier’s encounter with a young Palestinian girl. The imagery of a soldier entering a village and encountering a village girl present in Darwish’s journal reflects an uncanny thematic resemblance to Amichai’s poet-speaker in the “Elegy of the Abandoned Village” (*1942-1968*). Darwish’s poet-speaker describes how once, after the 1967 war, a soldier went to the West Bank and came face to face with a Palestinian village girl, whose look “shook the ground under him [the soldier]” causing “[the soldier to] realize [he] was an occupier (*The Journal* 32). Moreover again, this imagery of an Israeli encounter with a Palestinian is similar to the *Said*’s predicament where he stands as “prying visitor” in front of his childhood house occupied by “host-residents” present in Darwish’s elegy. In “Counterpoint” when *Said* comes face to face with the occupier of his childhood house, he realizes that “there is no place for two dreams/ in one bedroom” (“Counterpoint”). Likewise, in *Journal of Ordinary Grief*, the fictional encounter of an Israeli soldier with a Palestinian child compels the poet-speaker to ask: “Is it a struggle between two memories” (33). Darwish implies that memories of the holocaust for the Jews and of the Nakba for the Palestinians create intense “feelings of isolation and alienation from the rest of the world”
Thus, a reading of their poems within the context of their poetic histories highlights how the poets’ liminal positions are being pressured between the histories of nationalism and modernism, while simultaneously how their exilic consciousness seeks to destabilize these histories in striving for a freedom of aesthetics. The misreading, mistranslations, and misappropriations of Amichai and Darwish as national poets becomes a cause of their grief, their detachment, and their alienation thus influencing the representation of their poetic “I” in their elegies.

**Binational Consciousness**

In this section I return to Said’s theorization of binationalism as a framework to study Amichai and Darwish’s poems and their poet-speakers’ exilic consciousness. In the context of Israel and Palestine’s nationalisms, Said’s notion of binationalism relates to an exilic consciousness—a consciousness that recognizes, embraces, and empowers its exile, in the context of Israeli and Palestinian histories. A contrapuntal reading of both exilic voices of the settler “I” and the occupied “I,” or the victim of holocaust “I” and the victim of Nakba “I,” with different historical backgrounds, creates an alternative affinity and a narrative of nationalisms and self-determination that is complex and plural. Thus, Amichai and Darwish’s exilic consciousness destabilizes nationalism to unburden themselves from it and move forward to a possibility of something other, manifesting as a need for new language and an aesthetic of freedom.

Throughout his poetic career, Amichai resisted the role of a national poet. In one of his early poems “National Thoughts” published in *Now in the Din Before the Silence (1963-1968)*, Amichai expresses why he was hesitant towards the appellation of national poet from the
beginning of his poetic career. In the context of Jewish nationalism, the poem demonstrates how the poet-speaker’s alienation demands a new language of expression to represent the complex tensions living in-between Jewish history and modern Israel. Amichai’s poetic language evolves from the Hebrew tradition—the metaphysical and biblical abstraction—to more contemporary imageries; for instance, Amichai’s poet-speaker says:

Caught in a homeland-trap:
To talk now in this tired tongue,
Torn out of its sleep in the Bible: blinded,
It totters from mouth to mouth. In a tongue that described
Miracles and God, now to say: automobile, bomb, God (A Life of Poetry 94)

In this section of the poem, the poet-speaker juxtaposes biblical sentiments with the banality of war-life. Such a shocking contrast displays the need for new poetics—a synchronization of Old and New Hebrew registers—to represent life in modern Israel. Although Amichai attempts to release the biblical character of the Hebrew language—which has grown “tired” and “totter[ing]”—by introducing prosaic modern terms, the poet-speaker confesses how he still feels trapped with biblical responsibilities. For instance, the verse “caught in the homeland-trap of a Chosen people” repeated at intervals, throughout the poem, emphasizes the complexities of the Jewish migration to their homeland. The poet-speaker feels “trapped” and “tired” with idealistic notions of a homeland and designation as “the chosen people,” who utilize a “tired tongue.” Amichai describes these “chosen people” as wearing “Cossack fur hat[s]” on their heads. A hat worn by East Slavic-speaking Orthodox Christian people, thus signifying the diasporic

identity of the Jewish consciousness prior coming to modern Israel. In the final quatrain, the poem despairs over how nationalism and its modernity brought a stifling sense of existence, where the speaker feels “closed; every letter of a locked house/ To remain and to be enclosed in a final D.” Through such shocking revelations of the poet’s national thoughts and the absurd juxtaposition of the sacred with the contemporary Jewish reality, Amichai exposes the hypocrisy of nationalism and modernity that “traps” humankind via the ideals of a nation.

The poems included in *Now in the Din Before the Silence (1963-1968)* are filled with a recognition and resignation of the burden of nationalism while exposing the nomadic, decentered, non-national, diasporic consciousness of Amichai’s poetic “I”. Another example of such diasporic crises surfaces in the poem “Now in the Din” from the section titled “Poems of Akhziv”\(^{144}\) where the poet-speaker is ready to confess about the things he could not speak of “in the silence before the din.” There is an ambiguity of what this “din” is—Shoah and/or Nakba, past or present? This ambiguity marks the third position, marks the effect of the new-poetics Amichai is attempting to enact. In line 5 and 6, the poet-speaker acknowledges “we were just neighbors in the blowing wind”, people from the “land of two rivers”, coming to this place because the “weather was good for us and for our hearts”. It is a “sheltered place” where they come and enjoy while realizing that it is “too late to repair what was done” (*A Life of Poetry* 143). In the article “Vacation from History: Ethnic Cleansing as the Club Med Experience”, Peter Lagerguist explains how after Israel’s independence and the dispossession of the Palestinians in the year 1948, Akhziv became a vacation spot administered by Club Med—"a fantasy escape, a

\(^{144}\) Lagerguist identifies Akhziv as a village originally a Canaanite settlement and was later home to “some two thousand Palestinian fishing and farming families, whose orchards, fields, plantations covered over five square miles” (7). During Israel’s independence war, Lagerguist claims “60 percent of the Palestine’s Arab population” was pushed into exile. For more, see Lagerguist, Peter. “Vacation from History: Ethnic Cleansing as the Club Med Experience.” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2006, pp. 43–53. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jps.2006.36.1.43. Accessed 7 Jan. 2021.
mystical Arabian village for weary Europeans to come and have a leisurely stay” (Lagerguist 7). During the time when Israel’s Jewish working class did not have the means to travel abroad, Arziv (renamed and spelled differently) offered a rare taste of “cosmopolitanism” in a village that was abandoned by the Palestinians (Lagerguist 7). Hence, this “sheltered place” alluding to a historically real location, simultaneously marks a space of respite from Shoah or a space of Nakba. Similar to the poem “Elegy of An Abandoned Village,” “Poems of Akhziv” exposes historical references between Israel’s modern landscapes to its Palestinian past. By exposing these historical junctures—the Jewish settlements with the Palestinian history—Amichai poetically reflects the ethics of migrating and creating a national life, here holidaying or picnicking, at the cost of dispossessed Palestinians. These historical references reveal how Amichai’s poems, conventionally considered national allegories, mediate contrapuntally between the Jewish history and the Palestinian’s catastrophe, complicating nationalism for the Jewish imagination of the homeland. Thus, in poems such as “National Thoughts,” “Now in the Din,” and “Poems of Akhziv,” Amichai’s poet-speakers are described as people migrating from different parts of the world, with more than one cultural, social, linguistic, and political consciousness. His poet-speakers or poetic “I” suffer from a deep sense of estrangement that national narratives of modern Israel seek to misappropriate for a teleological linearity of Israeli nationalism (for instance, as discussed previously, Gold’s scholarship on Amichai in The Making of Israel’s National Poet). This pressure to reconcile heterogeneity with the homogenous character of a modern Israeli nation for political gains further aggravated the fractured fissures in the Jewish consciousness. Thus, in “Poems of Akhziv,” the poet-speaker finds himself “broken near the sea,” deeply alienated and isolated as he realizes “[t]here was a different wind/ [a]nd
there was a wind that was like you”—i.e., the difference in the wind marks his alienation. The poet-speaker describes his condition as:

...two-headed Cerberus
Baring our teeth. At noon
Your one leg was in the east, the other in the west,
And I in the middle, leaning on the forelegs,
Looking suspiciously to the sides, roaring terribly
So they wouldn’t rob me of my prey (A Life of Poetry 153).

The use of Cerberus is a metaphor for the poet-speaker’s split consciousness. According to Greek mythology, Cerberus is a multi-headed hound who guards the gates of the underworld. The depiction of Cerberus here as a two-headed hound, reducing its multiplicities into an ambiguous duality, speaks to the binary positions of the Israel and Palestine conflict, and/or of the Biblical and Modern Jewish consciousness. The analogous use of Cerberus’s split with the poet-speaker’s consciousness marks a fissuring and a third position. The speaker’s “I” finds himself “in the middle”—a third head, a third position, a new poetics, vacillating between the other two heads. In the next stanza, moving away from the imagery of the Cerberus, the poet-speaker asks: “Who are you? / A little Jewish boy from the Diaspora, / A yarmulke on his head. From there. From that time” (153). In this past migratory adolescence, the poet-speaker remembers the dead rabbis of his childhood, “far away from here, in another continent of time,” i.e., the reason for the diasporic move to Palestine. The stanzas, from Cerberus to reminiscences—from Israel remembering “before the din”—thereby mark a life of liminality.

However, the depiction of Cerberus here has been misappropriated as a two-headed hound, reducing its multiplicities into a binary.
between a collective Jewish historical past and a personal past, between his childhood memories and his contemporary reality in Israel. Amichai’s representation of the Jewish migration to Palestine alludes to both the complex history of Jewish persecution prior to the establishment of Israel, and also the history of their heterogeneous consciousness that dominates Amichai’s poet-speakers voice. Thus, Amichai’s poet-speaker’s “I” is fractured in multiple ways and the rhetoric of nationalism cannot reconcile his deep sense of alienation and isolation in modern Israel.

The following paragraphs will explain the importance of revising histories of Israel and Palestine’s nationalism leading to a novel framework to reading Amichai and Darwish’s exilic consciousness and their desire for an aesthetic of freedom present in their poems and elegies. While the migration was a political need, Zionism’s vision for a Jewish homeland in Palestine was initially an appeal for a binational state. Gershom Scholem envisioned Zionism as a movement towards the decolonization of the diasporic Jewish people from their European shackles, through a binational solidarity with the indigenous Palestinian people. In the essay “Truth and Reconciliation” Said explains how imminent Jewish intellectuals from Brit Shalom—Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and others—argued for a binational state. The Brit Shalom, known as the covenant of peace, believed in forming a mutual relation amongst the Jews and the Arabs “on the basis of absolute political equality of two culturally autonomous peoples, and to determine the lines of their cooperation for the development of the

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146 However, later in his career, Scholem departs from his initial visionary aspirations of a binational state and for the democratic relationship between both the Jews and the Arabs.

country”. Said shares their vision for such a binational state which would enable “coexistence” and sharing in ways that require an innovative, daring, and theoretical willingness to get beyond the arid stalemate of assertion and rejection” (“Truth”). Said’s hope was that “once the initial acknowledgement of the other as an equal is made…a [way] forward becomes not only possible but also attractive” (“Truth”). Therefore, Said, and earlier Scholem’s binationalism argues for a radical shift in the systems and structures of inequality to bring about a democratic form of cohabitation of the Jewish and the Palestinian Arab population.

Although Said’s binationalism might represent unrealistic optimism, his argument becomes convincing as he empowers the exilic consciousness. In his last work titled *Freud and the Non-European* (2003), Said argues that diasporic life can become the foundation “in the land of Jews and Palestine [for] a bi-national state in which Israel and Palestine are parts, rather than antagonists of each other’s history and underlying reality” (56). He expands on the diasporic consciousness which does not seek to “return,” or “to belong” and does not believe that to establish Israel as a nation fulfills a prophecy or establishes roots (*Freud* 59). Said argues that embracing the diasporic character of Israel’s national consciousness would lead towards “a historic return [that] break[s] on each count the symbolic parameters of the nation” (*Freud* 59). In other words, Said believes that by empowering the diasporic consciousness of Israel and Palestine, an innovative form of alliance and national space is possible. Said underscores that there can be no structural analogy between the two exilic consciousness since the Jewish

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148 By the late 1940s a group emerged called “Ichud” (Union) and attempted to continue towards the development of a state based on the mutual recognition of Palestinian rights. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin’s essay on “Exile and Binationalism: From Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt, to Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish”, 2011.

149 Butler demarcates the difference between coexistence and cohabitation arguing that coexistence accepts “the colonial structures for that condition living in proximity, the latter joint these struggles for decolonization” (*Parting Ways* 123).
diaspora created the Palestinian diaspora. However, Said believes that irrespective of their historical differences a diasporic consciousness is capable of innovation and multiplicity. In *Reflections on Exile*, Said writes:

> Seeing the entire world as a foreign land makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least of two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal. (185)

The exilic consciousness is then a non-national consciousness; a consciousness that is “nomadic, decentered and contrapuntal” (*Reflections* 185). In “Versions of Binationalism in Said and Buber,” Butler argues that Said’s embracing of the diasporic nature of Israel’s national character requires a revision of Israel’s own national history and its responsibility for creating Palestinian refugee (“Versions” 109). In the essay, Butler exposes how scholarship around Israeli literatures and literary national narratives conceal and repress Jewish diasporic consciousness, in order to create a historical continuity of the Jewish people from their biblical exile to their return to the Zion without the years of European persecution (“Versions” 109). However, when their dynamic diasporic history is juxtaposed contrapuntally against the static national narratives of modern Israel, such a study enables a recognition of the Jewish struggle for decolonization, instead of Jewish desire for nationalism. Thus, Butler offers a revision of Scholem’s Zionism as a movement that would risk everything to stand on the “right side of the barricades”\(^{150}\), namely the colonized, the Palestinian inhabitants of the land” (“Versions” 98)\(^{151}\). Butler argues that

\(^{150}\) It is understood that Scholem was in touch with Walter Benjamin’s philosophical theorizations of “tradition of the oppressed” present in his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

\(^{151}\) See Amnon Raz Krakotzkin’s bilingual essay titled “Exile and Binationalism: From Gershom Scholem to Hannah Arendt to Edward Said and Mahmoud Darwish in Carl Heinrich Becker Lecture 2011. In the essay
Scholem’s Zionism sought solidarity with the Palestinians against the western hegemony and colonial consciousness, while also “reject[ing] progressive perception of history” ("Versions" 99). Eminent scholar of Jewish history, Krakotzkin explains Scholem’s definition of binationalism as “a case in which Jewish tradition and memory are employed to counter the hegemonic Western approach” ("Exile" 99) i.e., a colonial/European consciousness. Thus, Zionism, according to Scholem and members of the Brit Shalom was a liberating movement that would resist the colonial oppression and “provide Jews the platform to escape the decadent west and ‘return’ to the authentic ‘Eastern identity’” ("Exile" 99). While political Zionism/nationalism demanded a national consciousness negating all forms of exilic consciousness, in contrast Krakotzkin explains that for Scholem exilic consciousness must embrace solidarity with the oppressed and colonized. According to Krakotzkin, Scholem also took a stance against assimilation (with the Palestinian inhabitants) and/or orthodoxy (i.e., Jewish fundamentalism). Instead, Scholem aspired for “a mystical tradition that would create a third road between assimilation and orthodoxy” ("Exile" 101)\(^{152}\), similar to Said’s push for innovative and daring alliances mentioned previously. Butler suggests that these revisions of Zionism as a decolonizing movement instead of a national movement “provide a way to understand one historical condition of dispossession in light of another” (Parting Ways 123). Butler emphasizes that the exilic consciousness is nonteleological offering redemption without a return, thus disrupting any teleology by opening history to a convergent and interruptive set of temporalities (Parting Ways 123). Therefore, within this framework of binationalism and exile, rereading Amichai and

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\(^{152}\) While Hannah Arendt still believed in these ideals, later in life Scholem confessed to Arendt that he departed from his initial conceptualization of Zionism and believed binationalism to be a state of partition.
Darwish’s poet-speakers exilic consciousness, present in their elegy poems, poeticizes a non-teleological historization of their nationalisms where their respective poetic “I” are multiple due to the contrapuntal overlapping of their histories.

Thus, in conclusion of *The Journal of An Ordinary Grief*, Darwish once again emphasizes the contrapuntal reality of his personal and poetic “I.” In the poem, Darwish describes an event from the past, while at an airport in Paris, the poet-speaker Darwish had to wait to prove his identity. Poet-speaker Darwish did not know how to answer the question “who are you?”—a question that dominated his life. The poet-speaker Darwish replies:

The French police could not understand something the Israeli police themselves did not understand. Your travel document declares that your citizenship is obscure. In vain you explain to the French security agent the meaning of this obscurity, since whatever you say calls for yet further grasp of the greater obscurity set into place by his colleague in Tel Aviv. Where were you born? Palestine. Where do you live? Israel. Therefore, you are obscure. (*The Journal* 153).

In the poem the use of the second person personal pronoun “you” functions on multiple levels. This “you” can address the Palestinians suffering from similar collective identity crisis or can imply the separation of Darwish’s poetic “I” from himself. The complexities of his estrangement (i.e., obscurity) expose the poet-speakers struggling from a double consciousness that seems to challenge linear, singular, nationalistic “I.” The poet-speaker document complicates his identities.

In a manner reminiscent of Darwish’s existential predicament, Amichai’s poet-speaker is also aware of his non-homogenous, non-singular identity, an identity that shifts in context of
overlapping histories. In grief and lamentations, Amichai’s poet-speaker finds himself “wallowing as an empty barrel” pushed from place to place, “sometimes see[ing] a Jerusalem between two people/Standing at a window and leaving space/ Between them. They’re neither close nor in love, /so I can see my life between them” (A Life of Poetry 163). Like Darwish’s in-between predicament, Amichai’s poet-speaker suffers an in-betweenness emerging from the fractured reality of his life. Documenting his life from Wurzburg to Jerusalem in a non-chronological fashion, Amichai’s “I” appears multi-layered and contrapuntal. His poems reveal how his personal history converges and diverges with the collective history of Israel and its others i.e., the Arabs, the inhabitants of the land153. At one point, Amichai poet-speaker exclaims:

I am a single man, a lonely man. I am not a democracy.

The executive power and the loving and the judicial
In one body. The power that eats and guzzles, and vomits.

The power that hates and the power that hurts

The Blind power and the mute power.

I was not elected. I am a demonstration, I raise

My face as a banner (A Life of Poetry 187).

The poet-speaker reveals his helpless cry and his paradoxical reality where his singular identity has turned authoritarian. In other words, even when he seeks to claim his identity as his own, as a “lonely man,” his position in the historical reality of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict turns him into a powerful “I,” powerful in his popularity as the Israeli national poet. While Amichai I’s

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153 Kronfeld advises to read the poem as an invitation to “rethink the historiography of Statehood Generation Poetry” and re-evaluate the nationalist justification of Israel occupying Palestine (The Full 51)
“face” becomes “a banner” i.e., the face of the nation; in contrast Darwish writes how “they [Israelis] were removing from your face the features that would have enabled the world to recognize you” (The Journal 154). Thus, revealing historical intersections: one is appropriated into being a banner, and one is erased via that banner. Darwish’s poet-speaker announces the contradictions in his identity: “You are a citizen of Israel, but your place of birth, your sense of belonging and your rejection transform you into a complex of ambiguity and contradiction” (The Journal 154).

Said explains the paradox of such an identity to his interviewer: “I am the last Jewish-Palestinian”154, meaning his alienation, displacement, and status as an exile contrapuntally connects him to the Jewish experience as his history over his land and language overlaps with the Jewish consciousness. In Culture and Imperialism, Said borrows the notion of non-belonging from Auerbach and Adorno (both Jewish intellectuals) to give words to his own Palestinian exilic predicament. He writes:

Why do you think I am so interested in the binational state? Because I want a rich fabric of some sort, which no one can fully comprehend, and no one can fully own. I never understood the idea of this is my place, and you are out. I do not appreciate going back to the origin, to the pure. I believe the major political and intellectual disasters were caused by reductive movements that tried to simplify and purify (455).

Similar to Darwish’s and Amichai’s poetic elegies, Said in his memoir Out of Place explains how this condition of being exiled has given him the opportunity to revise and subvert his notion

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of national identities without romanticizing it. Said believes that there is no way to repress the heterogeneity of the land, the contrapuntal intertwining of histories, and the diverse population that breaks all notions of binaries; all of which does not lead towards a simple ambivalence or hybridity but a creative multifaceted novel consciousness. The Palestinian and the Jewish exilic consciousness demystifies the subject formation where their “I’s” and “you’s” are bonded by their inter-relationships to each other. Said states:

I see no other way than to begin now to speak about sharing the land that has thrust us together, sharing it in a truly democratic way, with equal rights, for each citizen. There can be no reconciliation unless both peoples, two communities of suffering, resolve that existence is a secular fact, and that it has to be dealt with as such. (“Truth”)

Arguably, even as Martin Buber may have “shared spaces,” as he has been accused of living at Said’s uncle Boutros Said’s house in Jerusalem,\textsuperscript{155} what seems apparent is that the fate of the Israelis is sealed with the Palestinians. Their identities are intricately entangled requiring the creative, critical, novel framework of binationalism. Thus, as material sites for binational politics, Amichai and Darwish’s poetry reveal the disintegrating and changing subjectivities where the perpetrators and the victims are identical. Their poetic “I” de-historicizes and de-ontologies the grand narratives of the mythical national “I,” through a poetic process that enacts a novel and living history and ontology. Amichai’s poetic “I” and Darwish’s poetic “I” destabilizes normative notions of identities that exist under the framework of nationalism.

\textsuperscript{155} Butler, “Buber and Said Versions of Binationalism” (114). Said confirms this in \textit{After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives} (18).
The elegiac genre, marthiya and kina, reveal a hopeful future for Amichai and Darwish’s poet-speakers grief. Darwish’s elegy, according to the Arabic tradition, creates new directions and new political possibilities. While Amichai’s lamentations, according to Judaic tradition\(^\text{156}\), present a novel opportunity to move away from a dialogue to that of a self-reflexivity. Thus, in this unique space of self-reflection via imaginary conversations, dialogues, monologues, and intertextuality both Amichai and Darwish’s literary I’s are compelled to look at their exilic consciousness, that results in revising their national allegiance and forming novel solidarity in resistance. These splits and inner contradictions, multiplicities and pluralities are not a barrier to expression but instead exposes the failure to adhere to any form of subjectivity nationalism imposes. As Darwish’s poet-speaker asks:

What does it mean for you to be Israeli and Palestinian at the same time? What does it mean to stand in Sofia between two buildings, one flying the Palestinian flag, and the other, The Israeli? Are you capable of embodying the Palestinian spirit under the Israeli flag? Or, can you be a thing and its opposite at the same time? And beyond all that, who are you? (*The Journal* 156)

Challenging the concept of identity emerging from their reflections of an exilic consciousness, both Darwish and Amichai’s poet-speakers confront their respective histories, national narratives, and national identities. By identifying and empowering their grief, anxieties,

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\(^{156}\) According to Scholem, Ilit Ferber writes, Judaic lamentations are “a linguistic form is devoid of an addressee or an object. Rather, since it continues to perpetually circuit around its own consciousness in an “ever recurring self-referential” movement “lament becomes the only possible language that can wholly and utterly subvert the proportional structure of language, thereby revealing the innermost expressive” (“Incline thine” 128).
alienation, and loss, both Amichai and Darwish gives binationalism a meaning, a possibility—a novelty of imagination.
Chapter Three: On Butterfly’s Wings: The Unmaking of the Singular Self

The historical moment that the Palestinians are living imposes a return to the human on us, without resort to myth, to tell the story of our simple lives. Myth has reached peaks, whether in our poetry or in poetry in general. And it is the simple and humble man who gives birth from now on to the literary moment. There is no longer heroism in the classical sense of the word. The new hero is the one who is looking for the tools of his own existence, who tells of his questioning.

Darwish in interview with Nouri Jarrah (1996)

Well, [heroism] was never a big word for me, because when I took part in all these things [participation in wars] I was never that heroic. When you are young you are just…you do things, and you do them brilliantly and you want to show off. You know, it’s typical of young people. You’re not so much aware, on the other side, of the danger of it—or of what it means to the coming generations. It’s just a kind of bravado of young people.

Amichai in interview with David Montenegro (1987)

Introduction

In his 1996 interview with Nouri Jarrah, Mahmoud Darwish expresses the desire to focus on the human and the ordinariness of human life as a rhetorical trope and as a principal subject for his poems to resist the dominance of grand narratives and nationalistic readings of his poetry. For Darwish, this shift in his poetic consciousness replaced the legendary heroes—a tradition commonly associated with epics—with ordinary human lives. In advent of modernity and post catastrophic historical reality of Palestine, Darwish returns to the subject of the ordinary human
to be the creator of his own literary moment and of his own stories to reclaim the human self that
gets buried under the national self. However, this shift in the poetic consciousness of mid-70s
and mid-90s Darwish gets mostly unnoticed by Darwish’s critics as discussed in the previous
chapters. From 1995-96 towards his death, late Darwish speaks of a humanity that is not
framed by the politics of mythic nationalistic aspirations, if it is ever possible for a Palestinian
poet to do so. Rather, in his last work *Athar al- Farasha* (2008) translated in English as *A River
Dies of Thirst* (2009), the re-representation of the landscape, botanical imageries, and the
butterfly motif along with the subject of the human becomes the center of Darwish’s poetic
meditations. The poet searched for a language to access the daily ordinariness of the lives of his
poetic speakers and the Palestinians to recycle, recreate, renarrate and represent a self that either
challenges or outperforms the national self. As such, exile ceases to be the singular and
collective expression of a lost homeland, or for a longing to return. Instead, Darwish’s exilic self
demands a forgetting— a longing to forget — to unravel the narrative of returning to
Palestine as the necessary premise of Palestinian self-determination.

A similar poetic trajectory is also noticeable in Yehuda Amichai’s latter works. In
conversation with David Montenegro, Amichai critiques the bravado of young soldiers
functioning as instruments of nationalism. As a result, the desire to return to the human and the
ordinariness of human life became the central motif in the poet’s later works. Amichai’s return to
the topic of human is a return to the Jewish and Talmudic tradition: the practice of fighting with
God and grand narratives. In a 1992 interview with Joseph Lawrence, Amichai labelled himself
as a “post cynical humanist” (239), who “after so much horror, so many shattered ideals, we

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157 Late as a theoretical and stylistics marker rather than marker of the dead or absence.
158 The title of his poem from *A River Dies of Thirst* (37).
[Amichai] can start anew” (239). Like Darwish’s disappointment and distrust of the cyclical nature of nationalistic politics of the Palestinians struggle for self-determination, Amichai’s later works also present a critique of great ideals such as Zionism and Israeli nationalism. Thus, his poetic protagonists are no longer turning to Israel with political, romantic, or idealized visions of Zionism. Instead, there is a presentation of the poetic speakers exhaustion from such political fulfilments and collective representation, thus embracing a recluse. Hence, there is a striking shift in Amichai’s poetic commitments in his later works specifically in *Patuah Sagur Patuah*, translated as *Open Closed Open* (1998).

This chapter marks the poetic-political trajectory of both poets and the shift of their poetic subject matters from strategic nationalism, i.e., a struggle for self-determination at the face of historical erasure, to the politics of binationalism that promotes heterogenous community living and cohabitation, to the poetic meditations on the human advocating for a secular vision of individualism and humanism. While binational politics, as discussed in chapter two in lieu of a close reading of elegy poems, can be best described as the desire to return to the heterogenous history of historical Palestine, this chapter studies the shift present in the late style of the poets from the preoccupation of the heterogeneous and plural scope of habitation to the humane and individual. By no means, as late style advocates, the poets transcend the need for an identity of the self; rather the movement captures a depth of the exploration. While exile was an external feature influenced by the politics of the outside, Amichai and Darwish’s poetic protagonists exhibits an inward exile: an inward examination of the self and the other, a study of the human and his humanity. This inward exploration births the demand for a new language of expression, and poetic forms, close to prosaic and other forms of experimentation that is different from the agitational stylistics present in their earlier works.
Thus, a series of questions, if not answered, are studied to illustrate Amichai and Darwish’s late style, i.e., exilic aesthetics. One must begin to study the dialogic relationship between the poets’s exilic consciousness and their newer forms of poetic experimentations, i.e., exilic aesthetics. Simply put, can there be an aesthetic particular to the experiences of the poets’s exilic condition? If so, then how do the poets’s exilic aesthetics and exilic consciousness enable a practice of humanism that confronts the external demands of the exile and move towards an inward exploration of the exile self? While chapter two demonstrated how Darwish and Amichai’s poetic speakers foresee an alternative heterogenous polis—a contrapuntal interaction—this chapter offers a study of the poets’ exilic selves with a focus on the human suffering and representation of the mundane, banal lives of their poetic speakers that compels an understanding of Israeli and Palestinian identity politics beyond the grand narratives of nationalism.

Important to note that the chapter must begin with the end: there will be no reconciliation and no synthesis of the heterogenous selves as a hybrid free-floating ahistorical self. Rather, both Amichai and Darwish are actively alienating the alienation (i.e., embracing their exile) with a hope to empower this acute sense of strangeness expressed in form and metaphors, i.e., exilic aesthetics as a novel potentiality for re-envisioning the human self whose exile is not that of nationalism only. All this is analyzed in this chapter through a close reading of the butterfly motif, as an extension of the botanical imageries, and the human to illustrate both

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159 Hannah Arendt define polis as “not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be” (The Human Condition 198).

160 Darwish in “Gradual Exile” translated by Taoufiq Sakhkhane Journal of Postcolonial Writing, 2014 Vol. 50, No. 2, 230–235, says: “for the end of the road may lead me to the beginning of another road”, expressing how the past and future are at a dialectical standstill, and yet have the potential for innovation.
poets aesthetics by defamiliarizing the representation of the exile in context of nationalism to the possibility of the creative. Both Amichai and Darwish present nature and man re-emerging with a creative force and commitment to life.

**Late Style**

In studying the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy, Edward Said writes:

> His poems enact a form of minimal survival between the past and the present, and his aesthetic of nonproduction, expressed in a nonmetaphorical, almost prosaic unrhymed verse, enforces the sense of enduring exile that is at the core of this work. In Cavafy, then, the future does not occur, or if it does, is has in a sense already happened. Better the internalized, narrow world of limited expectations than that of grandiose projects constantly betrayed or traduced. (*On Late Style* 146)

For Cavafy, Said comments, Ithaca is no longer a goal or telos for the homeward-bound hero but becomes an instigation for his voyage. Cavafy’s Ithaka, Said studies, “acquires new meaning not as an individual place but as a class of experiences that enable human understanding” (*On Late 146). Said argues that Cavafy’s “basic poetic gesture was to deliver meaning to someone else while denying its rewards to himself: a form of exile that replicates his existential isolation” (*On Late 146), i.e., embracing his exile. Such an embrace, Said claims:

> …is the prerogative of the late style: it has the power to render disenchantment and pleasure without resolving the contradiction between them. What holds them in tension, as equal forces straining in opposite directions, is the artist’s mature subjectivity, stripped
of hubris and pomposity, unashamed either of its fallibility or of the modest assurance it has gained as a result of age and exile” (On Late 148).

Late style as stylistics do not imply aging or death. Rather, in reference to Cavafy, Rembrandt, Matisse, Bach, and Wagner, Said describes late style as the “artistic lateness not as harmony and resolution, but as intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction” (On Late 7). While a Hegelian approach would consider the irreconcilable opposites to be resolvable by means of the dialectic resulting in a grand synthesis, Said describes late style where the irreconcilable is “transformed more and more from something significant into something obscure—even to itself” (On Late 13). Similar to Adorno’s notion of lateness, Said believes “lateness is the idea of surviving beyond what is acceptable and normal” (On Late 13). Lacking a grand synthesis and by losing totality, late style’s power is in the negativity (On Late 12), hence catastrophic (On Late 13). Thus, late style is fragmentary, constituting a form of exile ready to forgo anecdotal continuity while embracing “a cascading series of discontinuous fragments” (On Late 15). And importantly, Said argues that this negativity holds the potential to be political since “in the performance of the unreconciled individual critical thinking there is the force of protest” (On Late 15) that births “a perspective of long experience rather than revolutionary beginnings” (On Late 19). To perform lateness means “to work through the silences and fissures [and] to avoid packaging and administration” (On Late 15) and uses its own exile as a late style expression to formally sustain itself (On Late 17). Said underscores the paradox of the late style: “how essentially unrepeatable, uniquely articulated aesthetic works written not at the beginning but at the end of a career can nevertheless have an influence on what comes after them” (On Late 18). Interesting to observe, both Said and Arendt, in their lateness, expressed a certain form of
internal exile with shocking disclaimers: Said referring himself as the last Jewish intellectual\textsuperscript{161} and Arendt’s desire to remain a Jew and a pariah simultaneously\textsuperscript{162}.

Correspondingly, close to their impending death, both Darwish and Amichai’s last book of poetry \textit{A River Dies of Thirst} and \textit{Open Close Open} generate a late style that is idiosyncratic with a contrapuntal voice intertwined with nationalism and totalitarianism, as well as, being critical and ironic about them.\textsuperscript{163} Thus, in Amichai and Darwish’s poems there is a shift from national aesthetics\textsuperscript{164} that were initially present in their works to the representation of the mundane and exploration in depth the concept of a humanism and humanity that is unapologetically occupied with antinomies, antagonism, irreconcilable, oppositions and absences. With this shift, from existential conditions of exile to the intellectual and poetic, the tone of their poetry bespeaks consoling and comforting or accepting and resisting exilic consciousness simultaneously.

Thus, the question lingers, is there a representation of the exile in a manner exclusive to itself? In the essay “Exile as a Political Aesthetic” Keya Ganguly argues that if the exilic experience is plural and multi, then the exilic experience cannot inhabit a singular expression either. It must resist totalizing, thus must perpetually shift, and transform (69). The terms associated with exile such as nostalgia, in-betweenness, estrangement or bifocality, alienation


\textsuperscript{163} Said describes Adorno’s latestyle as “contrapuntal voice intertwined with fascism, bourgeois mass society, and communism, inexplicable without them, always critical and ironic about them” (\textit{On Late} 21).

\textsuperscript{164} As mentioned in the previous chapters, both Amichai and Darwish’s early poetry had a nationalistic tonality which unfortunately stuck to them throughout their entire poetic career. Hence, many often, critics, scholars, translators as well as readers would misconstrue their poetic mediation as nationalistic while ignoring the growth of their poetic form and perspectives.
and marginality must mark that perpetual shift. However, Ganguli argues, these terms are pushed towards a totalizing description that forces the reading of the exile exclusively as an existential or ontological problem (“Exile”). Amichai and Darwish defies the reading of the exile as an existential or ontological problem precisely by representing the banality of human life. For the poets, as well as Said and Hannah Arendt, the exile is not only an existential or ontological issue but more generative as an intellectual condition. Exile becomes a choice or a condition that refuses a state of rest. Ganguly’s essay addresses how the experience of the exile calls for representational strategies that refuse a state of rest (“Exile”). In other words, how to capture such defiance in literary forms and imageries, i.e., in the aesthetics? Can aesthetics become praxis? To add to this complexity, how to connect Said’s concept of late style in relation to the poets impending irreconciliation, or unresolved contradiction of their selves as artistic lateness? On the question of exilic representational strategies, Said considers “how to think exile—to grasp it as a modality of thought and to embrace the openings it makes possible” (*Reflections* 70).

Thus, to return to Said’s attempting to answer these questions in his reading of Cavafy’s poetry, Adorno, Beethoven, Glen Gould, and others, he remarks upon the art of late style as “an alternative argument to the prevailing conventions that so dead and dehumanize and rerationalize the human spirit…that is not only an intellectual achievement but also a humanistic one” (*On Late* 133). Thus, this chapter demonstrates, how Darwish and Amichai explores the mundane dailiness of the human life as alternative aesthetics to contest the prevailing myths of legendary tales and nationalistic heroism.
Exilic Aesthetics

If exile is a human condition rather than a state condition, as Said argues and Darwish and Amichai explore in their poems, then such inward expression of exile is able to stand distinct from the framework of nation and nationalism. In other words, inward exploration of the exile, an acceptance of the exilic consciousness, and an in-depth study of the exile self no longer seeks to find home or nation which Lukacs referred to as “transcendental homelessness”165. Following Victor Hugo’s philosophical musings on the concept of home and belonging, Said believed that the “perfect man has extinguished” his desire to find his homeland, thereby empowering and advocating for an exilic consciousness. Through the perpetual process of defamiliarization, a constant need to estrange the knowable, Said invokes the persuasion of an anti-theological mode of life: secular and exilic166.

In an interview with Lebanese poet and journalist Abbas Beydoun (1995)167, Darwish expresses an understanding of the existentialist idealization of the irreconcilable exile that Said explains. Such idealization for the determination of a Palestinian identity restricted the scope of his poetry from which Darwish wanted his critics to turn away. Darwish intreated for an aesthetic freedom that shifts from the representation of the national struggle to representing the “complicated human journey, human condition as the self, the shadow, and the other” (Palestine 16). The poet realizes the power and importance of a lyric that moves between “the relative to

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165 See Edward Said’s essay “Reflections on Exile” (181).

166 Said writes:

The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (“Reflection” 185).

167 See Palestine as a Metaphor for a collection of Mahmoud Darwish’s interview essays.
the absolute, an opening to inscribe the national within the universal, not limited to Palestine, but establishing an aesthetic legitimacy in a wider human space” (*Palestine* 16). By rejecting the question of Palestine as *only* an ontological problem and their fight for self-determination *only* as an existential crisis, Darwish demanded a form of writing i.e., aesthetic representation that presses the fragmentary nature of our lives to its limit. The call here is to mobilize the idea of disjunction, dissonances, and discrepancies of the lived experience to empower these non-reconciliations with a productive inflection, hence the “widening of the human space” (*Palestine* 16). Thus, for Darwish, aesthetic freedom entails the “surviving beyond what is acceptable and normal”, towards a representation of the human surviving beyond its given conditions. Darwish offers his poetic philosophy:

I believe that the theme of Palestine, which is at the same time a call and a promise of freedom, risks transformation into a poetical cemetery if it remains locked within its textuality, within the limits that are Other and self in the delineated space and this historical moment. (*Palestine* 16)

If it is narrow the homeland will find itself narrowing within it. A homeland cannot be reduced to what it is objectively, for the poetry opens the homeland onto the infinitely human, on the condition that the poet succeeds in carrying it there. For this reason, the poet must create his own myth… a myth that is born from the construction of the poem itself, its form and universe, transforming concrete language into poetic language.

(*Palestine* 17)

The erasure of the Palestinians from the (promised) land meant the erasure of the Palestinians from the Book of Genesis, thus it was the duty of the Palestinians to write down their own
Genesis. Benny Morris explains that the relationship the indigenous Palestinian population had with their land was an organic relation. They did not require historicity or historical fact to establish their relationship since it was organic, automatic, un-imposed. Darwish correlates this understanding and explains that at the omission of the Palestinian, there was a need to depend on “myths” close to secular interpretations since Palestinians were not equipped with all things necessary to defend its right to existence, i.e., historians, geographers, anthropologists (Palestine 17). Under such circumstances the myth becomes the point of entry in accomplishing the human and familiar understanding of the Palestinian life. For Darwish the myth is both historical and the daily ordinary reality of the Palestinians living under occupation. The familiarity of the ordinary dailiness of the Palestinian life “humanizes” the Palestinian text. Darwish explains:

> Even when I directly refer to the myth, my obsession is to write what is simple, familiar, commonplace. I try to humanize the Palestinian text. Myth is not always the adversary of man, not always. It is only an aspect of cultural confrontation to write of the same place. We Palestinian poets write close to the Book of Genesis, and to an accomplished myth, definitive, consecrated. (Palestine 18)

Thus, for Darwish the function of mythmaking and myth-narratives is subjected to the exploration of humanity and their living conditions. For an in-depth exploration on the topic of humanity and the Palestinian struggle, the poet attempts to reframe the exile beyond its context. Darwish explains:

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The Palestinian issue risks becoming a poetical cemetery if it remains within the limits of its speech, if it doesn’t open up to the space of humanity, is it does not become a myth that borrows its language from the concrete reality to transport it into a reality of words. In my eyes, it is there that aesthetic salvation resides. (*Palestine* 142)

This very idea of myth making as a representation or protestation of the humanity is evident in Amichai’s late works. Like Darwish, Amichai’s attempt to expanding the scope of humanity is apparent in the way he uses the language of the ordinary man juxtaposed and blended with the language of God (the prayers and language of the Bible), i.e., modernizing Hebrew to capture the living than the dead. Instead of God’s grand gestures, narratives and particularly history, events Amichai expresses “are very, very important to [him]. [He] see events—images, memories—almost physically, like small plaques, icons, objects, each with its own descriptions, depictions, its own codes (“The Art” 238). For Amichai, daily events or the performance of their personal lives can resist national history claiming a form of human agency who is not fatalistic in the over-determination of their historical fate influenced by their material conditions. If not completely political, the performance of the daily life becomes the locus for movement or mobility contesting paralyzing exile or displacement. The dynamism is not lost; hence the human of desires and disappointments remain alive. The possibility of exploring and experience life as it

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169 Bhabha defines this mode of living or ubiquitous form of living the locality of culture as:

a form of living that is more complex than ‘community’; more symbolic than ‘society’, more connotative than ‘country’, less patriotic than patrie, more rhetorical than the reason of state; more mythological than ideology, less homogenous than hegemony; less centered than the citizen, more collective than the subject’; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications—gender, race or class—than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism. (“DissemiNation” 292)
is, without immediately identifying with the historical institution of national narratives. To this, Amichai declares his position as “secular humanism” (“The Art” 241):

My position isn’t an isolated one, not at all. It’s a position defined and politically recognized in Israel in terms of secular humanism…. Dealing with political realities is part of what we need to do to survive as normal human beings…[I] try to take the evil of politics into yourself, to influence it imaginatively—to give a human shape”. (“The Art” 241)

Additionally, for Amichai, his exile emerges as a form of travel. The poet’s travelling consciousness has produced the heterogenous scope of his poetic influences in language, grammar, form, tone etc. Both Darwish and Amichai’s exile favored their poetic language to be more than just its representation. Influences from European, Hebrew, Arabic cultures to influencing each other’s work, both Darwish and Amichai’s work are filled with exilic documentations. Moreover, the poems mark how both poets constantly change and challenges their filliative and affiliative relationship between their “birth-identity” and “chosen-identity” in an attempt to destabilize notions of identity and history with that of contrapuntal, and heterogeneous (containing histories within histories). Amichai refers to the contrapuntal influences of his work as an invention—a fugue form:

I like mixing different techniques and forms. A modern or postmodern, composer might take the heart of a Bach fugue and break it open, expand it; what I do is put jazzy languages and techniques within classical forms, juxtaposing different, sometimes competing language and forms. I usually feel, right from the beginning of a poem, the shape, the form, it will have—even before images or particular words. I feel the form or
shape almost visually, like a piece of sculpture—I can touch it. Then I fill in the form
with my subjects, from the entire world of my subjects. (“The Art” 251)

Likewise, Darwish says:

This land is mine, with its multiple cultures—Canaanite, Hebraic, Greek, Roman,
Persian, Egyptian, Arab, Ottoman, English, and French. I want to live all these cultures. It
is my right to identify with all of these voices that have echoed on this land. For I am not
an intruder, nor a passer-by. (Palestine 120)

Through these experimentations of the form, and filling the form with subjects, Amichai and
Darwish contest the reification of literature in the annals of history where people’s daily events
and living practice challenges the constant principle of national culture and logic of a “true”
national representation. All this coming from the exilic consciousness constructs a latestyle
poetic form that can be easily identified as the aesthetic representation of the exile.

**The Freedom of the Butterfly**

This section closely studies the aesthetic representation of latestyle and exilic
consciousness present in Amichai and Darwish. In their later poetry, both poets are shifting from
a nationalized view of their physical landscapes and identities to a focus on the predicament of
their internal exile demonstrating the paratactic\(^{170}\) human experiences, a shift towards a fractured
landscape and self-corresponding with a fragmentary style. As this shift occurs, unique motifs

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\(^{170}\) Ganguly in “Exile as a Political Aesthetic” defines parataxis to suggest “that rhetorical figures such as parataxis
or counterpoint can equally serve as the means to avoid contending with historical determination by emphasizing,
instead, the purely discursive juxtaposition of events, movements, or actions. And such a celebration of semiotic free
play certainly accounts for the valorization of parataxis in forms of modernism that have sought to detach aesthetics
from politics” (81).
manifest; a shift in motifs of butterfly (as an extension of botanical imageries), along with the reading of the human in its banality, away from the multiplicity of selves discussed in the earlier chapter, towards a radical dissolving of identity. Thus, simultaneously corresponding to the development of an exilic late style and consciousness that studies the depth of their exile for newness in replace of an escape; thinking about the [self], music and literature against the grain.\textsuperscript{171}

Traditionally, national poets meditate on the descriptions of the landscape to “authorize” their natural resources in respect to the development of their nation-states, i.e., to create an image of the land and new nation. It is the convention of the national bards to sing the praise of their land, birds, and flowers, to capture the fragrance of their country in creating a domain for national narratives and epistemological representation. These motifs are exercised to the institutionalization of nation narratives and knowledge production. Earlier, in the Jewish literary tradition and at the cusp of nation building, Haim Bialik along with other romantic Jewish poets felt compelled to return to decorating their poetic landscape with winged creatures such as birds, butterflies, folkloristic and other winged beings as national motifs\textsuperscript{172}. The primary aim was to create a literary tradition that resonated the building of an emerging nation: Israel\textsuperscript{173}.

\textsuperscript{171} As Said puts it on the subtitle of his last work \textit{On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain}, 2000.

\textsuperscript{172} See Hamutal Bar-Yosef’s article “Bialik and the Baudelairian Triangle: Ennui, Cats and Spider’s Webs” that explains “how winged creatures—birds, butterflies, folkloristic winged beings—[are considered] as the Romantic animals par excellence. Their free movement towards their outer distance is a symbolic realization of the Romantic drive towards the infinite” (366).

In Palestinian literary tradition and resistance literature\textsuperscript{174} 1948–1968, botanical imageries and natural references were excessive and limited within the symbolic representation of the dispossession of the Palestinians post Nakba. These imageries on the poetic scene became the documentation of lost Palestinian lives. The ecological loss was intertwined with the loss of Palestinian lives and Palestinian national history. The trauma of the pastoral disruption\textsuperscript{175}, as the title of Darwish’s last work \textit{A River Dies of Thirst} echoes, are reconstructed in the poetic scene as an act of ‘active remembrance’ to counter their historical and national erasure.

As a result, it is understandable how the reading of the recurrent metaphor of landscape duplicates a symbolic representation for a homeland for both poets. However, both Amichai and Darwish plays with the images of vegetation, nature, birds, and landscape to textualize their exilic experiences and absences instead of the national or institutional. The exile wants to hold onto these imageries to protect itself from feeling lost and isolated in contesting literature and narratives on the topic of Israel and Palestine’s national movement and existence. As such, metaphoric images, for the late Darwish and Amichai and their exilic consciousness, function as locating history of human life caught in their act of living. Exilic aesthetics, is then, the treatment of these tropes in an innovative representation of the exile’s relationship with nature and their landscape.

An arc of change is noticeable in the treatment of these motifs in both Amichai and Darwish’s poems. The following paragraphs serve a close reading on one of the motifs—the

\textsuperscript{174} Known as \textit{Al-adab al-filasfīnī al-mugāwīm taḥt al-iḥtilāl} 1948–1968 (Palestinian Literature of Resistance under Occupation).

\textsuperscript{175} See Hannah Boast’s work \textit{Hydrofictions: Water, Power and Politics in Israeli and Palestinian Literature} that studies extensively the impact of environmental crisis and the ecological changes reflected in Israeli and Palestinian literature.
butterfly—to demonstrate how both the poets treatment of the butterfly metaphor reveals the secular desire for humanizing the exile—a shift of the using exile as a mouthpiece of nationalism and religious values towards innovation and beauty.

For instance, Darwish’s first book of poetry *Leaves of Olive* (1964) that began the poet’s pioneering poetic career as the spokesperson for the Palestinians, is filled with symbolic references to nature as a means to reconnect the Palestinians with their land. In the poem, “Write Down I am an Arab”, the poet speaker seeks to claim his identity and his relationship with the Palestinian land aggressively and affirmatively. The cypresses, trees, groves, land, and rocks all stand as the witness to Palestinian self-determination. However, in his last poetry collection, *A River Dies of Thirst*, Darwish reworks his botanical references with a creative humanization. These botanical references and plant symbols such as the fig trees, olive trees, orange, lemon, grapes, etc., and the birds and animal symbols such as the Hoopoe, Horses, Doves, Moths, or butterflies transpire into the representation of exilic aesthetics and late style poesis. In-between life and death, the exilic poet Darwish provides an innovative acceptance of his exile.

The butterfly motif in *A River Dies of Thirst* unburdens itsfelf from the weight of a promise by a complete immersion of the butterfly-self towards light. The poem “Athar al-Farasha” is framed with a parallel refrain, an unrhymed couplet, that occurs both at the beginning and at the end of the poem almost mimicking the wings of a butterfly. Although the form and

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stylistics of the poem formally on pages appears inflexible in terms of the structural appearance of the poem, however, the rhyme, meter, and cadences move freely bringing a novel form of expression. Darwish interrupts the visual structural elements with free verse to “break the normalized cadences in order to create others” (Palestine 32). In his last poetry collection, Darwish deliberately moves away from “the seduction of plaintive chant” (Palestine 32), a quality heavily dominated in the early stages of his poetic career. Darwish leaves the agitational style of his earlier poems for a novelty. It does not mean the agitation is no longer there or it has reconciled, rather it is taking different forms.

Darwish’s desire in seeking new forms is evident in the poem “The butterfly effect”. Darwish’s choice of the butterfly motif is intriguing, especially in the Arabic language. The Arabic word فراشة can collectively signify moths, butterflies, or other winged creatures. Based on the shifting nature of the word and its meaning the poem opens to different interpretations. In Arabic religious-Sufi poetry, the symbolic imagery of a moth is understood for its attraction to heat, light, flame, warmth, and burning desires. The moth motif is common in satire, panegyric, and love poetry. Interestingly, the moth has a dual symbolic connotation: on one hand it is regarded with high esteem within a superior status since the moth may also represent mysticism, imagination, power, or desire, on the other hand, the moth is considered to be fragile, ignorant, and death-seeking insects. The fleeting nature of the moth’s existence due to its fateful

177 My readings here is indebted to Fadiya Suyoufie’s article “Mahmud Darwish’s Athar al-farasha: The Poetics of Proximity” where Suyoufie offers an extensive scholarly reading of the “butterfly effect” in Mahmud Darwish’s poem. Suyoufie writes:

Semiotically, the “butterfly” represents poetic sensibility for Darwish’s text. Athar in Arabic, both as trace and effect, serves to elaborate modes of proximity to the other, a palliative for Darwish’s anxiety about absence and death that dialectically imparts a sense of permanent dwelling on earth (94).

178 See Muhammad Mansour Abahsain’s article “The Supra-Symbolic Moth in Arabic Religious Poetry from the Late Ottoman Period” in Journal of Arabic Literature, 1993.
attraction to flame and light marks both the foolishness of a lover’s desire to love and perish, and
simultaneously its commitment to loyalty. Even though the moth is borne with the tendencies of
self-destruction, in Sufi literary tradition the moth mostly holds a higher symbolic representation
because of its resilient intention to attract light which the Sufis interpret as a union with the light
and love of God. Thus, what becomes an important reading of the moth motif in Arabic
literary tradition is the trajectory it takes from the moth’s nihilistic or fatalistic determinism to a
novel representation of the moth’s symbolism towards light and unification with God—a
dissolving of a self.

In the 17th and 18th century, the Naqshabandhi mystics created a poetic counterpoint to
install a new symbolism of the moth from annihilation (فَنَا فَنَا: turning into ashes) to rebirth
(بِقَايَةٍ بَاقِيَةٍ: reborn). Inspired by cross cultural exchanges and references of the moth
symbolism in Arabic Sufi tradition with Indian Sufi literatures, the moth is analogous to the
Anqa bird—whose modern-day analogy would be the phoenix. Thus, understanding the moth
symbolism in Arabic tradition, and considering that Darwish refers to فراشة as moth then one
possible interpretation of the title of this poetry collection is: the moth symbolizes the possibility
of a بقَايَة, a rebirth or a novelty of poetics and imagination that can bring about new

179 In his poetry book Tawasin, Sufi poet Al-Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj uses the moth to symbolize union with
God. The concept of unification with God is critiqued by Shariah oriented Sunni Islamic scholars with the doctrinal
understanding that Creator and Creation cannot merge. The longstanding conflict among the Sufi mystics, Shia and
Sunni scholars from Omar Khayyam to Rumi and Imam Ghazali regarding the symbolic play of the moth imagery in
religious and spiritual text is another topic of discussion.

180 See School of Sufi Teaching to learn more on the Naqshabandhi mystics following the Sunni tradition tracing
back to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to Abu-Bakr Siddiq.

181 See Abahsain’s footnotes in the article: “The Supra-Symbolic Moth in Arabic Religious Poetry from the Late
Ottoman Period”:
The original conception of annihilation theory (fandi) is credited to the Persian Bayazid Bistami, teacher of
Hallaj. The redemptive concept of perpetuation (baqdi) was only marginal in the teaching of al-Kharraz of
Iraq. (25)
associations of meanings, growth, beauty, light, song and more (as stated in stanza 2, 3, and 4) while dissolving the self. However, فراشة may also refer to the butterfly effect, instead of traces of a moth, then along with the title of the poem “Traces of a Moth” to “The Butterfly’s Effect” the reading changes.

According to the mathematical phenomenon of the Chaos Theory, an action or change in a particular space-time, no matter how insignificant, might take a larger effect in another space-time. The metaphor for such an effect is called the butterfly’s effect, i.e., little, or insignificant changes can bring about greater changes in an unpredictable, non-linear chaotic manner. Thus, the butterfly effect in the chaos theory stand to represent the characterization of the complex and formal structures of deterministic chaos that uphold a paradoxical diversity or randomness within a fixed dynamical framework. Under this theoretical pretext, Darwish’s use of butterfly’s effect as the title of his poem and poetry collection seems to be directing to the possibility of movement, dynamism, fluidity that insignificant changes can bring about in the static context of Israel and Palestine conflict. However, both interpretative meanings, farasha as moth or butterfly, allude to novelty: whether in destruction and union with God, or whether in dynamism. For the sake of this chapter and my own reading, I will use Catherine Cobham’s translation of the title, “The butterfly effect”.

In the poem, Darwish tries to describe and define the butterfly effect in anaphora or series of repetitive definition and action as the followings:

The butterfly effect is invisible

The butterfly effect is always there

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182 See https://www.britannica.com/science/chaos-theory#ref251589
It is the attraction of mysterious things
Which entice meaning, and depart
When the way becomes clear

It is the lightness of the eternal in the everyday
A longing for loftier things
A beautiful brightness

It is a beauty spot in the light signaling
When we are guided towards words
By an impulse within us

It is like a song trying
To say something, and being content
To borrow from the shadows
And say nothing

The butterfly effect is invisible
The butterfly effect is always there. (A River 70)

Darwish describes the butterfly’s “attraction of mysterious things, /which entice meaning” (line 4) and then “depart/when the way become clear” (line 5), implying that even though the butterfly attracts meanings, it also moves or shifts from the meanings making way for new meanings. Furthermore, the butterfly effect represents the “lightness of eternal in the everyday” (line 6), i.e., looking for permanence within the impermanence of the “everyday” while simultaneously
“longing for loftier things/a beautiful brightness” (line 7,8). Notice how for Darwish the butterfly’s attraction to the mundane and everyday life becomes the inspiration for the living instead of the magnificent. In the next stanza, Darwish describes the butterfly effect taking the form of “a beauty spot in the light” that can guide human. For the poet-speaker the butterfly holds a spiritual and secular energy “like a song trying/to say something” (line 9) and “borrow from the shadows and say nothing” (line 11). Therefore, within the series of repetitive qualities of the butterfly’s effect and within this paradoxical dynamism —between visibility- invisibility, here-there, life-death, absence-presence, permanence, and impermanence— the poem can be marked as a possibility where through the butterfly motif Darwish is describing the need for a novelty of a poetic imagination that looks at the “lightness of eternal in the everyday” (line 6).

Like Darwish, in Open Close Open, Amichai uses the butterfly motif in his poems in unusual settings simultaneously subverting its religious and nationalistic symbolisms. For instance, the poem “Gods Change, Prayers Are Here to Stay” is a secular mediation on God that is removed from a conventional theological image and construct of God. In section 19 or section 16, the poet is describing a person wearing the tallis like a butterfly. The poet writes:

Whoever puts on tallis when he was young will never forget:
Taking it out of the soft velvet bag, opening the folded shawl,
Spreading it out, kissing the length of the neckband (embroidered or Trimmed in gold). Then swinging it in a great swoop overhead

183 In “Amichai’s God” Glenda Abramson explains how the Palmach generation/first generation Israeli poets (participating in the Haskalah) detached themselves from the past to reinterpret the biblical and rabbinic sources of God.

184 Two versions of the poems are found in translations: Stephen Mitchell 19 and, Chana Bloch 16 (including the missing sections).
like a sky, a wedding canopy, a parachute. And then winding it
around his head as in hide-and-seek, wrapping
his whole body in it, close and slow, snuggling into it like the cocoon
of a butterfly, then opening would-be wings to fly. (Open 37)

Amichai gives a creative spin to the image of a devout Jewish man who wears his religious
garment in preparation to be of service to God through prayer. This man is wearing his prayer
shawl, wrapping his body with it, and snuggling like a cocoon ready to turn into a butterfly and
fly. Amichai describes the tallis to be striped instead of checkered like black and white believing
that these stripes “come from infinity and to infinity they go”, marking infinite possibilities. The
stripes on the tallis holds supreme religious significance in Judaism since the fringes, knots, and
thread of the tallis corresponds to the number of commandments in the Torah. However,
Amichai describes the stripes on the tallis in two secular ways: by comparing the stripes to the
wings of a butterfly and to airport runways, thus, breaking away from a Judeo-religious symbol
to a novel interpretation. It is noticeable how Amichai’s treatment of the butterfly’s motif
presents a secular and modern metaphoric language that releases the religious gravity of the
Tallis to freedom, flight, and an escape.

The imagery of the butterfly reappears in the poem “What Has Always Been” where the
poet is attempting to create a literary lineage with the first woman poet in Hebrew Rahel
Bluwstein. Reworking and intertextualizing Rahel’s poem “Perhaps” in “What Has Always
Been”, Amichai disrupts the poetic memory of Rahel’s poem by interposing his own voice or
song “sing[ing] of what has always been, what truly [emphasis mine] has been”. In other words,

185 A Tallit is used to bury a pious Jew. For more information on Tallit see https://www.britannica.com/topic/tallit.

186 Rahel Bluwstein’s poem “Perhaps” is available on the Anthology of Modern Hebrew Poetry, 1966.
Amichai’s poet-speaker wants to reveal the “true” narrative of Rahel’s poetic memory. While Rahel’s poem does not poetically contain any historical residue from her past before Rahel’s migration *Aliyah* to Palestine, Amichai resurrects her Russian past symbolically on the wings of a butterfly:

I want to sing of Russian shirts embroidered in the colors of love
And the colors of death, Russian shirts buttoned up or open at Throat
For easy breathing, for singing for hope.
Russian shirts like monarch butterflies or winged angels (*Open 61*).

Amichai is using the butterfly metaphor as a symbolic motif of freedom to unlock Rahel’s repressed nostalgia and trauma present in her poem “Perhaps”. Amichai compares the Russian shirt, like the tallis, with the wings of a butterfly or an angel of history which must not be repressed. The shirt flying like a butterfly symbolizes Amichai’s pressing desire to find freedom in their (the Hebrew poets) poems. The poem proceeds to a montage of Israeli landscape and the poets desire to remember the past as a practice for freedom. Amichai subverts the use of Israeli landscape for the purpose of romanticizing Zionism, i.e., the making of Israel. Instead, his description of the landscape is secular, erotic, and human, for instance notice how Amichai describes the promised land with sensual sensibilities:

…The way she moves between past and future,
Between it-was-good and it-may-yet-be, between doubt and certainty
Sways in her hips and thighs like a dance. (*Open 65*)
In stanza 7, Amichai once again secularizes the historically significant places such as the Mount Hermon\textsuperscript{187} or the Dead Sea by bringing our attention to the living: the poet speaker sitting at his desk with a stone carved with “Amen”. The poet reduces the magnanimity of religion, religious language and symbolism, and God to the mundane ordinary secular life: from mount Hermon to a desk. And while the stone represents the weight of Jewish history it simply functions as a paper weight on his desk to “weigh down papers so they won’t fly”. The poet compares the stone as “a thing of beauty, a toy of history and fate…a hand grenade” that didn’t kill the poet-speaker, and thus sits on his desk “free as a butterfly”. The contrasting imageries of fragments of a hand grenade with a butterfly is intriguing to say the least: a man-made device of destruction compared to the beauty of a butterfly in search for freedom.

One of the last examples of Amichai’s use of the butterfly motif appears in the poem “And Who Will Remember the Rememberers?”, from where the title of this collection of the poems Open Close Open has been chosen. In a sardonic tone, the poem begs the readers to keep questioning the relevance of remembering and memorializing the dead knowing fully well that no one will remember the rememberers. In accordance with the Jewish historical trajectory, Amichai includes himself in the category of the rememberers: the Palmach generation or first generation of Israelis, who remembers, grieves, and laments the loss of their fathers in the holocaust, i.e., the remembers. In section four, the poet asks:

And what should our lament be? David’s lament over Saul and Jonathan:

“swifter than eagles, stronger than lions”, that is what our lament should be.

\textsuperscript{187} Mount Hermon has significance in Judaism. It is one of the ancient and majestic mountains in Israel.
had they really been swifter than eagles
they would have soared high above the war
and would not have been hurt. From down here, we would have
seen them
and said: “There go the eagles! There is my son, my husband
my brother”

And had they really been stronger than lions
they would have stayed like lions, and not died like human beings. (Open 170)

While the tradition of grieving is to elevate the status of the dead, Amichai’s poet immediately
humanizes the dead by breaking superficial and religious delineations of the dead as winged
creatures, high-spirited eagles, or strong lions. The poet moves away from the symbolism of
these winged creatures as lofty ideals of the dead. In the following section, with unusual use of
metaphors, the poet comments how a certain object, person, or an event becomes memorable for
praise while forgetting the aftermath of such legendary praises of the dead. For instance,
Amichai compares this case to that of a fruit of the jasmine versus a jasmine flower. The poet
claims that no poet has sung praises of the fruit of jasmine but sung drunken odes to the jasmine
flowers. And, while the life of the jasmine flowers is short lived like “a butterfly’s life or the life
of a star”, no one thinks about the fruit of the flower. Here the butterfly motif appears differently
than what have been discussed thus far. Unlike previous descriptions of the butterfly as the
symbolism of independence, infinity, beauty, romantic past, here the butterfly represents brevity
of life. In line with the romantic tradition and the use of winged creatures, Amichai chose the
butterfly motif instead of high-spirited eagles or lions to represent the dead to subvert and
challenge the notion of the dead. For him selective remembering and memorializing the dead is
not only problematic but pointless. Life, like the butterfly, moves in a fleeting motion, and the act of memorializing or preserving seems to be a futile attempt since the best way to remember is to forget. In section seven, the poet says:

And who will remember? And what do you use to preserve memory?  
How do you preserve anything in this world?  
You preserve it with salt and with sugar, high heat, and deep-freeze,  
Vacuum sealers, dehydrators, mummifiers.  
But the best way to preserve memory is to conserve it inside forgetting  
So not even a single act of remembering will seep in  
And disturb memory’s eternal rest. (Open 171)

While it can be argued that Amichai is challenging the nationalist practice of remembering the dead, he is also going against such distinctive acts of remembering and forgetting. To Amichai, the brevity of the butterfly’s life is a symbolic representation of human life where the death of the human is not compared as eternal spirits. In other words, the magnified status of the death, a narrative to preserve national history and national memory, is subverted with the butterfly motif as fleeting, short lived moment. While Israeli nationalism demands the preservation of such memories and grand heroic narratives, Amichai wants to move away from the stagnancy of the dead to the movement in-between—a vacillation of “forgotten, remembered, forgotten/ Open, closed, open”. As the translator of Amichai’s last book of poems, Kronfeld explains how the readers, specifically Americans, tend to qualify Amichai’s poetic aesthetics and the religious intertexts present in his last poem collection as nationalist or religious (The Full 72). Thus, reading these motifs closely becomes imperative to notice Amichai’s poetic novelty that operates
in-between, between forgetting and remembering, and by secularizing and humanizing life and death.

Comparably, a last example of this section includes the reading of Darwish’s poem where the butterfly motif is represented to challenge the nationalist determinism of his poetry. For instance, in the poem “Assassination”, Darwish’s poet-speaker complains how the critics imposes a certain form of metaphoric reading of his poems that must always turn into an anthem for the Palestinian nationalistic movement. Darwish writes:

The critics kill me sometimes:
they want a particular poem
a particular metaphor
and if I stray up a side road
they say: 'He has betrayed the road'
And if I find eloquence in grass
they say: 'He has abandoned the steadfastness of the holm oak'
And if I see the rose in spring as yellow
they ask: 'Where is the blood of the homeland in its petals?'
And if I write: 'It is the butterfly my youngest sister
at the garden door'
they stir the meaning with a soup spoon
And if I whisper: 'A mother is a mother, when she loses her child
she withers and dries up like a stick'
they say: 'She trills with joy and dances at his funeral
for his funeral is his wedding'
And if I look up at the sky to see
they say: 'Poetry has strayed far from its objectives'

The critics kill me sometimes
and I escape from their reading
and thank them for their misunderstanding
then search for my new poem. (A River 56)

When the critics of Darwish’s poems do not find the metaphor that supplements the writing of the nation they label Darwish as the betrayer. Every romantic inspiration and gesture Darwish seek to make in his poems are misconstrued within a nationalistic framework. Natural and botanical imageries such as grass, roses, butterflies, or sky loses its aesthetic meaning to the dominant symbolism of the nation. While Darwish attempts to recreate and reconceptualize the language for his poems for novelty and freedom, the critic continues to impose the reading for the Palestinian nationalism. According to the critic in this poem, each metaphor that the poet works with must be representational of Palestine. For Darwish the process of poetic creation and novelty becomes a frustrating process under such strict nationalistic lens. Thus, in this poem, the poet-speaker declares that his poetic language does not always reflect the struggle for nationalistic purpose. Rather, his metaphors, the landscape, the oak trees, the yellow roses in the spring and the butterfly in the garden become a symbolic representation of itself. Thus, shifting

188 Amos Oz in “Meaning of homeland” describes how fraught the concept of traitor is in context of Israel and Palestinians nationalistic allegiances. Oz writes:

I shall have to reformulate some accepted phrases about identity and identification, because there has been a massive upheaval recently, an erosion of words and their meanings: ‘Jewishness’, ‘Zionism’, ‘homeland’, ‘national right’, ‘peace’—these words are being dragged into new spaces, and laden with interpretations that we could not have imagined previously. And anyone who stands up and speaks out these days risks being stoned in the marketplace and suspected of Jewish self-hate or betraying the nation or desecrating the memory of the fallen…. (79)
the use of these motifs and diverting them from the nationalistic representation to the personal representation becomes an act of novelty and freedom.

All this discussion of the butterfly motif in both Amichai and Darwish’s poetry reveal the poets’ relentless pursuit in contesting regimented readings of their poems in connection to the Palestinian or Israeli Self and nationalistic determination. The butterfly motif in both poets’ poem represents a desire for secular symbolism, a representation of the living and human life stripped from the grand narratives of legendary tales to that of the secular and mundane. Such experimentation of the butterfly motif in the various representational capacity discussed thus far stand as a testimony to Amichai and Darwish’s desire to embrace an exilic consciousness and aesthetic that deliberately either interrupts or challenges their respective nationalistic narratives. Therefore, the butterfly motif becomes the new metaphor, a representation of a new poem or a new language that is worldly, secular, and human instead of the divine or nationalistic. Darwish explains this as a negotiation to find “a new horizon between [his] national identity and aesthetic identity” where their poetry will be judged solely by their merits, by the human condition and their living and not by extenuating circumstances [historical or religious] (Palestine 39).

**The Banality of Ordinary Life and God’s Exile**

In continuation with the poets’s need for an aesthetic identity, the closing section of this chapter will explore the representation and treatment of the human, as a rhetorical trope, and its implication in reading Amichai and Darwish’s last poetry books. This section explores how a return to the focus of human, its struggle with inner forms of exile and its representation of the ordinary living or banality as a motif can become the aesthetic representation of late style.
In her controversial essay “Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil (1963)”, Arendt explains how evil is not an inherent quality, rather a product of the unthinking being lacking originality of thoughts. For Arendt evil is banal and unoriginal largely depended on the outcome of a subservience of the evildoer to their material conditions. However, in this concluding section of the argument regarding the exilic consciousness and the need for exilic aesthetics, the concept of banality is addressed with a different force. Late works of Darwish and Amichai explores the banality of the mundane events of life as an active form of thoughtlessness—a force of resistance and a return to living— instead of engaging in nationalisms that the poets are pushed to execute. Thus, for the poets, unlike Eichmann’s thoughtlessness, the de-politicized banality of ordinary life and human activity becomes the performance against the grain, against the duty of national politics—an idleness that works against the operatives of the nationalisms. All of this emerges as a strategy for the poets late style poetic meditations. The following passages will unpack the ways the exilic poets use the representation of the mundane and banality of life under conflict presenting a form of involuntary praxis to move against its (cultural and political) grain and the responsibility to evoke national life and national identities in their poems. Arendt describes how the focus on the personal human life can become political. She writes:

The chief characteristic of this specifically human life, whose appearance and disappearance constitute worldly events, is that it is itself always full of events which ultimately can be told as a story, establish a biography, it is of this life… that Aristotle said that is somehow is kind of praxis (Human Condition 97).

Thus, how did Amichai and Darwish turn the banality of ordinary life into a force of protestation? Chana Kronfeld observes Amichai as a poet who resisted the role of the “great poet” even though his poetry was revolutionary in context of Israel’s establishment. Kronfeld
describes Amichai as a poet who has an “everyman appearance in an unaffected manner” (The Full 2). In conversation with David Montenegro, Amichai explains his relationship to ordinary living:

I believe poets start so low that our high is to do things that so-called normal do, like having children and working for your life and doing things like every carpenter to doctor to anyone else. So actually, my high is to live normal [laughs], an ordinary life. That’s why I enjoy things—children and more, because to me they are high (18).

In the rest of the conversation, and repeatedly, Amichai highlights how poets in Israel write poetry under pressing political conditions, and it is nearly impossible for the poets to be apolitical, yet his last poetry collection Open Closed Open heavily focuses the self, finding humanity in-between love and war, between poetic meanderings, and obligations.

Similarly, Darwish wants his poetry to turn its attention to the human and its force of life caught in the mundane events from the boundaries of its historical condition. In conversation with his interviewees189, Darwish explains why it is important for him to “renew and multiply his forms” and resist the concept of poet-prophet (Palestine 80). Stated earlier in the introduction of this chapter, for Darwish, the heroes of his poems are “simple people who look within themselves to create a private space, marginal beings who wonder about their existence without having a warrior spirit and without great lyricism” (Palestine 80). Darwish underscores that the “epic is today a quest for the individual, which has nothing to do with the representative function of the poet” and that the poet no longer “represent either a cause or a people or a group; he

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189 Conversation with Palestinian novelist and film director Liana Badr, poet, novelist, and scholar Zakariyya Muhammad, and historian Mundher Jaber in “Our Present Does Not Decide Either To Begin Or To End” (Palestine 84-90)
represents only himself” (Palestine 80). Thus, in A River Dies of Thirst, Darwish closely look at the human to articulate a kind of humanity where “poets can now explore their own universes, tell of their lives, tell of their concerns, without having to submit to patriotic pressure” (Palestine 81). The poet underscores:

We need to choose from our situation whatever allows us to evolve toward the human.

We must disengage ourselves from the moment, which is made up all the external political pressures, to contemplate the humane in us. The great majority of our Palestinian poetry deal with the Palestinian cause and remains mute with regard to the humanness of this people, in its existence and its questioning. In this poetry, the topic at hand is more important than the essence. A great cause, however, is formed of a multitude of small bits of humanity. And there will be no true liberation unless we succeed in extricating ourselves from the general them [of Palestine] in order to explore the human in this theme. Otherwise, our literature will only be a long political document (Palestine 85).

Thus, arguably, the force of mundane events and the representations of the banality of ordinary life is strategically employed as a motif to resist the tendencies of nationalistic determinisms. The attention to the details of the banal becomes instrumental, both as a stylistics and subject matter, to bring the discussion of the human artifice against the backdrop of nationalistic totalities. In other words, the exile who is in a perpetual state of being the outsider, the pariah, the outcast can rethink its relation to himself, contrapuntal yet inward, an absolute antithesis to Eichmann who remains one—at home. This inward exploration and a separation from unity, situated Said and Arendt to take radical secular positions discussed in the introduction of this chapter. Similarly, the following close readings will display how both Amichai and Darwish
A perfect example of Darwish’s return to the human from its teleologic nationalistic commitments is explored in the poem “The Rest of a Life”. Treating the cadences of death as the ultimate point of return, the poem captures a dialogue between the poet-speaker and someone who is asking him what the poet-speaker would do if he happens to know that he will die today, this evening. The poet-speaker replies:

I will look at my watch
Drink a glass of juice
And crunch on an apple
And observe at length an ant that has found her day’s supply
Of food (A River 20).

The poet-speaker continues to list the daily, mundane things he would do to pass the day such as taking a “long shower”, “looking nice”, work at his desk, prepare his last meal, take naps between two dreams, read a canto of Dante and half of Mu’allaqa and “see how [his] life goes from [him]/into other people, and not wonder who will take its place” (A River 21). Surprised by his answers the interviewer asks, “just like that?”, to which the poet reassures “just like that”. In fact, the poet-speaker expresses:

I will comb my hair
And throw the poem, this poem
In the rubbish bin
Put on the latest shirt from Italy
Say my final farewell to myself with a backing of Spanish violins
Then
Walk
To the graveyard (A River 21)

Notice the simple characteristics of the verses, lacking overt metaphors, grandiosity, or poetic gestures. Instead, the poem’s inclination to the ordinary life is held by conversational verse forms—nearly atonal in opposition to lyricism or symphony. The poem reflects the human, and his humanity. There is no grand reconciliation of his self and without the need of it, the contrapuntal and polyglot speaker who reads Dante and Mu’allaqā and listens to Spanish music is ready to bid farewell to the self.

Or, for instance in the poem “Two Strangers”, the poet-speaker’s irreconciled exilic consciousness becomes his truth when “he looks in the mirror and sees a stranger like him/ looking at him” (A River 25). The stranger and the estranged both are present within the fractured self. In fact, Darwish’s poetic protagonist’s self dissolves like the butterfly/ moth’s union with the fire or God. For example, in the poem, “Summer and Winter” the poet-speaker’s exasperation is evident while contemplating how many lives have been lost on the return journey. The poem ends with the imagery of “the butterfly circling around in the light/ and it burnt up its tears (A River 65)” expressing the desire to absolve from definitive explorations of the self that has exhausted the poet from the beginning of his poetic career. Instead, in a series of poems in this collection, the poet seeks to return the human to human with the declaration “I am not Alexander the Great/ and I am not Diogenes”190 (A River 79). The poet believes such renunciations and indifference can become a philosophy of life— “one aspect of hope” (A River

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190 Poem “The Indifferent One” from A River Dies of Thirst.
79) for Palestinian poetry. A final example of such disinterested look at the self is dramatized in the poem “I was Not with Me”. The poem is as follows:

Staring at the ceiling, resting my face on my hand, like somebody stealing up on a fresh idea, or lying in wait for a gleam of inspiration. After few hours I realize I wasn’t’ there on the ceiling, or here on the chair, and my mind was blank. I was absorbed in nothing, in total, complete emptiness, separated from my being, sheltered by a benign absence, and free from pain. I was neither sad nor happy, for nothingness has no connection to emotion or to time. Not a single memory shook me awake form this trance, and no fear of my fate disturbed my obliviousness to the future. For some reason, I was sure I would live until tomorrow. I could not hear the sound of the rain shattering the smell of the breeze outside, or the flutes bearing the inside away. I was nothing in the presence of nothing, and I was calm, trusting, confident. For how lovely it is for a person to be nothing, only once, no more! (A River 71)

In an essayistic and prosaic poetry form, the poem becomes the declaration for nothingness, a dissolving of the self, the truce with the search of the self and homogeneity. The poem takes this nonsense and absence positively as an interiority and a form of exilic consciousness that is beyond redemption in the form of any definitive claims. The defamiliarization occurs at the level of minute details of the house and its relation to the self that has no connection to emotion or to time. The poem presents Said’s argument of late style as aesthetic reflections about the passages of human life. Unlike bourgeoisie western literature of bildungsroman, idealism and disappointments, Said argues how the late style acquires new idioms (On Late 6). Said was particularly interested in the lateness as a factor of style— “a style that involves a nonharmonies, nonserene tension, and above all, a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going
against…” [ellipsis not mine] (On Late 7). Therefore, the reading of the poem “I was Not with Me”, exemplifies such nonserene tensions, an unproductivity or thoughtlessness that pushes the poet-speaker to dwell in the banality of his living “for how lovely”, the poet says, “it is for a person to be nothing, only once, no more” (A River 71).

Amichai, on the other hand, did not completely forsake the poetic form for a prosaic aesthetic exploration of the human. However, the use of his metaphors has taken different shape as he humanizes the Jewish man’s religious responsibility and the sacrifices needed for the reestablishment of Judea in Palestine. Open Close Open functions as an allegorical form of the Qohelet filled with multi-layered elusive biblical associations standing against the mundane human condition. In a sense, Amichai is deliberately undercutting the solemnity of religion through trivial human events. This, argued thus far, operate as a strategy and a late style poetic meditation to describe a world where Amichai’s poetic protagonists emerge as secular and radical abandoning the magnanimity of God’s promises. His post-cynical humanism is coming from an acute sense of exilic consciousness and suffering leading his poetry to a language of new metaphors. In the article “Amichai’s Counter-Theology: Opening Open Closed Open”, Kronfeld and Bloch describe Amichai’s last poem collection filled with late style mediations where the poet is embracing and demonstrating a fractured landscape and fractured self like the broken gravestone that sits like “a thing of beauty, weighing down papers so they won’t fly away” (Open 66). Amichai performs a morphing of the theological categories with that of the banality

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191 Bloch and Kronfeld open the article with a reference of a gravestone which is apparently from the Jewish cemetery which is also known as Amichai’s birthplace Wurzburg, Germany. Bloch and Kronfeld explain how a German Professor of theology reconstructed the broken pieces of this gravestone as a gift for Amichai. Open Close Open have five poems referring to this stone carved with Amen however Kronfeld and Bloch argue, unlike the German professor, Amichai’s poems do not seek to reconcile a wholesome unity of the stone, a metaphor for his Jewish past, and the self (153).
of life towards a bricolage and anti-anthropocentric representation of the self. For instance, in the poem “Summer and the Far End of Prophecy” Amichai describes:

Through the window that is not there, we see our children
Searching the old ruin for toys they lost yesterday
And turning up broken clay jars from centuries ago.
The chasm between generations fills up with dust and sand,
Human bones, animal bones, a multitude of broken vessels,
Broken jars speak the truth. A new jar is the lie of beauty. (Open 81).

For the poet, the in-betweenness in the imagery of a broken jar, a liminal space that the exilic consciousness hold, speaks the truth. A new jar, Amichai claims, is the lie of beauty. This section of the poem empowers the exilic chasm, the gap that fills in everything from dusts and bones to multitude broken vessels. The past life is not annulled, and a fresh concept is a lie. The irreconcilable unmediated contrapuntal and fragmented history can only speak the truth.

Kronfeld and Bloch describe this affinity to the chasm and the representation of the life as a brief interim between two infinites as Talmudic mashal or parable (“Amichai’s Counter” 157).

Neither Open nor Close directly represent only life or death, rather Kronfeld and Bloch argue, Amichai’s “key concepts are always unstable and multivalent, accumulating a wide variety of meaning in the course of the book, some deliberately inconsistent” (ibid). That inconsistency, Amichai believes in-between open closed open is where the human lies. Religious metaphors and symbolism break down from the weight of the holy and enters the human scene. Amichai’s

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192 Amichai writes in the poem “I Wasn’t One of the Six Million: And What Is My Life Span? Open Closed Open”:
Open closed open. Before we are born, everything is open
In the universe without us. For as long as we live, everything is closed
Within us. And when we die, everything is open again.
Open closed open. That’s all we are. (Open 6)
God is a photographer “who develops pictures in His darkroom (Open 6), a God who makes mistakes (Open 31), a blind God who the poet wants to “lead him around/and tell him what he doesn’t see”, a God who “covers his eyes, like a child playing blindman’s bluff” (Open 40). In the poem, “God Change, Prayers are here to stay”, Amichai’s humanization of God is a refusal of the divine interpellation that dominates religious narratives of human life. Amichai’s God is a prayer that human beings created (Open 40), a god that is like:

a revolving door, which turns, turns, on its hinges
In and out, whirling and turning
Without a beginning, without an end.

…

God is a staircase that ascends
To place that is no longer there, or isn’t there yet.

… (Open 40).

Throughout the collection, the poet subverts the scaredness of a prophecy yet to come with a mundane, if not profane, metaphor. The poet writes:

…Oh, the great prophecy
Of what is past or what is yet to come.
And there, at the far end of prophecy,
A swimsuit spread out to dry. (Open 84)

It is almost impossible to miss Amichai’s humor and ironic tone present in these poems. The narrative of great idealism—the prophecy—is interrupted by the banal object from an ordinary life: a swimsuit. Throughout this collection, Amichai’s deliberate playful blasphemy breaks the
binary of the holy and the mundane. In another instance, Amichai describes a poetic representation of God in the most humane and secular framework. Amichai writes:

When God packed up and left the country, He left the Torah
With the Jews. They have been looking for Him ever since,
Shouting, “Hey, you forgot something, you forgot”,
And other people think shouting is the prayer of the Jews. (Open 40)

In all this counter-theological critique and playfulness through the lens of “a post-cynical humanist”\textsuperscript{193}, even Amichai’s God chose his own exile, leaving the country. The poet seeks to democratizes God’s power and failure with a human shape. The human inquiry of God highlighting his exile, deepens and questions the conjectural representations of monotheism. Amichai extends Said’s and Arendt’s concept of non-identity identity—a challenge towards fixated identities—and applies to God’s identity. He writes:

The God of the Christians is a Jew, a bit of a whiner
And the God of the Muslims is an Arab Jew from the desert,
A bit hoarse.
Only the God of the Jews isn’t Jewish. (Open 41)

Amichai directly challenges God’s non-Jewish identity. Said late style lectures, collected as essays in \textit{Freud and the Non-European} picks the premise of the heterogeneous “origin” of Jewish history to argue against fixated, national, or theological, identity formations. Said argues that Freud’s profound insight is that the foundation of the Jewish identity, in connection to Moses who was an Egyptian—a non-Jewish Jew—, is always as an outsider (Freud 54). Said

\textsuperscript{193} Kronfeld writes “compassion for [the] disenfranchised people is an early expression of what Amichai refers to repeatedly later on in his career as his ‘postcynical humanism’, refusing the categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (\textit{The Full 139}).
further argues “this non-Jewish, non-European history has now been erased, no longer to be
found in so far as an official Jewish identity is concerned” (Freud 45) and yet this “unresolved
sense of identity is so fruitful an example” (Freud 55). As such, Amichai’s meditations on the
banality of life, and the unresolved self and fractured history and landscape, argued thus far,
become the counterpoint of the unproductive productivity against the grain. In Open Close Open,
the poet finds sanctuary in the moment at the “standing at the crossroad/ and intersections, in
jungles and deserts, /showing each other where to turn, what the right way is” (8). Amichai’s
poet no longer fights to repress his own humane narrative. He says:

We lived in many houses and left remnants of memory
In every one of them: a newspaper, a book face-down, a crumpled map
Of some faraway land, a forgotten toothbrush standing sentinel in
A cup—
That too is a memorial candle, an eternal light. (Open 89)

Amichai’s exilic consciousness demystifies the inside/outside with a de-familiarizing and
disclosive uniqueness. He is Arendt’s conscious pariah, whose “questions are cunning and
concealed/ like baited fishhooks” (Open 120). Amichai’s poetic-speaker asks:

…Where is that man who was here a moment ago,
When do the latitudes cross the longitudes—all a nudge and a wink
At death. Where is Palmach Street. Where is the street
That used to be Palmach street. Where is the Palmach
They Palmach they turned into a street, and the street they turned into a crossroad.
What remains? Move and countermove.
When they meet, they create turbulence. East and west will never meet,
Like two halves of a tunnels that is badly planned.
What remains, The sense of expansion and the sense of contraction,
Expansion like night of stars,
Contraction like a mouth puckering at the tase of lemon.
What was and what might have been.
Deeds and the empty gestures of deeds along the roadside
like rows of trees lining the boulevard (Open 120)
Notice how the punctuation of the poem undermines the traditions of grammar. Despite being questions, they remain statements for Amichai. For the poet the only question that continues is to think about the remains evoked in the poem through the refrain of “what remains” marking Adorno’s negativity—an anti-Hegelian synthesis—. Amichai wants to capture the “remains” between move and countermove, between expansion and contraction. The secular landscape, its trees and fruits stand as contrapuntal witness to the never meeting counterpoint of the east and the west.

Thus, the exiled human history for Darwish and Amichai is as a non-linear dispersion, an incoherent account of life and living. The poets’ late style exilic aesthetics, represented in their late works, instead of reconciling the fissures between their national identity and aesthetic identity go down into its depth with a creative force. As such the question of binational politics for both Amichai and Darwish extended for different possibilities discussed thus far. The framework has both expanded and contracted from the principle of cohabitation to the depths of human exilic predicament that is universal where like Said, Arendt, Amichai and Darwish even God is out of place.\footnote{Reference to Edward Said’s Memoir Out of Place.}
Postscript

A contrapuntal reading of the exilic consciousness of Yehuda Amichai and Mahmoud Darwish’s poems demonstrates that their most consistent poetic commitment is to the varied and shifting conceptions of their relative nationalisms and the polemics of identities. All three chapters unfold the complications of nationalistic and identity politics present in their poetry—a topic and subject matter that both poets constantly try to break free from and yet gravitate towards the most. As such, for the exilic poets, the question of identity, home, kinship, romance and belonging remains as an obsessive affair. A contrapuntal reading of Amichai and Darwish, together, offers a unique understanding of an exilic poesis, which digs deep into the different stages of searching for the Self and the Other, not only through selective political reference to Israel and Palestine but in conversation with each other. The problem is neither the labelling of Amichai and Darwish as national poets, nor the cosmetic readings of the poets’ existential predicament as nationalistic. Rather, the problem is the reifying practice of such categorizations that deliberately resist change. For Amichai and Darwish, their love, grief, and banal lives exist in tension with the stagnancy of a totalizing and synchronous system. They exist, as an Israeli and a Palestinian poet, through varied and complex historical developments. As such they are compelled to initiate poetic interrogations of myth breaking and myth making, of construction and reconstruction of national identities, and of overlapping, contrapuntal, heterogenous histories. The only constant in their poems is the repeated breaking and making of narratives, a struggle that is cyclical and repetitive, and yet has the potential for reimagination.
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