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Hebrew Studies, Volume 51, 2010, pp. 329-350 (Article)

Published by National Association of Professors of Hebrew

"DAYS WILL COME AND THEY WILL DEMAND AN ACCOUNT. WHAT WILL I GIVE?": THE DYNAMICS OF SECULARIZATION IN ABRAHAM SHLONSKY'S WRITINGS

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This study deals with the dynamics of secularization in Shlonsky's poetry**.** Contrary to classical descriptions of secularization, this article provides a nuanced description of the way in which Shlonsky's poetry performs secularization in three broad stages: the heretical-pioneering stage, the urban alienization stage, and the mourning over tradition stage. In the first heretical stage, Shlonsky negates religious institutions and calls for an individualist spirituality based on the inner-conscious on the one hand and the secular myth of socialist pioneering on the other. In the second stage of secularization, the same socialist-pioneering myths are secularized and the poet looks to experience modernity in isolation without the support of nation and class and without collective political myths. In the third stage, Shlonsky returns to tradition in order to examine the differences between secular and religious time and to mourn over the lost world of Jewish tradition. The analysis of the secularizing process in this influential Hebrew poet is essential in order to relate the complexities of secularization in this crucial stage of Zionist culture.

Hebrew literature has played a major role in the process of secularization of Jewish culture. Not only is secularization one of the major themes of the classical era of Hebrew literature (1860–1940), dealt with by diverse authors such as Bialik, Agnon, Feierberg, Brenner etc, but the creation of a national literature meant stressing human events in the here and now, rather than divine intervention in the past or expectation for such intervention in the future.[1] Recent studies by Jürgen Habermas and Talal Asad have called into question secularization as a one directional change of focus toward inner worldly empowerment.[2] Secularization often involves cycles of exposure to secular literature, abrupt profane illuminations, invention of "substitute reli-

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[1] Secularization is a contested concept that has been at the center of much of enlightenment and post-enlightenment thinking from August Comte to Theodore Adorno. For the purposes of this article, secularization describes a movement (gradual or dramatic) from an otherworldly orientation to an inner worldly orientation and the marginalization of religion and religious institutions. For a recent review see C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007). For the classic treatment of secularization in Hebrew literature see B. Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu ha-ḥadashah: hemshekh o mahpekhah* (Jerusalem: Shoḳen, 1959), pp. 9–146.

[2] For the recent problematic regarding secularization see J. Ratzinger and J. Haberman, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (trans. B. McNeil; San Francisco, Calif.: Ignatius Press, 2006) and T. Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

gions" (e.g., Nationalism and Marxism) and the re-articulation of tradition.[3] In the context of the Pale of Settlement and Palestine during the first third of the twentieth century, secularization involves an abrupt secularization process which then reverberates to all subsequent social and cultural practices. For most Hebrew writers, this has meant growing up with a traditional religious education, and then in their early adulthood shifting to a wholly secular environment in which they have tried to create a secular Hebrew culture.

The poet Abraham Shlonsky (1900–1973) was a crucial agent of secularization of Hebrew culture and the creation of a secular culture.[4] His literary works represent and effect the most crucial transformation of secularization as it took place in Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s. Shlonsky conducted a successful rebellion against Chaim Nachman's Bialik and his work brought a modernist, secular sensitivity to Hebrew culture which was until this time dominated by Bialik's Jewish romantic nationalism.[5] It is this phase of secularization that was key to the formation of a new type of Israeli culture.[6] Secularization in Shlonsky's poetry is both dramatic and complex and went through distinct phases. The first poetic phase is characterized by a heretical, aggressive, and iconoclastic attitude toward religious tradition. The religious institutions are negated and the attention and love formerly bestowed on God are turned toward the self in an act both self assertive and narcissistic. There is a great identification with the life of the pioneer which is seen as difficult and taxing, ascetic, and ecstatic total fulfillment of the self.

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[3] For abrupt religious conversions to secularity see M. Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993). For Nationalism as catering to religious needs (such as the need for immortality and meaning in suffering) see B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 9–12.

4 For Shlonsky's secularization of "Jewishness" see M. Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 51–53. For Shlonsky as a prototype of secularizer see G. Shaked, "Shall We Find Sufficient Strength? On Behalf of Israeli Secularism," in *The New Tradition: Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Hebrew Union College Press, 2006), pp. 14–28.

[5] For Shlonsky's anti-traditional futurism see Ch. Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentring Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 103–109. For Shlonsky's rebellion against Bialik, see A. Hagorni-Grin, *Shlonsḳi ba-avotot Byaliḳ* (Tel-Aviv: Or-am, 1985).

[6] For Shlonsky's seminal role in Secular Hebrew culture see E. Zakim, *To Build and be Built: Landscape, Literature, and the Construction of Zionist Identity* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 97–102. Also Y. Levin, ed., *Sefer Shlonsḳi: Meḥḳarim al Avraham Shlonsḳi yi-yetsirato* (Tel Aviv, Sifriyat poalim, 1981). I. Zmora, *Avraham Shlonsḳi*. (Tel Aviv: Hotsaat Yaḥdaṿ, 1937). A. B. Yoffe, *A. Shlonski, ha-meshorer u-zemano*, *A. B. Yafeh* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat poalim, 1966).

The second phase of Shlonsky's poetry marks a disappointment with a pioneer's life as a life producing passive contentment and as lacking inner turmoil. This disappointment with this substitute religion of pioneering expresses itself in urban poetry of self alienation. The third phase of Shlonsky's poetry recognizes the loss of religious Jewish tradition and the guilt involved in doing away with this tradition. It is these different phases and the transition between them that I will now explicate fully.

The first phase of Shlonsky's poetry is part and parcel of the total revolution of life and culture which was socialist Zionism. Inspired by the October revolution taking place in Russia, the third Aliya (1917–1932), of which Shlonsky was an integral part, attempted to create an egalitarian and wholly secular society based on agricultural settlements.[7] The pioneers of this Aliya, all came from Orthodox or Hassidic backgrounds but believed in a thorough rejection of a religious way of life as an expression of middle class, (living the life of a house-owner as Shlonsky put it).[8] According to the philosophy of this Aliya, a battle against the self should be waged in which the previous self with its neurotic and narcissistic religious behaviour will be purged by hard physical work and communal living. The Jewish people as a whole will transform themselves and "acquire a body,"[9] they will then rely on different strata of society including agricultural workers and engineers, and will no longer be dominated by religious leaders and capitalists. The first influential poem book written by Shlonsky "Gilboa"[10] describes this endeavor of negating bourgeoisie-religious Diaspora culture and the affirmation of pioneer-settler existence. This negation entails performing acts which actively reject religion, acts which follow what can be called a heretical imperative.[11] This heresy is aimed against bourgeoisie romanticism and traditional religion, against the conventionally beautiful and the gentle. The poetic speaker in these poems negates the "body less" melancholia, the

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[7] See A. Shapira, "The Origins of 'Jewish Labor' ideology," *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture* 3 (2002): 93–113. As well as A. Shapira, "'Black Night—White Snow': Attitudes of the Palestinian Labor Movement to the Russian Revolution, 1917–29," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry an Annual 4: The Jews and the European Crisis, 1914–21* (ed. J. Franke; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 509–543.

[8] See A. Shlonsky, "Dor bli don kichotim," in *Yalkut Eshel: Tseror ma'amarim u-reshimot*, (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1960), pp. 42–45.

[9] See A. Shlonsky, "Meagvania ad symponia," in *Yalkut Eshel: Tseror ma'amarim u-reshimot,* (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1960), pp. 237–239.

[10] A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems in Six Volumes* (vol. 2; Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 2002).

[11] C. Schmidt, "Hateologia hapolitit shel Gershom Scholem," *Theory and Critique* 6 (1995): 149–160. For the original use of the terms see P. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (New York: Anchor Press, 1979).

ennui of everyday life and the excessive use of stars and flowers in romantic poetry. More importantly, he rejects what can be called religious cleanliness and purity and affirms an ethos which embraces life, industriousness, and social justice. In one of the key poems of this period "Tenuvah"[12] the poets contrasts himself with romantic poetry and states that for him a cultivated field is a heart, that is the most important center of things, while the stars themselves are meaningless.

חֲרַזְתֶּם :	You have rhymed
לִבֵּנוּ אַרְמוֹן	Our heart is a palace
הֵיכָל דְּבִיר	an interior sanctuary[13]
רִפְּדוּהוּ בְּטַפִּיטִים וּבְכָל חֵפֶץ יָקָר.	let us decorate it with wall paper and with precious things.
וַאֲנִי לֹא אֵבוֹשׁ :	And I will not be ashamed:
לוּ לִבִּי רֶפֶת	If my heart was a cowshed
אֻרְוָה	A stable
דִּיר	A pen
וְאֶת גֶּלְלוֹ וּפִרְשׁוֹ יַטִּיל בִּי כָּל בָּקָר.	And their excrement and droppings every cattle will throw upon me. [14]

In this key gesture of the poem, the speaker intentionally degrades himself by letting himself be the recipient of the excrements of cows. This act is simultaneously active heresy against notions of religious purity, while at the same time a deification of the fertilizing and thus life giving power of manure. It is a rejection of the cult oriented value of purity and a reaffirmation of the god like value of fertility. The pioneer's act famously resonates with several antecedents, among them the heretical acts of Shabtai Zvi and Yaacov Frank who sought to quicken by them the coming of the messiah.[15] Even more striking is the similarity and the allusions to Jesus Christ in the poem. Like the figure of Christ, the speaker of the poems tries to radically transform Jewish society and religion by identifying with the lowly and by coming in contact with the impure. This self-negation carries with it the authority of selflessness and sacrifice in the name of new values and personal

[12] In A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection*, 2:24

[13] The Devir is the traditional Holy of Holies, the interior sanctuary in the Jewish tabernacle and temple where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and was entered only once a year by the high priest.

[14] All translations in this essay are mine.

[15] G. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973).

transformation. This willingness for sacrifice on the part of the speaker reinforces the supreme value of worldly fertility and life. In subsequent poetry and writings, this iconoclastic gesture turns into a general philosophy of constant spiritual seeking which Shlonsky sees as a secular, individualist alternative to established religion. In his article, "A Generation without Don Quixotes,"[16] which Shlonsky published in 1938, he contrasts institutional religion that is the time-honored "technique of civilization" with the relations between man and man and man and God and faith which signifies the hunger, the unrest of the one who seeks, who demands the direct presence of God:

דת – תרי״ג מצוות, שלווה ושובע של מי שמצא כבר את אלוהיו, ותורתו בתוך מעיו, והוא בעל ביטחון, וכל כובד העול שלו בעולמו המוסרי-הרוחני הוא עול של קיום מצוות, של הוצאה-לפועל, של פולחן ערוך ושולחן ערוך. זוהי, אם אפשר לומר כך, הטכניקה והציביליזציה שביחסים בין אדם למקום ובין אדם לחברו. והיפוכה – האמונה: לא שלווה ולא ביטחון, אלא סערה וחרדה של מחפש אלוהיו, של בא- בטענות, של תובע מן האידיאלי את גילויו הרב, הרב ככל האפשר, את כולו, את כל-כולו.

> Religion—613 mitzvot, tranquility and satisfaction of one who already found his god, and his Torah is in his bowels, and he is secure, and all his burden in his spiritual-moral world is the burden of fulfilling the mitzvoth, of carrying them out, of set worship and set table (Shulchan Aruch). That is if one can say so, the technique and civilization of the relationship between man and god and man and man. And its opposite—Faith: no tranquility and security, but storm and dread of the one who seeks his god, of the coming with complaints, of demanding from the ideal its utmost revelation, its everything, its all and everything.

Shlonsky calls the seeking of the direct presence of the highest ideal (god) "againstness" which he formulates as the true attitude of the great artist and the great heretic:

כי **במוליות** הזאת – אם הורשה לומר כך – הרגשתי תמיד את סודה ויסודה של הגדלות והקטנות אשר ליצור האנושי. והוא, לדעתי, גם סודה ויסודה של האמונה בניגוד לדת. ו... – וזהו עיקר נושאי: גם סודה ויסודה של אמנות- אמת. זוהי אותה אפיקורסות גדולה, שהיא הרליגיוזיות האמיתית.[17]

[16] See A. Shlonsky, "Dor bli don kichotim," in *Yalkut Eshel: Tseror ma'amarim u-reshimot*, (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1960), pp. 42–45. The article was based on a talk given in kibbutz Aphikim and was published April 15, 1938.

[17] A. Shlonsky, "Dor bli don kichotim," p. 42.

> Because in this “againstness”—if I may say so—I have always felt the secret and the foundation of the greatness and smallness of the human creature. And it is also in my opinion the secret and foundation of faith in contrast with religion … and this is my main point: it is secret and foundation of true art. It is the great heresy that is true religiosity.

“Againstness” in Shlonsky sometimes signifies the extremely active search for the ideal while at other times it denotes an inward preparedness for hearing the call when one is chosen. This spiritual call is conceived as an opening to radical otherness that is above personal interests or a socially conditioned ethical injunction.[18] This calling chooses a person (contrary to being consciously chosen by him), takes him away from his regular life and subjects him to an often tragic public life. Shlonsky expresses this new relationship with God by poetically re-staging dialogs from the Bible, especially those which carry universal import such as those with Abraham, Job, and Jonah. A paradigmatic poem in this respect is the poem “Revelation” (התגלות)[19] with which Shlonsky chose to open all published collections of his poetry. In this poem, we witness the classic biblical scene in which Samuel as a young man sleeps in the temple and hears a voice speaking to him at night. At first he mistakes the voice and thinks that it is Eli the high priest calling him, until he understands that it is God’s authentic call (1 Sam 3:1–20).

אֵי-מִי קָרָא לִי: שְׁמַע.	Who has called me: listen.
אֵי-מִי קָרָא בִּשְׁמִי.	Who has called my name.
מַה?	What?
מִי?	Who?
עֵלִי אָמַר: שׁוּב שְׁכָב.	Eli said: go back and lie down.
עֵלִי אָמַר: לַשָּׁוְא.	Eli said: in vain.
עֵלִי אָמַר: אֵין חָזוֹן, כִּי כָּהֲתָה עֵינִי.	Eli said: there is no vision, because my eyes have darkened.

[18] Shlonsky has formulated this philosophy in parallel with the very similar dialogic philosophy of Martin Buber; their main difference being that Shlonsky stresses man’s whole being against God while Buber stress mainly verbal dialog. See M. Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, Scribner, 1958).

[19] A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky’s Poems in Six Volumes* (Tel-Aviv: Sifriyat Po’alim, 2002), 1:9.

אַךְ שׁוּב קֹרָא לִי : שְׁמַע.	However again it calls me: listen
אַךְ שׁוּב קֹרָא בִּשְׁמִי.	However again it calls my name.
אֵיכָה אַעַן : הִנֵּנִי !?	How will I answer: Here I am!?
חֲצוֹת. עֵלִי יָשִׁישׁ עַל יְצוּעוֹ יִתְיַפֵּחַ :	Midnight Eli on his bed cries:
"בָּנַי...הָהּ בָּנַי..."	"My sons…oh my sons…"
וּכְבָר רוֹבֵץ הַיְקוּם בִּי, פָּצוּעַ כַּשְּׁקִיעָה	And already the universe lays inside of me, wounded as a sunset
בֵּין פִּגְרֵי- עֲנָנַי.	Between the corpse of my clouds.
יָדַעְתִּי : הִנֵּה יָבוֹא יְהֹוָה.	I know to here YHWH will come.
הִנֵּה יָבוֹא וִינַשֵּׁק פִּצְעֵיכֶם בְּסָעַר.	Here he will come and kiss your wounds in a storm/rage.
וְעֵלִי זָקֵן מְאֹד. וּבְנֵי עֵלִי נְבָלִים.	And Eli is very old. And his sons are scoundrels.
וַאֲנִי עוֹדִי נָעַר.	And I am still a youth.
אַךְ הִנֵּה שׁוֹאֵג יְקוּם	But here the universe roars
הִנּוֹ כּוֹאֵב וָרָן	Here it hurts and sings
וּבַמִּזְרָח הָאָדֹם אֶצְבַּע בָּרָק לִי קוֹרְאָה.	And in the red east the finger of lightening calls me.
—דַּבֵּר יְהֹוָה כִּי שׁוֹמֵעַ עַבְדֶּךָ.	—Speak YHWH because your servant hears you.

The poem, written in first person, superimposes the young Samuel with the young poet receiving his call for a life of poetry. In the poem, established religion is rejected for a charismatic essentially inward, almost unconscious voice that the boy hears in the middle of the night. The poem represents many oppositions that were expressed in Shlonsky's writing such as between the young Samuel and the old Eli, between dream and realism, between moral innocence and moral fatigue, but most importantly between charisma and institutionalization.[20]

This poem and others like it, in which the speaker of the poem uses a prophetic persona, radically secularizes Jewish culture. First and foremost, they attempt privatization and depolitization of religion which in a sense is a

[20] One can see such binary oppositions as a basis for Shlonsky's world view in: A. Shlonsky, "Mum and metom," in *Turim* (Tel-Aviv, 1933), p. 1, as well as in manifests "Freshness" and "The Melitza" in B. Harshav, *Manifeṣtim shel modernizm* (Ramat-Aviv: Karmel, 2001), pp. 201–204.

direct continuation with the modernization project of the Jewish Haskala.[21] They uphold the individual conscious, the inner voice as the source of ultimate spiritual authority. Second they actively seek to delegitimize religious authority and its institutions by making use of the binary opposition of Prophet-Priest. In his article *Machanayim* (Between camps),[22] Shlonsky explicitly contrasts the Prophet and Priest:

> אכן, שלם אתה עם האלוהים, אישי כוהן גדול, שלם מאד. ישר עשאך אלוהים, מאד ישר. לא קובלנה ולא טענה לך על הבירה, ולא שיח ומדון עם מנהיג הבירה ... ובאמת: על מי, על מה? וכי לא על פי חוקים מתנהג העולם? העל מנהיג הבירה נלין – אנו רק עושי דברו, אנו רק מקבלים ממנו, מקבלים ולא נותנים. ברגש, ברגש נהלך בחצרות בית ה׳. בדממה דקה – ובהכנעה.[23]

> Indeed you are whole with God my dear Priest very whole. God has made you straight very straight. No disputes against the state, no argument against its leaders … and indeed against whom and about what? Does not the world behave according to the laws? Should we complain about the leader—we are just doing his bidding, just receiving from him, receiving and not giving, and so we should walk with feeling in the house of God, in silence—in submission.

The priest is tied to the big house (symbol of the bourgeoisie), in this case, the original house of God (*har habayit*). In this house, one ought to walk in silence and slowly with temperance (*nachat*), one should not raise his voice, the exact opposite of these are the attributes of the Prophet. He is:

> הוא הגבר העומד מחוץ לבית. בחוץ. ברוח פרצים. בערפלים. והרוח קורעת מדים, שוברת כלים.... דין לו עם משטר ואנשי משטר. לכן יפר את הדומיה ועל כן מגורש הוא מבית הדממה.[24]

> The man who stands out of the house. Outside. In the strong wind. In the fog. And the wind rips his uniform, brakes the vessels…. He always disputes and argues with leaders of state. Therefore he always disrupts the stillness and therefore he is always cast out from the house of silence.

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[21] This is indeed the most important message of the Haskala's key book Moses Mendelsohn's *Jerusalem*. See M. Mendlshon, *Jerusalem: Or on Religious Power and Judaism* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983).
[22] A. Shlonsky, "Mum and metom," p. 1.
[23] A. Shlonsky, "Mum and metom," p. 1.
[24] A. Shlonsky, "Mum and metom," p. 1.

According to Shlonsky, the priest (who stands for traditional rabbinic religion) is just a tool of God; his life is circumscribed and safe, he stays in closed places where he leads a quite and gentle life, composed of ritual and learning, a life sheltered from reality. The priest is complacent with the political leaders and perceives the social world as being as it should be. The prophet on the other hand is the one who God speaks through, who stands outside in the rain-storm-snow. The prophet is critical of the rulers and forcibly speaks his mind. Shlonsky uses the figure of the prophet in order to negate the traditional institutes of religion using the biblical tradition. The figure of the prophet like Shlonsky's iconoclastic cultural revolution essentially upholds the attitude of defiance and assertiveness of the here and now.

It is no accident that secularization proceeds by using the mythic figure of the prophet. There is no simple negation of tradition; it is always the case that in order to make a dramatic change one appeals to an even more ancient source. Modernist secularisation always uses myths,[25] in which the people can partake in, such as a collectivist settling of the land, selfless toil, acts that in their asceticism and idealism are very similar to religion itself. Shlonsky's symbolist poetry aims at contending with religion, using religion's own powers. This new religion will be a dialectic advance with regard to Judaism and will incorporate "pagan" values such as physical beauty and sensuality, sensitivity to nature and season.

In his manifesto "BeTzelem" (in your image),[26] Shlonsky expresses what can be called his "neo-pagan" orientation; he argues that people need images, that although Judaism always stressed moral content and not form, and has used the image only as a rhetorical tool, for him it is the moral content that is always discarded into the waste basket of history, and it is the images, the artistic creations of man whether in literature, painting, or sculpture, that win eternal life. Faith needs an image. Impressions and feelings count more than ideas. Even Moses was not content in his belief until he saw God at least from behind.[27] In this manifesto, Shlonsky makes an explicit connection between the cultural importance he wants to ascribe to form and figure and the heretical imperative that explicitly rejects Judaism and affirms paganism. Shlonsky even hints that contrary to the explicit ideological stance, even Judaism is ultimately based on the assurance that Moses received for his faith by seeing God. According to this perspective,

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[25] This belief largely stems from an internalization of Nietzsche's philosophy by the majority of thinkers and poets of the Hebrew renaissance.
[26] B. Harshevsky, ed., *Manifeṣtim shel modernizm* (Karmel: Aviv University, 2001), pp. 205–206.
[27] B. Harshevsky, ed., *Manifeṣtim shel modernism*, pp. 205–206.

images are superior, eternal and make for the basis of values and morals. The basic connection that religion and art makes with people and which sustains people spiritually is through forms and images. It is not values that dictate the form but form which dictates values. The superiority of the myth and of the image means that myths must be used in every cultural change. The belief in the powers of images and the need to transform Hebrew culture using traditional myths has made for extensive use of the Bible by Shlonsky. Sometimes this use is restricted to using biblical vocabulary which is disconnected from its original context, but at other times the dependency and the use of the Bible is profound and can be considered a variation, or a creative deformation of the biblical text. To summarize, the first secularizing phase of Shlonsky's poetry is dedicated to the total negation of traditional religion and the creation of an alternative myth using biblical tradition as a reservoir of forms from which to borrow.

The second phase begins with Shlonsky's disaffection with his life as a pioneer and thus as a partial disengagement with the highest ideals of Zionist Socialism. In 1922, two years after he has immigrated to Palestine, he leaves his life as a pioneer in the group in Ein Charod and moves to Tel-Aviv, then after a short stay, he goes abroad for the duration of two years spent in Paris. During this time Shlonsky writes his most influential poetry which quickly becomes the dominant style in which Hebrew poetry is written between the years 1935—1965 by writers such as Natan Alterman, Leah Goldberg, and others. This poetry has two important characteristics; the first is that it is written in French symbolist style rather than the Cubo-futurist style[28] of his previous iconoclastic phase, and second it represents a poetic speaker who suffers from a self-willed urban alienization, depression, and even psychosis. In poems like "In Tel Aviv" (*betel aviv*) the speaker roams the raining streets and pubs of Tel-Aviv aimlessly, without work, without meaning, suffering from hallucinations and extreme loneliness. This change from cubo-futurism to symbolism is quite sudden and indeed reverses the "normal" historical development since Cubo-futurism as a style came significantly after and negated the pervious symbolist style.

How then are we to explain this dramatic shift in Shlonsky's poetry? The change of style can be understood once we explicate the ideological meaning of these two different styles. Cubo-futurism, the thunderous dramatic style

[28] By French symbolism, I mean the late nineteenth-century French poetry by Stephane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine which constituted a reaction to Naturalism and Realism. By Cubo-futurism I mean the communist version of Italian futurism which reached its peak with the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, who was the official poet of the Russian revolution.

of the Russian revolution, and especially of its leading poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, belongs to an iconoclastic phase in which socialist Zionist pioneering is wholly identified with. The rejection of pioneering as a way of life entails a rejection of corresponding revolutionary style. Moving from the country where active pioneering takes place to the city meant, in the socialist discourse of the time, a reaction toward western capitalism, toward a life of the petty bourgeoisie. Petty bourgeoisie or urban middle class life does not sit well with the revolutionary style of cubo-futurism, and thus Shlonsky adopted the urban sophisticated style of French-Russian symbolism, which was indeed the poetic style of the urban middle class in France and Russia.[29]

Thus the move from pioneering to urban living entailed a change of style to correspond to the new experience, a change from cubo-futurism to symbolism. The poetic speaker of the symbolist style is more intent on describing urban alienization and his estrangement from the world than to promote a call for political change. However, why did Shlonsky choose to disengage from the classical praxis of Socialist Zionism, that is, why did he abandon pioneering?

We may understand the reason for this move from a letter that he wrote to his good poet friend Yitzchak Lamdan.[30] In this letter, Shlonsky encourages Lamdan to leave the pioneering life of agriculture. Shlonsky tells him that the success of Zionism and Bolshevism and their style are a danger to his poetry; they threaten the poetic state of mind and existence with too much satisfaction, too much fulfilment. The life of agriculture has no needles to prick the flesh; it has drops of Bromine (a chemical used to put out fires) which put the soul to sleep.

Shlonsky is well aware that an injunction to move to the city will be seen as anti-progressive; as a reaction, however, he rhymes “you will say that I am a degenerate but I don't care” (תאמר דגנראט אבל לי לא אכפת). It is only urban existence which can provide the poet with the “zig zags,” with the “jolts” needed for poetry. Rather straightforwardly one can gather that it is the same lack of excitement that has led Shlonsky to move to the city.

Another reason which has likely led him to move to Tel-Aviv was the lack of appreciation for culture and poetry of the pioneers themselves who almost exclusively centred on practical work. In the autobiographical article

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[29] The classic writers of the symbolist style like Baudlieare, Verlanie, Mallarmé, Alexander Block etc were all urban poets coming from middle class background.
[30] See U. Shavit, ed., “Shlonsky-Miri-Lamdan,” in *Sefer Shlonsky Aleph* (Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Po’alim, 1980), p. 215.

"From a Tomato to a Symphony"[31] where he relates his pioneering experience, he ironically chastises the pioneers for overdoing it with their anti-cultural revolution:

הלא זה הגיונה של כל מהפכה בראשיתה, שהיא זונקת בקו הגוזמה מן הקצה אל הקצה, עד בוא שיווי-המשקל והפרופרוציות הנכונות. אתמול – משכילים, ארכי משכילים, לעילא-ולעילא מכל משכיל בגויים; היום – בורים-לראווה, פשוטים-וגסים מתוך פרינציפ.... אנו, ב״פוטוריזם״ החלוצי שלנו, לא סגי לנו בכך: את התרבות מעי קרה ביקשנו להשליך אחרי גוונו הכפוף מרוב עיון בספרים. על-כן מתבערים-מדעת היינו, מתיחפים-לתיאבון-ולהכעיס..... ובאי-כושרנו לאחוז כלי-עבודה אחיזה של ממש, על דרך הקבע והמובן-מאליו, הוצאנום מידי פשוטם והפכנום לסמלים ולתשמישי קדושה ... כך ברחנו מעודף הקדושה האחת-לא אל החולין יפה-העול, שקודש וחול משמשים בו בהשלמת-גומלין, אלא אל עודף הקדושה האחרת.[32]

> This is the logic of every revolution in its beginning, that it jumps in an exaggeration, from one end to the other, until an equilibrium and good proportions are reached. Yesterday—Maskilim, over Maskilim more learned then the most learned Goyim: Today—Flauntingly ignorant, simple and crude out of principle…. We in our "futuristic" pioneering wanted to throw off culture as a whole from our back which is weighted down from scrutinizing books. Therefore we became knowingly ignorant, barefoot on purpose and in spite.… in our lack of ability to hold the tools of physical work naturally and as a matter of fact we have divested them of their simple meaning and have turned them into symbols and ritual objects … thus we escaped from one excess sort of holiness not to secularity with its proportionate burdens where the sacred and profane complement each other but to an excess of this other holiness [the holiness of physical work].

In this quote Shlonsky laments the fact that the pioneers have made physical work holy rather than normal. Rather than secularizing Jewish culture to the point where there is a place for the holy and a place for the profane and physical work is relegated to the profane and secular realm of society, the revolution has failed to create a normal secular space and has thus only projected the attitudes of religious life on physical labour. It is this deification of physical labour that Shlonsky criticizes.

In the same article, he relates how he had to hide the fact that he writes poetry from the pioneering group and stressed his physical abilities as a

[31] A. Shlonsky, *Yalkut Eshel: Tseror ma'amarim u-reshimot* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1960), pp. 241–237.
[32] A. Shlonsky, *Yalkut Eshel*, pp. 237–238.

soccer player. This ambivalence regarding pioneering is probably what has led him quickly to Tel-Aviv where he could edit various journals, translate for the theatre, and write poetry.

Although pioneer anti-intellectualism was enough of a reason to leave a pioneer's life, there was a deeper reason for this move which can be seen at work in his poetry and life. Shlonsky's identification with socialist Zionism was only his second identification with a system of belief and practise, the first was traditional Judaism. Shlonsky was raised traditionally in a *heder* (religious elementary school), his family neighboured the family of the famous Rabbi Levi Yizchak Schneerson. The Rabbi's wife, Hannah, was very close to Shlonsky's mother and his son, and the would be Rabbi Menachem Schneerson (the Chabad Rebbe), studied with Shlonsky in the same *heder*.

Shlonsky used to experience religious ecstasy during Jewish holydays, and was often found eating at the Schneerson's since he thought that the food in his house was not kosher enough. The poet's youth is marked by a strong identification with Jewish traditions which partly explains Shlonsky's life-long poetic preoccupation with religion either negating traditional religion, offering spiritual and individualist alternatives to it, or lamenting its loss. The fact that Shlonsky's first deep identification was with Chassidic Judaism and not with Zionism explains why the identification with the second "substitute" ideology is already more ambivalent. This ambivalence with Zionism reveals itself first in the poem "Lech Lecha" [33] (Go you shall go) which is quite tellingly the first poem in Shlonsky's corpus which express sorrow at the loss of the Jewish world.

After writing hundreds of poems and using a great variety of biblical and European themes and images, Shlonsky uses themes taken from the traditional Jewish world for the first time. The name of the poem book refers of course to God's first command to Abraham, however, the speaker's journey in this poem is not toward certainty and faith but toward ambivalence, doubt, even desperateness. The poem describes the speaker as leaving his home without a *talit* and *tfilin* without a father in heaven and with no prayer for the road. He reaches Palestine and hears the new song of the settlers "The Folk of Israel is Alive" (עם ישראל חי), but meeting the "resurrected people" does not satisfy the poet, coming to Israel without faith or belief cannot be a total victory. The poem switches again and again from the speaker's attempt to identify Zionism as the new Jewish religion that can substitute Judaism, to

[33] In A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems*, 2:97.

the realization that the new nationalist faith cannot be true faith since modern, sceptical man is not made from the right "material" for true faith. Thus Shlonsky's first identification with Chassidic Judaism is the strongest and the most privileged, after his heretical revolution and the total affirmation of the values of rebelliousness, a total identification with the nationalist alternative is no longer possible. As seen in the stress on the rebelliousness of the storm in his article, Shlonsky's negation of the traditional Jewish self becomes a pattern in which self-negation, rebelliousness, and skepticism are seen as the essential characteristics of an authentic self.

Two years after moving to Tel-Aviv, Shlonsky moves on to Paris, a move signifying his will to immerse himself in French symbolist poetry and even to further distance himself from the life of the pioneer. Among the reasons for the trip was the plan to use his experiences in Paris as raw material for his poem book *Avney Bohu* (Stones of chaos). This poem book is considered the pinnacle of Shlonsky's urban poetry. The poems in this book are built from exquisitely polished rhymed stanzas (the stones) which convey paradoxically the chaotic, estranging, and hallucinatory experience of the poet as he boards a ship from Jaffa, travels by sea to Trieste and then by train through northern Italy and south of France to Paris. In Paris the poet wanders the streets listlessly at night, meets prostitutes, foreign workers, and the homeless and sinks in a stylized feeling of despair. The poetic experience in Paris can be seen as the ultimate end of a process in which the poet negates his former existence. In Paris, the poet experiences the world of isolation, without community and family without nation or class.

In this phase of his writing, Shlonsky reaches the ultimate consequences of the secularization process. After negating both traditional religion and its political alternative, he is thrown alone onto the alienated world of modernity. His inward experience is radically disrupted, his different senses mix with one another, and his bodily parts are projected on outside objects. Shlonsky's poetry reaches here a culmination of isolation and madness, as our young hero wanders the streets not just lonely and sad but suffering from hallucinations and paranoiac guilt. In the poem "Al Chet"[34] (Over sin), the speaker is being persecuted by an indefinite being, a kind of impersonated super-ego which blames him for witnessing and taking part in a murder.

[34] In A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems*, 3:79–82.

אֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ מִי הוּא מָה הוּא :	I do not know who he is or what he is:
הָעֲזָאזֵל אוֹ אֵלִיָּהוּ	The Azazel or Elijah
אוֹ הַכַּנָּר הוּא כְּרוּת הַיָּד?	Or the fiddler with an amputated hand?
וּמַה מִּמֶּנִי הוּא תּוֹבֵעַ?	And what exactly he claims from me?
וְרַק אַחַת אֲנִי יוֹדֵעַ :	Just one thing I do know:
זֶהוּ אוֹיְבִי אוֹיְבִי לָעַד.	He is my enemy my enemy forever
וְזֶה קוֹלוֹ בָּעֲלָטָה	And it is his voice in the darkness which
רוֹדֵף אַחְרָי :	Haunts me
אַתָּה! אַתָּה!	You! You!

This enemy who pursues the speaker alternates between Azazel (the devil), the prophet Elijah, and an amputated fiddler, all of them figures of the Jewish tradition. These figures of the Jewish tradition torment the poetic speaker in the streets of Paris. One can ask, why are the figures which pursue the poet in these circumstances taken from the Jewish tradition? Why in this extreme setting of urban alienation where experience is at its most secular does the Jewish tradition suddenly reappear? The answer has to do with guilt over the process of secularization itself, which we shall examine later, and the fact that faced with total meaninglessness, with the breakdown of the self, elements of the repressed tradition represent themselves again. The drive for secularization is spent and with it the force which actively repressed tradition which then very partially reappears again. Once this point has been reached, Shlonsky's poetry has exhausted the theme of modernity. After experiencing modernity at its most naked and brutal, Shlonsky's poetry stops representing modernity as well as puts an end to the heretical process. It is at this point that he changes his iconoclasm and starts the process of mourning over the lost Jewish world.

Shlonsky returns to Palestine in 1936 in order to take a position as chief editor of the daily *Davar* as well as translate works for the theater and supervise the way Hebrew is used there. However, in spite of this hectic activity and deep involvement in the classic mediums of modernity (the newspaper, the modern theater, translation of world literature, etc.), his poetry goes back to the traditional world of east European Jewry which seems to be destined to perish in its traditional form.[35] The poem book

[35] This turn was already completed well before the Holocaust that is in the early 1930s, showing the perceived certainty that secularization will effectively eliminate the traditional Jewish way of life.

Metom[36] is the first poem book which is wholly and explicitly devoted to expressing the painful process of secularization. In this book, Shlonsky tries to represent the problems of secular existence (as an expression of lack of faith and tradition) side by side with a process of morning for the lost world of faith. The beginning or middle of the book are dedicated to representing secular existence as the loss of all the religious-familial oriented ways of life which make a person's situation in the world appear natural. The poems in this book especially "Hulin"[37] and "Metom"[38] express existence without faith by using a series of surprising images and metaphors. Just as in "Lech Lecha," Shlonsky uses the biblical command in a surprising way that is as a command toward becoming strange in the world rather than an injection for reaching the safe haven of the promised land, so the poem series "Metom" uses and "deforms"[39] the story of Izchak's sacrifice. The first stanza reads thus:

אַבָּא	Father
הָסֵר הַיּוֹם אֶת הַטַּלִּית-וּתְפִלִּין	Take off the praying shawl and tefillin
וְאָרַחְתָּ עִם בִּנְךָ אֶל דֶּרֶךְ רְחוֹקָה.	And accompany your son to the distant road.
סוֹבֵב הַשַּׁעַר עַל צִירָיו.	The gate turns on its axes,
יָמִים יָבֹאוּ וְחֶשְׁבּוֹן יְבַקְּשׁוּ.	days will come and they will demand an account.
מָה אֶתֵּן?	What will I give?
פָּעֲתָה גְדִיָּה עִם שְׁקִיעַת הַחַמָּה.	A kid bleats in the setting sun.
נֶאֱסַר הַשּׁוֹר אֶל אֲבוּסוֹ.	An ox has been tied to his trough.
אַבָּא	Father
הָסֵר הַיּוֹם אֶת הַטַּלִּית-וּתְפִלִּין	Take off the praying shawl and tefillin
וְנָהַגְתָּ אֶת בִּנְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ רְחוֹקָה	And drive your son to the distant road
אֶל הַר הַמּוֹרִיָּה.	Toward the Moriah mountain.

The poem "Hulin,"[40] which means secular, profane, or non-holy, transforms the myth of the Akedat Yitzchak (Yitzchak's sacrifice). The poem opens with an ironical inversion of the original biblical story. The poetic speaker calls on his father to take off the talith and tefillin and join his son

[36] In A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems*, vol. 2.
[37] A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems*, 2:136.
[38] A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems*, 2:139.
[39] Shlonsky's methods were very much influenced by deformation of religious imagery in Russian poetry. For deformation of religious language in Russian poetry see K. Pomorska, *Russian Formalist Theory and Its Poetic Ambiance* (The Hauge: Mouton, 1968).
[40] A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems*, 2:136.

on the distant road. This opening is highly ironic, unlike the original in which God calls the father Abraham to sacrifice the son, here the son, who is perhaps like God, calls upon the father to go through a new and difficult test of secular existence that starts with taking off the talith and tefillin, that is, by distancing oneself from religion.

This beginning is highly ambiguous, we do not know who will be sacrificed the father or the son. The injunction or command given to the father may hint at the father being a victim to the secularizing tendencies of the son. But the father is not given as sacrifice and the biblical framework is breached. Instead of a new test of faith, we are presented a series of mystical symbolist images, images denoting lack of direction (gate turns on its axes), finality and death (a kid bleats in the setting sun), and limitations of life (the ox tied to the trough). What is the function of these dream-like images that replace the continuation of the biblical narrative? Shlonsky avoids completing the Akeda as a narrative and provides us only with its beginning. This can be interpreted as implying that the modern test of secularist faith (as a new religion) *cannot* become realized in a distinct, well formed, concrete narrative where the hero goes through an objective event like that of the classical biblical story. Modern secular existence is an existence in which one cannot go through a clear test, which then provides and constitutes objective values; it is the person himself who creates meaning and values. This being the case, secular existence is characterized by ambiguity and anxiety, lack of meaning, and the feeling of constrained existence and an arbitrary ending to life. Hence the images of the gate swinging on its hinges, the kid crying toward the setting sun, and the restricted feelings and immobility of the ox that is tied to his trough. The first part of the poem ends in a variation on the opening which brings it closer to the biblical story.

The last stanza repeats with few variations the first stanza, this repetition highlights or draws attention to the few changes that occur and imports them with meaning. (Such repetitions with variations are also used by the biblical narrator and are important clues to the meaning of the text.)[41] Shlonsky makes use of the technique of repetition in the Bible in order to create meaning in this poem. The changes make the story in the last stanza more similar to the original biblical story. The father is active in this last stanza, he leads the son (נהגת) not just keeps his company (ארחת). The explicit mountain of Moriah, which appears in the ending instead of the more

[41] For the importance of variations in biblical narrative see M. Sternberg, "The Structure of Repetition: Strategies of Informational Redundancy," in *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indian University Press, 1985), pp. 365–440.

general and abstract "far away road," returns us as well to the biblical story rather than to some abstract road that one must take in order to become secular. However, the single most important difference between the biblical story and the story as portrayed in this last stanza remains; it is the son himself who commends this sacrifice, commends to sacrifice himself.

What is the meaning of the self-sacrificing Yitzchak in this poem? Shlonsky may have been influenced from midrashic interpretations which posit Yitzchak as heroically sacrificing himself.[42] Alternatively he may have been influenced by Christian readings of the Binding of Yizchak which stress his likeness to Jesus, that is, the voluntary nature of Yitzchak's sacrifice as an important theological event. While clearly both options might be true, it is clear that the poem expresses transformative self-sacrifice in the service of a new set of values and virtues. While in the poem "Tenuvah," these values were the values of fertility; in "Hulin," the self is sacrificed to the largely negative experience of secularity, to a rootlessness and shifting existence. After the use of Yitzchak's binding, "Hulin" easily moves to a modern setting, the poetic speaker becomes an unemployed young man roaming the streets of the metropolis exciting himself with very self aware poetic loneliness and misery, as the poet states:

וּמֵטִיל סְעָרוֹת בִּצְלֹחִית-נִשְׁמָתִי.	Making storms in the small plate of my soul.

That is, self-sacrifice turns to a romantic yearning, to a life seemingly deliberately led in self-negation in uncertainty and angst. The last part of "Hulin" involves a personal appeal to God, a sort of personal modern prayer in which the speaker thanks God for waking him up safe and making him pure.

[42] Shlonsky may have been influenced here from rabbinic interpretations who see Yitzchak as heroically sacrificing himself; see Sh. Spigel, *Meagadot hakeda, piyut al shchitat yitchak utchiato lerbi efraim mibuna* (New York: Mchol Publishing, 1949), or he may have been influenced by Christian readings of the Binding of Yitzchak which stress the voluntary nature of Yitzchak's sacrifice, that is, Yitzchak's likeness to Jesus. See also Y. Feldman, "Yizchak o edipus? Migdar upsycho: Politika begilguli hakeda," *Alpayim* 22 (2001): 53–77.

אוֹדְךָ	I will thank thee
אֲשֶׁר עִם הָנֵץ הַחַמָּה לְיוֹם עֲמָלִי עוֹרַרְתָּנִי	Who with the risen sun to a day of toil has awakened me
וְשָׁלוֹם בַּעֲצָמַי.	And my self is intact.
מִמַּיִם זַכִּים טָהַר גּוּפִי	From pure water, my body is purified
וּמִטַּל בֹּקֶר.	And from the morning dew.

The themes in this prayer are of course a variation on the Jewish morning prayer, which blesses God as one ritually washes his hands, thanks God for creating the body as it is and maintaining it in health, and for getting consciousness back after it was lost during sleep. Shlonsky changes the order of the blessings and adds two foreign elements: the focus on nature and on physical labor which connects the poem to socialistic settler society in which labor in nature is strongly connected to the redemption of humanity.

In the same way in which "Hulin" transforms the biblical story in order to describe the process of becoming secular, the poem "Metom"[43] transforms the basic metaphors of man as a natural being which have been used since the middle ages. The poem "Metom" is divided into four parts. The first part "without God" (באין אלוהים) describes the prediction or existence of traditionally religious man. This description makes use of a basic image in which a harmony, a parallelism, exists between the body of man and the seasons of the year. The first stanza stresses the functional aspects of the body and their "fit" to the traditional calendar.

שְׁסָה גִּידִים לִתְקוּפַת הַדָּמִים	365 tendons for the period of days [blood]
בְּגוּפוֹ שֶׁל בָּשׂר-וָדָם עַל אֲדָמוֹת.	In the body of flesh and blood on the earth
שְׁסָה יָמִים לִתְקוּפַת הַשָּׁנָה	365 days to the period of a year
בִּגְוִיַּת הָעוֹלָם לְמִנְיַן הַחַמָּה.	In the corpse of the world for the counting of the sun.
וְעוֹמֵד לוֹ אָדָם כְּלוּחַ-הַשָּׁנִים	And man stands as a slate of years,
בְּטַבּוּר הָעוֹלָם	In the navel of the world

For every one of 365 tendons in the body corresponds a day, man stands in the center, the navel of the universe. Time has meaning; it is not just an accumulation of content. The poem expresses the religious meaning of time.

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[43] In A. Shlonsky, *The Complete Collection of Abraham Shlonsky's Poems*, 2:139.

Time's beginning in creation, its linear progression, its division to sacred and profane, and its end in redemption all these characteristics are objective attributes that time has; they are not attributes that have to do with the perspective and attitude of the individual. The metaphor of time as body exemplifies the objectivity of time in the traditional religious view. After establishing what can be called religious time, the poem goes to oppose this time with secular time:

וְעַתָּה – נִשְׁתַּנּוּ הָעִתִּים.	And now—times have changed.
עַתָּה לֹא תַּדְלִיק אִמֵּנוּ הַכְּשֵׁרָה	Now our kosher mother will not light
אֶת נֵרוֹת-הַשַּׁבָּת	The Sabbath candles
(הֲתִזְכֹּר:	(do you remember:
גִּבְעוֹלֵי-יָדַיִם עַל קְלַסְתֵּר הַפָּנִים	The hand-stems on her portrait
כְּמוֹ אוֹמְרוֹת לְהַסְתִּיר אֶת קִמְטֵי הַחֻלִּין	As if wanting to hide the winkles of profanity
שֶׁבֹּשְׁשׁוּ הִמּוֹג עֲדַיִן?)	That have been late in disappearing)
עַתָּה הוֹי עַתָּה.	Now oh now.

In contrast to the religious way of life which was expressed abstractly, Shlonsky uses the mother (our mother) to describe the tragedy of secular existence. The poem refers to a time in which the mother did bless the candles. The image of the mother's hands as plant stems express a soft gentle spirituality. The stems which are of course the forearms (אמות), cannot hide the face which according to tradition should not enjoy the light of the candles before saying the blessing. Thus the hands as plant stems stress the fact that the mother cannot hide the "the wrinkles of profanity (or secularism)" (קמטי חולין). The meaning of the image becomes even clearer once we see it in contrast to the centered heavy and solid body of traditionally religious man. This image is the epitome of the sorrow and loss that secularization entails, in fact, this loss is construed as the loss of relationship in which the poet as son, the mother, and God exist in loving harmony.

How are we to interpret the different secularizing phases in Shlonsky's poetry? More specifically why did the process of mourning over tradition appear after a significant time has elapsed from the iconoclast phase? That is, why did Shlonsky have to go through a period in which he did not deal with tradition at all, neither to negate it nor to mourn over it? I think that the answer resides in the traumatic character of secularization itself. For the Hebrew writers of the first quarter of the turn of the century, secularization was a traumatic experience and created a great sense of loss. Their pariah status as East European Jews could be more easily counterbalanced by narcissistic pride in being God's chosen people. When this status is negated, one is left with the perception of oneself as poor, hated, and secluded.

Moreover, Hebrew writers of Shlonsky's generation where still very much attached to the Jewish tradition. They all believed in partaking in a national rebirth by a transformation of culture which was deemed as essential. Their status as some of the best students in yeshivas meant that they excelled in religious study before they turned secular, and that their attachment to Hebrew stems from religious study. Indeed Zionism as Shlonsky commented both respects tradition and rebels against it. It is conceived as an ideology which respects the fathers but which looks toward Palestine as the land of sons.[44] Actively doing away with religion (in the nationalist context) involves an ambivalent traumatic move toward reality, one that is no longer chosen by God but is "chosen" for a common destiny in a common land. The Zionist rebellion is thus an uneasy compromise struck between tradition and modernity, which retains a deep ambivalence toward both. It expresses a psychological need for continuity but at the same time a taking upon the self of the critique of modernity.

The heretical act itself, the doing away with tradition and religion has something that feels inwardly violent (hence the philosophical-literary expression which it receives from Dostoyevsky to Nietzsche as the ultimate trespass of killing God or the father). The act of secularization especially with those who have a strong attachment to tradition (such as Shlonsky) entails intense feelings of guilt which are at first repressed.[45] For Shlonsky after this heretical act, there was a short lived wholesome satisfaction with the ideological *ersatz* object (Zionist pioneering), however, rebelliousness itself was internalized as a central value of modernist experience and so pioneering as life and poetic style was rejected in favor of a quasi-nihilistic poetry of absence in Paris and Tel-Aviv. Indeed after the great iconoclastic period in Shlonsky's poetry, the poet does not regret this doing away with tradition but goes further in the process of secularization and modernization. In this stage, Shlonsky's poetry follows modernity and secularization to their ultimate consequences. Total secularization, the doing away with the *ersatz* religion of Zionist pioneering, leads to an isolated existence in which the in-

[44] See "Magen avot magen banim" in A. Shlonsky, *Yalkut Eshel*, p. 34.

[45] Some of the repression of the holocaust by many writers in the 1940s and 1950s has to do with this guilt being reawakened by the fact that traditional Judaism has been annihilated. Thus the German national socialist repeats in real life what was already done symbolically by the Zionist, the negation of traditionally religious European Diaspora Judaism.

dividual faces his limited existence directly without the buffer of nation. community, family and religion. In this phase of his poetic writings the suppressed guilt only resurfaced now and then in small references to the Jewish tradition in his urban poetry (casting the poet sometimes like the wondering Jew) and in the general atmosphere of persecution and paranoia.

It is only after returning to Palestine in the late 1930s and with the great rise of anti-Semitism that repressed feelings resurfaced. Far from Europe in the essentially secular settlement of Palestine, where in the 1930s the traditional Jewish religious world seemed lost forever, tradition could both be mourned and idealized.