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"Modern Man in Search of a Faith: An Analysis of Abraham Shlonsky's D!vai"

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מחקר על „דווי"

מאת א. ב. יפה

א.

הרברט ברונשטיין סטודנט ב„היברו יוניון קולג'" — מוסד יהודי דתי באמריקה, בחר כנושא לעבודת־הגמר שלו, — העבודה שתוכנה בתואר „מוסמך לספרות עברית", — את יצירת הנעורים של אברהם שלונסקי, הפואימה „דווי"*). מחקרו, הנקרא בשם „האדם המודרני מחפש אמונה", הגיע לידי; ויכול אני להעיד, לאחר קריאה בעיון, כי זוהי אחת העבודות הרציניות ביותר על שירת שלונסקי, עבודה שכמוה לא נעשתה אולי עד היום הזה אפילו בעברית. בלי היות שותף לכמה מהנחותיו של ה. ברונשטיין ומתוך חילוקי־דעות יסודיים על מסקנותיו, חייב אני לציין את מידת ההבנה והחדירה לתוך־תוכה של הפואימה „דווי", שגילה ברונשטיין במחקרו. כלי הניתוח שלו הם כליה של הביקורת המודרנית המשוכללת ודרך כתיבתו היא ענינית ובעלת־משקל.

המחבר מייחס חשיבות גדולה ל„דווי", כאשר פואימה זו נוגעת בנושאים ובאידיאות המרכזיות של ספרות המאה העשרים. לדעתו לא הוערכה יצירת נעוריו של שלונסקי כראוי בביקורת העברית (והוא מצטער גם על כך שהפואימה לא תורגמה לשפות אחרות, כי תכנה הרעיוני הוא כלל־אנושי). כלפי המבקרים העבריים טוען ברונשטיין כי הם הירבו לטפל בבעיות הצורניות של שירת שלונסקי ולא נתנו דעתם במידה מספקת על תוכנה. הוא מנסה להסביר את סיבת אטימותו של הדור לשירה זו: „עולם הספרות העברית לא היה מוכן עדיין לקלוט את דבריו של המשורר... המבקרים לא התיחסו אליו יחס רציני מחשש שהוא „מותח" אותם, ואם קבלו אותו ברצינות ישימו את עצמם ללעג... ולבסוף, אף־על־פי שתשומת־לב רבה הוקדשה לעבודתו המאוחרת של שלונסקי, העומד עתה ב„מזרחה" של הספרות העברית, אין זה ידוע די הצורך כי הרבה מן הסימבוליקה, הרעיונות, הבעיות והטכניקה של כל יצירת שלונסקי אינם אלא הרחבה ופיתוח של דברים שנאמרו והונחו ביסוד הפואימה „דווי".

בסוף ההקדמה שלו אומר ברונשטיין כי עבודתו באה למלא את החסר בביקורת העברית בת־זמננו ולהציע פירוש אידאי ל„דווי"; הוא מקווה, כי ניתוחו יסייע להכרה נאותה ב„דווי", כאחת היצירות הספרותיות הגדולות של המאה העשרים.

ב.

עבודת־המחקר של ה. ברונשטיין עשויה משזר של פולמוס רעיוני, הערכה אסתטית ופרשנות אידאית. המחבר קרא כמעט כל מה שנכתב על שירת שלונסקי בעברית והוא מתדיין עם רבים מן המבקרים שטיפלו בה, בסוגיות שונות. בחלקים אחרים של עבודתו הוא מוכיח, כי יש לו ידיעת־רקע מספקת כדי לקבוע את המקום שתופס א. שלונסקי כפותח־תקופה בשירה העברית החדשה, כמחדש צורותיה ותבניתה. אולם עיקר מאמציו הושקעו בהארת תוכנה הרעיוני של הפואימה „דווי". הוא מודה שיש משום הצרת־תפיסה במתן פירוש חד־צדדי לפואימה. ל„דווי" פנים רבות והיא משולה בעיניו למנינה רבת־צדדים, המבריקה מכל צדדיה. אך נראה לו כי בעיקרה „„דווי" היא פואימה על אודות ערכים. על היעדרם, על הצורך בהם, ועל האפשרות למצוא אותם".

מאחר שהוסכם כי הפואימה היא סימבולית, אין עלינו אלא למצוא את משמעות סמליה. וברונשטיין סורח ומפענח את כל הגרמז והנמשל שביצירה. הוא רואה את הפואימה כבטוי לחיפושו הנואש של המשורר אחרי ערכים, בעולם שראה בחורבן כל ערכיו המוסריים וההתברתיים. בתחום זה ישנן, כמובן, נקודות מפגש רבות בין שלונסקי ומשוררי העולם בני־דורו. וברונשטיין מעלה בהקשר זה את שמותיהם של פול קלודל (שראה פתרון בחזרה לאמונה הקאתולית), של רילקה (שמצא אמונתו בדת־האהבה), של ברטולט ברכט (התרופה במארכסיזם), של ט. ס. אליוט ואודן (שזכו בודאות רוחנית מתוך קבלת עול הכנסיה האורתודוכסית). להלן הוא מותח קוי־הקבלה מהותיים בין „דווי" מצד אחד ו„רויקנאו" של אמן כ־אדם צעירי" לבויס. „ארץ השממה" לאליוט, „הטירה" לקאפקא ו„סיזיפוס" של אלבר קאמי, מצד שני. אין צורך לומר שהמדובר כאן לא בהשפעות משוסף־כמשמען (שהרי רוב היצירות האלה נכתבו ונתפרסמו קודם „דווי", ומאידך גיסא איש מבין

*) Modern Man in Search of a Faith.

An analysis of Abraham Shlonsky's "D'vai" by Herbert Bronstein,

Hebrew Union College — Jewish Institute of Religion, 1957.

הסופרים המוזכרים — „פרט אולי לקאפקא — לא ידע עברית...) אלא כבטוי דומה שמקורו בכושר ההקשבה של היוצרים האלה לרוח־הזמן.

ננסה לתאר עתה את הפתרון המקורי שמציע ברונשטיין להבהרת משמעותה של הפואימה, לאחר שהוא דוחה את כל הסתרונות שהוצעו ע"י מבקרים וחוקרים אחרים. לדעתו, מתלבט המשורר בין הכפירה והאמונה. הוא רואה את עצמו כבן הורג לאלוהים אך הוא משתוקק לבכות בחיקו. הוא איבד כל אשליה לגבי ערכים מסורתיים אך לא מצא ערכים אחרים במקומם. ואכן ישנם צדדים של דמיון בין תשוקתו של שלונסקי לשלמות לבין „החיפוש אחרי האבאבל גייס או תומס וולף. אלה הם בלוייו של דור חסר שרשים, שרוי בדרות, בתחושת היותו מיותר, דור התר בחלל הריק של עולם־ללא־ערכים. נקל להבין כי ברונשטיין רואה אפשרות של פתרון בדה־אינטגראציה של הערכים המסורתיים הישנים; אם כי הוא נזהר מפני מלהכניס לתוך עבודתו נימה של הטפה.

בנקודה זו נפרדות דרכינו: ואין אנו מקבלים חלק זה בעבודתו של ה. ברונשטיין, שבו הוא חדל לעסוק בשירת שלונסקי באשר היא שירה ובמקום זאת הוא מזמין את אברהם שלונסקי לדוכן העדים, במשפט שהוא עורך על מקומה של הדת בעולמנו.

רשותו של החוקר היא לעסוק רק ביצירה אחת מסויימת, או בפרק־זמן מסוים ביצירתו של משורר. אבל מחקר שהוכיח בפרקים הקודמים בקיאות רבה בשירת שלונסקי אפשר היה לדרוש שלא יסיח דעתו לחלוטין מהתפתחותו המאוחרת של המשורר, מן החיפושים והסתרונות שהוא מצא בשירת בגרותו. על־כן, נדמה לי כי מגבלתו העיקרית של המחקר הזה היא הצטמצמותו מרצון ומדעת בתחומי „דווי".

ג.

לציון מיוחד ראויים גילויי המקורות שנעשו בידי ברונשטיין. הוא טרח ומצא את מקורותיהם של בטויים וצירופים רבים. כמובן, שלגבי המשורר אין המקורות האלה תמיד מודעים. הצירופים עולים במוחו מתוך צרכי ההבעה וההברוזה, ושאיבתו מתוך המקורות היא לרוב בלתי־מודעת. אבל לגבי החוקר והקורא המשכיל יש עניין רב בגלויים, באשר אופים של המקורות יכול להעיד במקרים רבים על כוונותיו הבלתי־מפורשות די צרכן של המשורר. הבאותיו של מחבר המחקר יוכיחו.

למרות הסתייגויותינו מכמה הערות ומסקנות במחקרו של ברונשטיין רוצים היינו לראותו מתורגם לעברית. תהיה זאת תרומה נכבדה לחקר פרשה חשובה בשירתנו החדשה, ואולי תהיה זו גם בחינת עידוד לאדם היכול לפענח רבות בשדה המחקר והביקורת העברית, אם ששמחים היינו לראותו זה ויוצר בקרבנו.

MODERN MAN IN SEARCH OF A FAITH

An Analysis of Abraham Shlonsky's "D'vai"

By

HERBERT BRONSTEIN

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of requirements for the Master of
Hebrew Letters Degree and Ordination

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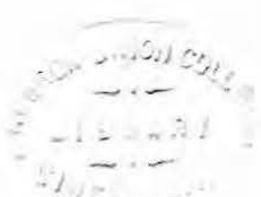

Digest of the Thesis:

Modern Man in Search of a Faith

An Ideational Analysis of Abraham Shlonsky's "D'vai"

By Herbert Bronstein

This ideational analysis of Abraham Shlonsky's "D'vai" begins with a resume of the two dramatic poems of which the volume of poetry is composed, "Leprosy" and "The Final Covenant." The first chapter also includes biographical and bibliographical data, as well as translations from the Hebrew into English of important sections of "D'vai".

Chapter Two is a review of critical writing on "D'vai" and Shlonsky's first period in general. This body of material revolves around the following issues: the issue as to whether "D'vai" is an attempt to state a universal principle regarding human existence, or whether it is an allegory about particular circumstances in the twenties of the century; the issue as to whether the poem has inherent value in itself, or whether it is of value only for the understanding of Shlonsky's later poetry; the issue of the poem's pessimism; the issue of its obscurity; and the issue of the type and validity of its style and form.

In Chapter Three, the roots of Shlonsky's outlook in the spiritual crisis created by the historical events of the twentieth century are characterized, and the relationship is noted between themes and motifs in "D'vai" and parallel themes in important fiction and poetry of the period. The thesis is then stated that "D'vai" is concerned with the spiritual problems raised by the breakdown of the traditional syntheses of value and the subsequent crisis of living in a spiritual vacuum.

Finally, problems of interpretation raised by the symbolism and expressionism of the poetry are noted and a methodological approach is determined which will do justice to Shlonsky's painstaking creative labor.

Chapter Four shows through detailed analysis that "Leprosy" depicts the spiritual sickness of mankind and the spiritual sterility of existence. It emphasizes especially the failure of the intellectual to provide mankind with meaning or purpose in life whether through the revitalization of traditional values or the establishment of new ones.

The analysis embodies in chapter five of the thesis demonstrates the manner in which Shlonsky, by means of a cosmological-revelatory framework, states that we should not delude ourselves with false hopes for future redemption or frustrate ourselves in the attempt to discover any essential Meaning in existence which is rooted in a transcendent Reality or Truth. Rather, the wretchedness of alienation from any such truth, the wretchedness of the complete absence of faith or values, is the reality of the condition of Man's existence.

Man's destiny is to endure this wretchedness without the redemption and justification of a spiritual rationale or the certainty of purpose to this suffering.

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PREFACE

The first major work of the contemporary Hebrew poet, Abraham Shlonsky, a volume of poetry entitled "D'vai", which is composed of two long dramatic poems, "Leprosy" and "The Final Covenant", was published in Palestine in 1924. "D'vai" was later somewhat revised by its author, and appeared in this re-worked form in the collected poems of Shlonsky "Shirim" published in Israel in 1954.

Though over thirty years have passed since its original publication, the full importance of "D'vai", in terms of the major ideas of twentieth century literature, has never been realized. That this volume of poetry has never achieved the recognition it deserves in the international world of literature is made understandable by the fact that the language in which Shlonsky's poetry is written, Hebrew, is inaccessable to major circles of critical opinion throughout the world. Nor has "D'vai" been translated into any of the literary linguae francae, such as English or French.

It is a great deal more surprising to find that the importance of "D'vai" has been underestimated in Hebrew critical writing. An examination of this body of writing shows that the poem has never been completely understood by Hebrew critics, that no analysis of the poem made heretofore manifests a comprehension of its central ideas, and that although much has been written about Shlonsky's literary origins, no attempt has ever been made by Hebrew critics to relate the thought expressed in "D'vai" to the major themes and ideas of twentieth century literature in general. While the reasons for this will be indicated in the course of this thesis, it should be noted, at this point, that

upon the appearance of "D'vai" and of Shlonsky's early poetry, in general, critics were more absorbed in the issues raised by the form of Shlonsky's poetry than in an inquiry into, or analysis of, its content. Shlonsky's style represented a complete break with the school of Bialik and its followers and became the storm-center of a polemic controversy between "traditionalists" and "modernists" in Hebrew poetry, a battle which obscured the problem of the ideational aspects of the poetry. Furthermore, it seems that the Hebrew literary world was completely unprepared for what Shlonsky had to say, and could not quite make heads or tails out of what is admittedly abstruse symbolic poetry. One has the feeling that the critics were apprehensive about taking Shlonsky seriously for fear that Shlonsky himself might be perpetrating a hoax on them, and himself would laugh if they took him too seriously. It is as if they could not quite divine whether there had strode forth so suddenly on the literary stage a "comic" or a tragedian. Finally, though a great deal of attention has been given to the later work of this poet who now stands at the forefront of Hebrew poetry, it is not widely known that much of the symbolism, the ideas, the problems and the technique of the total body of Shlonsky's published work to this date represent an expansion of what is already expressed and inherent in "D'vai".

The aim of this thesis is, then, to fill a vacuum in contemporary Hebrew literary criticism by arriving at an explanation of the meaning of "D'vai" on the basis of a thorough ideational analysis.

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It is the ideas, the values, the concepts embodied in the poems to be analyzed that constitute the object of our investigation here. For this reason and because there is already a large and adequate literature on the subject, questions of style and of literary definition are of only tangential concern. Thus, questions of form will be dealt with only as they impinge upon, or are related, to matters of content.

After summarizing the poem and providing translations of certain important passages as a referend for analysis, we shall examine the issues raised by critical literature on "D'vai" as well as the critics' conceptions and misconceptions as to the meaning of the poem. The sources of the poet's ideas in the conditions of human existence in the twentieth century will then be noted along with themes parallel to those of "D'vai" in twentieth century literature. The truth of the thesis that "D'vai" is concerned with the problem of values, the search for a faith and the means of human redemption will then be demonstrated by a separate analysis of parts I and II of the volume of poetry under consideration.

It is hoped that this analysis will contribute to more widespread recognition that Shlonsky's "D'vai" deserves a place among the great literary works of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER I

Part A

Aside from the short and incomplete sketches of "D'vai" presented by Ben-Or and Steiner, no summary of "what happens" in the poem, no outline of the plot, is extant.*[1] Such a precis is, however necessary as a referend for a thorough analysis of the poem. Though the sequence of events is not, in and of itself, the total combination which will unlock the meaning of the volume of poetry under consideration, nevertheless the sequence in which the events occur is, in connection with other factors, of importance for its analysis. Furthermore, only if we are firmly anchored in the solid ground of an overview are we able safely to give to the specific symbols, images, and expressions the thorough attention which they require without fear of being swept out into the sea of the poem's complexities and dragged under by the welter of its detail. Finally, we must not forget that the creator of the poem cast his poetic expression into a dramatic form, thereby himself attaching some degree of importance to matters of plot and story.

Therefore, following a brief summary of the essential biographical ** and bibliographical data leading up to its publication, we shall present a resume of "D'vai", including translations of certain of its important speeches to which repeated reference will later be made.

* Steiner's summary is of the second part, "the Final Covenant", only.

** Biographical data significant for the understanding of the poem itself will be presented in relation to its analysis.

Abraham David Shlonsky was born on the fifth of Adar-Sheni, 5660 (1900) in the village of Kriukov near Krementchug in the Ukraine.[2] His father was a chasid of the Chabad school, a learned maskil and an active zionist who belonged to the B'nei Mosheh. Shlonsky's childhood was passed in a home in which literary pursuits were of importance and in which Hebrew was a living language. It was a home not only steeped in rich Jewish tradition but also stimulated by the ideologies of the enlightenment, artistic creativity and enthusiastic Zionism. Shlonsky's father, in addition to writing, also composed melodies for poems. The well-known tune to Tchernichovsky's "Sachaki, Sachaki" is his composition. Abraham Shlonsky was educated in a cheder m'tukan and in a modernized Yeshiva.[3] At the age of thirteen, he was sent by his father to Palestine where he studied in the Herzlia secondary school. Shlonsky contributed poems to the Herzlia student publication, Tal Shacharit. After a year's study, he returned to Russia during the summer of 1914, and the outbreak of World War I prevented his return to Palestine. He then was enrolled in the Jewish gymnasium of P. Cohen which, during the course of the war, moved from Wilna to Ekaterinaslav (Dnieperpotrovsk). There, also, he wrote poems which were circulated among his friends.[4] At the age of nineteen, Shlonsky saw his first poem printed in the Hashiloach of 1919.[5] Shlonsky himself, did not view this as the embarkation upon a literary career, but merely as a chance event. He did not publish again until 1922 in Palestine, and then not as a result of his own initiative.[6]

An enthusiastic member of Hechalutz, Shlonsky attempted in 1920, after a period of preparation and training for Chalutziut, to leave Bolshevist Russia by way of the Crimea in order to go to Palestine.

Failing in this daring scheme, he was able, a year later, to go to Poland and from there to Palestine as a member of Hechalutz. In Palestine, he joined the G'dud Ha-avodah (labor Battalion) and worked on the Afula-Nazareth Road, living in Ein Charod. The poems that he wrote in his free time, he showed to no one, fearing that it would be taken as the deviationism of an "intellectual", an escape from the simple physical life of chalutziut which demanded complete devotion to the building of the land. Not until, during a stay in Tel Aviv, some of his poems got into the hands of Nathan Bistritsky, Pesach Ginsburg, and D'vorah Baron were they published; and it was these three who published them in Ha-poel Ha-tzair and Ha-chaim. Shlonsky soon settled in Tel Aviv and became a construction worker. He career as a great poet who developed his own creative forms and a new way of expression in Hebrew poetry is dated by most critics, however, from his publications in "Hedim" in 1922.[7]

After the publication of several lyrical poems, Shlonsky seems to have wanted to present to his audience of readers, the summation of his human experience and intellectual search which began in the days of his youth, through forms of expression appropriate to what he had to say. He chose to do this through two long dramatic poems, related to one another in theme, both symbolic, schematic and visionary, and both finally appearing together under one title, "D'vai" (Wretchedness).

This long dramatic work, written when Shlonsky was twenty-four, can be regarded with justification as his own conscious first-fruit offering. "Tzoraat" (Leprosy), part I of the poem, was published separately in 1923, and "Ha-brit Ha-achrona" (The Final Covenant), part II of the poem, in 1924. Both appeared in Hedim. In 1924, both parts were published together in book form.[8]

A final version of "D'vai", somewhat revised from the original, appeared in his collected poetry, "Shirim."[9] A resume of this final form of the poem now follows.*

* All page references in parentheses, to the poetry of Shlonsky in this paper, are to Shlonsky, Abraham, Poems (in Hebrew) Vol. I (Tel-Aviv, 1954).

Part B

The first poem of which "D'vai" is constituted is called Leprosy. The latter is composed of four parts: Ganges, Tuval-Cain, Vay'hi, Elohim.

Ganges begins with a description of a mass of Lepers and polluted men cast out of the camp in a dismal and destitute condition. Longing for the return of spring, for the coming of the Priest, for the healing he is supposed to bring them, and for return to the camp, they, nonetheless, claim that they are actually the camp, that God is the God of the stricken, and that they are not envious of those in the camp, but hate them who have only clean flesh but are unclean of soul (p.74). The abominable position of the women, who have long since ceased to see the blossoming of flowers, the smile of children, whose infants have died for lack of mother's milk, and whose husbands no longer embrace their abhorrent flesh, is paralleled by the children who are like mangy dogs, kittens and piglets, fighting and scratching one another and who notice that the aunt who used to say day-by-day that the priest was coming, now weeps (p.75).

The scene now shifts to reveal the priest in the Tent of Meeting, alone:

> And again I bear you on my palms, world,
> And you are all ulcer and tears.
> And I have said:
> Would that I were a dog, that I might lick your leprosy,
> Harlot, washing in your blood and tears,
> If there were healing for you,
> If only there were healing for you
> Forever.
> But night after night someone groans over me, like a consumptive ewe,
>
> And the Divine word,
> Is like shriveling breasts, undesireably sagging,
> On the poor door of my lips.

This line, isolated, is not bad, but in context is poor – breasts → door. The Hebrew in the later version

A black skull floats in my soul
(Does anyone see?)
And someone bereaved sighs over it:
you have drowned others . . .
Where shall I take you, where shall I take you
Disembodied head,
Like an ark on the waves of a flood,
While my God has scabbed the skull of his heavens with clouds,
And I am only a teat which they have let go
Because it is exceedingly dried out.
Behold an oxe bellows
And chews the wood of the trough,
And its bellow, like a fungus, cleaves to my soul.
Behold a suckling clings to the teat
And sucks pus and cries,
And the fungus sprouts.
And behold someone roars from wretchedness, from lust, from ugliness,
And the fungi spread and spread over me . . .
My God!
Jobs in their leprosy roar,
Jobs rub against me,
And they pierce their fingernails through the skirts of my garment for mercy:

Healing! --
And there is none with me.
My God! My God! Why have you deceived me . . .

(he encourages himself)

Now I know!
There are two ways -- Arise and choose!
Winters beat the drums of thunder unto me:
"Flood! Storm!"
And the trumpets of wind answer them:
"Storm!"
But clods yearning for produce whisper to me:
"Slowly! Slowly! Like cattle! Like the earth!"
And my brethren weep at the threshold of the Tent of Meeting:
"When? When will the spring finally return?"
Because for what does the wretched and bereaved soul lust?
Behold only its purity and a little tranquility.
Hoi brethren!
Come and let us go to atone the face of the earth.
Perhaps the produce will respond to us from clod and womb.
Perhaps the udders will become fat with milk.
Perhaps God will respond!
For there is nothing aside from you, earth.
There is nothing aside from you. (p.76-78)

One of the group outside the camp, Rotted-Nose, derides the expectations of lepers and polluted men who are looking forward to the coming of the Priest, since the Priest is at most capable of giving relief but not real healing or restoration of physical normality, and is really an Eliphaz scheming to escape from those who have become a loathing to him. The Harlot defends the Priest as meditating to discover some salvation. Just as the group, at the limits of their forbearance, decide to go themselves to the Tent of Meeting, the Priest appears before them and is promptly and repeatedly blamed for their deformed, dismal, and destitute condition (p.78-79).

The Priest rebukes Rotted-Nose for his ill-treatment and insults to the harlot, for calling her a "worn-out harlot". Whoever is not leprous, says the Priest, should cast the first curse. The people beg forgiveness, whereat Rotted-Nose scorns them and demands the so-called word of salvation from the Priest. He is echoed by the people's supplication for salvation for healing. Tomorrow, the Priest announces, they will go to seek healing in the "holy Ganges, which flows slowly." (p.79-81)

After immersion and emergence from the tranquil, comforting, fatherly-motherly waters of the Ganges, beloved of Vishnu, the people see the holy animals jumping from the pagodas of Vishnu: apes at whose hands the people beg laceration so that they might return to their primitive condition; and cows, which drive the apes away, and which drop dung fertilizing, anointing and healing earth and man. Divine milk pours from the udders of dawn on field and man. The hairy-handed wind fondles the belly of the earth swollen with conception. Tomorrow, cry the lepers turned husbandmen, tomorrow, produce, harvest; tomorrow we will go with the cows dropping our dung into produce (p.81-83).

The first part of the next section, Tuval-Cain, pictures the stony drought, and exhausting famine which confronts the despairing husbandmen. The Priest has been proved to be deceived; he has been heard at night whispering incantations and consulting teraphim. An old husbandman rebukes the others for their slackness, weakness and little faith; he bades them to continue in their work, for the earth will not deceive them. But the husbandmen, broken by the sterile monotony of the endless days, and the continuous nakedness of the fields, having gnawed on the stars which, too, are now gone, are in the depth of discouragement. The visionaries have told us, they say, to spread our sails, for distant are the peaks of Ararat. But it is only Ararat's distance that impresses itself upon them (p.84-85).

At the beginning of the second sub-section of Tuval-Cain, we find the husbandmen again complaining that the earth is consumptive and barren, that they lack a gift-offering for a sacrifice, that the fact that the earth's womb is closed testifies that God does not want their sacrifice as he did not want Cain's. The old husbandmen urges them to look for another sacrifice, to follow the road that beckons to them. The waste-road declares itself a road untrodden, a virgin road, on which every step is a new beginning, every thought, a new creation. A young husbandman responds: (p.85-87)

> Blessed art thou unto me, oh road,
> Waste-road!
> For I, I desired,
> That my roving feet should be smitten
> at every step;
> And that I should fall and bow down,
> And that I should arise;
> And that I should be broken down, and despoiled and cry out:
> No destination!

Thorn and thistle
And heat, heat, heat,
Wherever you step
Heat, thorn and thistle.
And a hand tents the eyes,
And a hand spreads down thorns
And levels a trail
And cuts it out
And blood flows,
And there is no destination, and there is no path, and no way-station.
And only heat, vai, and thorn —
This I desired! (p.87)

"No," says the old husbandman, "it is an altar that we seek, on which to offer an acceptable sacrifice." "March on footsore," answers the road, "towards....There are two paths into which I fork, toward S'dom and towards Bavel." When the old husbandman declares that they are bound for Ararat, the road answers that they will find the seductive, enticing, beckoning Tuval-Cain at the head of the roads; he will teach the way to Ararat. (p.88)

The cave of Tuval-Cain is a gaping maw eaten by soot. At its threshhold is a giant wheel; inside, a thorn bush, taking fire whenever an unseen bellows blows upon it. "Cain," announces Tuval-Cain, "my grandfather, like you, bore wrath against God; but now the two of them have come to terms in my captivity: Cain turns the wheel and God blows the bellows. Also, Noah, the Priest, yesterday bowed down to me. The Apes told him: 'tomorrow, the flood.'" "Come then, husbandmen," concludes Tuval-Cain, "let us make an ark."

The men are seized into the crucible, whipped and swung about, not knowing why or where to, and are like squirrels in a wheel. Somewhere, the last flower is crushed; somewhere an infant crushed by iron tongs. On the cow, the ape comes crashing down. The bush burns; the wheel runs. (p.88-89)

From somewhere, the Priest appears and sees the following vision: bellows in the dark of the cave; a turning wheel; billows of smoke; sooty heavens, mornings cast down on their back; the ball of sun, like a stylus, inscribes on the sky "Mene, mene, tekel" while the clouds are like apes around the inscription. (p.90-91)

"See," boasts Tuval, "how the bellows of Cain and God, whose smith is the Ape, blows so strongly." "Like a wounded beast," answers the Priest. The bush which seems to burn so brightly, is, to the Priest, like a consumptive lung spurting blood; the wheel whose arms gird the world, like the rings about a splitting barrel. Now the days of the world dizzily whirl on to the confoundment of man and his God: a new beginning or the millenium? (breshit ō elef ha-shishi?) To the Priest's roar to Tuval-Cain to desist, the latter laughs "I am not able to desist. Let the struggling generations be wasted and ruined." You had better hold back, also, he warns the Priest; for it would be better that your brethren did not know that we have deceived them (p.91-92).

The choir of the banished-from-the-sacrifice appear singing of the sterility of the earth: If the sacrifice of the husbandmen is not acceptable, then long live Tuval-Cain! No longer shall we accept the holy task of building the ark for the generation of the casting-off; rather we will raise up the Tower of Bavel unto Tuval-Cain. The soul of steam you have breathed into us, and we, at our full height, are like smoking chimneys. There is a god who will accept our offering as preferable to earth's vapor, or the dung of flocks or the incense of the altar. But, if not, then again will Cain rise against Able for the final time." To the Rabble's cry that the Priest has been proved to be a liar, and "long live Tuval-Cain", the Priest says:

Oh brothers!
See the smoke of your incense which rises straight upwards,
See it groping into the empty heavens,
Like a dog, room by room, while its master is not in the house,
And he does not know it. (p.93-94)

"Here is the altar, and here is the sacrifice," cries the Priest to the mocking Tuval-Cain, "but where is the God to accept it. You have encouraged them to this sacrifice; give them God also." "Why?" answers Tuval. He doesn't want a korban. "I will call to God and Cain who I have imprisoned like two Samsons turning empty grindstones and they will sport before us. The wheel will turn and S'dom and Bavel like iron chariots to which monkeys are harnessed will speed on without restraint to the flood carrying all, including Tuval-Cain and the Priest in it." "Never before," boasts Tuval-Cain, "has the sky spawned clouds like this, or has fungus like this spread in the world which I have wintered ( ). "DESIST," Cries the Priest, "for the last time, trying to stop the wheel with his own teeth, and fainting" (p.94-96).

In the first of two sub-sections of Vay'hi, the sky is pictured as a rag-wagon to which the masses offer their diseases and disabilities "cheap". The lepers complain and make accusations against the Priest: They are worse off than before. If only they had a sherd; if only they had an ark." What use would there have been in the sherd if Job had cursed his God, rather than his day," answers the Priest, "or in the ark, if it was the raven who had brought the leaf." "All of the world is blood and spittle," continues the Priest, "but each man is concerned only with himself." The lepers again beg forgiveness, saying that they were deceived by Tuval-Cain. "Heal in any way you want" they conclude. Rotted-Nose again scorns the rabble for asking for pardon. They like to be led astray.

"Where, Priest, is the Ganges, the cows, the ark? We are the sail, you said, but where is the wind that will drive it?" The Priest decides to choose the other way: "Not in silence now, oh God," he declaims. That which was too hard for the dung of the cows, the claws of the apes will accomplish; that which was too difficult for the dove, in that the raven will succeed. The Priest sacrifices the dove, dips the raven in its blood, sprinkles the leprosy on it and sends it out into the world. Then the Priest turns to the people and tells them that until the other wind, the other rain, the other sun, their Jobian spirits will be raging heat; their rain, downpour; their sun, a vat of blood.

> For if the world is drunk and leprous
> I am its wild song,
> I am the song!
>
> And if the earth is a mad dog
> I am the spittle dripping from its mouth,
> I am the spittle!
>
> I am the human torn with longings
> On another transmigration, the transmigration of man. (p.97-100)

A tumult arises as the Rabble break forth with Rotted-Nose at its head. The despised move to the driver's seat urging the apes to draw the chariot on to destruction, as they smash the clods of the days to dust. With exhaltation, the masses shout their love of the storm, of autumn-winter (ווינטער). They are thunder-eaters, taller than all. They are the Ararat against which the ark of days grounds. They can crack any egg of dove or raven; they can tear down to crack on earth, the egg of the sun hatched for thousands of years, but from which only now a raven breaks forth immediately to sense and light upon the flesh of a corpse.

Yes, vengeance, they cry, as they toss the shrinking ball of the earth about, vengeance for all the sacrifices which have not been accepted, vengeance for the last time. The wheel of Tuval-Cain has stopped, but now we will turn it, like a wheel of fortune spun by a gambler. The blood of the dove cries Rah! (Evil!); The Raven cries Krah! (Tear!); The Ape cries Tzrah! (Strike Leprous!). The masses exault in the imminent rising of Cain against God, when they will cast Him down upon his back, with their knee in His belly and stuff the world down his mouth, or perhaps themselves swallow it, drunk with vengeance like God in S'dom. Hey, Ape, Raven, let us devour the dove in the pre-fast meal. (p.101-104)

The aftermath of this frenzied superarrogation presents a group of anonymous men (Mahn Dehu, V'od Mahn Dehu, V'od, V'od, V'od) who lament that the plague is worse than before. The other wind of healing, the other rain of cleansing, the other sun to dry the pus, came not. Only ceaselessly host the flights of raven; only ceaselessly do they lacerate themselves like us; only ceaselessly rises the putrifying pool, rising to knee, to kneck. They wonder if the Priest has fled. He is, that Eliphaz, always distant, they complain.

In the sanguine light of the setting sun, appears the sick Priest like one who bears all burdens on his back, announcing that his sail is torn, that he too is ulcerous, that he too is stricken with leprosy. He immerses himself in the pool and the people wail (p.104-105).

The initial setting of the last section of Leprosy, called God, is one of skies rolling in ashes and girded with sack-cloth, and the Tent of Meeting collapsed and rolling on the ground.

From all sides, the silence of man and beast --- Night. The Priest meditates:

> My black raven, behold I have sent from me,
> And he does not return. And why cannot I also send the dawn
> Like a red dove which will grow white by afternoon?
> For at my feet its little warm corpse wallows,
> And how shall I send it forth?
> And behold the ark:
> Torn of sail, broken of oar, its anchor lost,
> Only masts like crooked fingers
> Lacerate the void:
> "Save!"
> To cast off? To go backward?
> Oh Noah, Noah, your ark has lost its way...
> And you, oh earth,
> At my feet you crouch and hide your face from shame:
> The prayer of all the lepers is in your clods.
> Do not ask and do not try,
> Oh, that the world could doze in my bosom as in a sick-bed,
> A moribund who has come to terms with his lot.
> Do you see: Night.
> I know:
> From some great and awesome wound
> Of some exalted and ancient leper
> Flows, flows this black blood.
> You are leprous, oh God!
> And how shall I knock at your gates? (p.106-107)

With a background of the wailing of a dog, groaning and downpour, the harlot asks a series of questions of the Priest, to all of which he remains silent. How long will you be silent, supplicates the harlot, entreat God so that we may live, or curse him that we may die; for why should we rot? Outraged, Rotted-Nose calls the actions of the Priest holy-despicable falsehood. "We did not want the Ganges," he claims, "nor did we love the ape-chariot, nor will the earth put us to sleep in the eternal cradle. We flew at every storm and were not sated; we scratched with every sherd and were not healed. The ulcer spreads daily and our unbearable pain is worse than death."

"Tomorrow," says the Harlot, is the sun's impostor face blinking in foul light at the naked earth wallowing in vomit, like Noah. Where will man run? Tomorrow, Tuval-Cain will extend his acid-sponge at me, grinning." Tuval-Cain indeed, suggests his return to spin the wheel so that a new Bavel will arise like an iron task to rend mankind. The throng of tomorrows will host like flies on the flesh of the world, and cow and ape will dance the dance of coming-to-terms. The Harlot has a vision of the future: A hydra-head of tomorrow, growing back in multiples as soon as you cut them off.

The Priest cries out: My God, My God, why have you cast me off? The dove descends, broken-winged and hums: world, world. The Raven rasps: "In your Leprosy live; in your Leprosy live." And men rot away in leprosy (p.107-110).

The second poem in "D'vai," The "Final Covenant," begins with the section entitled Revelation. The opening description of this section encases us in the symbol of night.

> On the golden ladder of the setting sun
> Hairy evening descends slowly
> To visit the grounded ship.
> Like an ARK the black ship moves
> And the lighthouses go out.
> The wind sounds an alarm in its haste:
> "The ship is anchored."
> And is dumb.
> And a ladder links out to the dumb coast
> And it, like its ship, is in the symbol of night (p.111).

Now the poem goes on to describe Job's initial search for sailors to man his black ship. He will tear at the shutters like the night owls, breaking through closed doors, calling men for aliyot to the Torah of night, bringing them tidings, and his thick smoke will put out all their candles, and quench the unwilling kindled lights which the people hope will chase away the bat of night.

why have you given me, O night
the stretched out arms, the feeling face

But the reactions of the people, in the poor sections where Job was especially hopeful of finding recruits, as well as in the better, & larger bigger streets, is uniformly one of alarm at the strange visage of Job, at the thick, strange darkness and smoke which accompanies him; flight from him; and locking of doors before him. This section closes with Job's lament, which itself concludes with a sign of new possibility for his mission:

Lonely my footsteps rustle in this jungle,
And with love my smoke licks its casting-off.
Shall I call again aloud:
Ah-oo!
I call to you, oh wretched ones!
Above the tree-top of the nights,
There, there, wherever you are.
Perhaps someone will hear,
Perhaps he will answer.
Ah-oo!
Woe unto me that I arose to come.
And now
Shall morning indeed come to bind its coxcomb to my head
Which I do not desire.
On your spread out feet, night,
The tears of God you have given to me.
How shall I go with your tears, God,
Or to whom shall I declare your afflictions?
I will pound on every locked door,
And on every closed shutter:
Open to me sleepless ones!
Open, pained ones!
For I speak in the name of God, the God of the weepers,
Whose tearful face you envision on your bed at night.
But no one opens.
On your spread out feet the tears of God // style
Oh why have you given unto me, night.
Behold I will take myself from here,
Behold I will return to the ship and cast off and
Just as I anchored.
And here,
Here the dawn will come and with a lustrous hand will erase
The great tiding from off the parchments of night.
Oh strike, wind, at the thresholds of the wretched: beat upon
Perhaps they will hear, perhaps they will understand.
And I
With shut eyes will ascend to the tree-top of night
And will call unto them for the last time:

Come ye, come ye to the ship,
Come ye, come ye to the night!

(The ship's siren wails
The smoke whirls)

Oh, black ship!
Misunderstood and despised as always
Empty-handed Job returns to you.
But what are the voices which I hear, there at the end of the alley,
The noise of late-tarriers?
It is a SALOON (בית-אבל : also, Mourning-House)
A house of the bitter of soul.
Here,
Here I will find them,
Sailors-of-night who will understand me. (p.111-116)

The discussion of wayfarers in this very saloon opens the next section of the poem, which is entitled The Covenant. Their speculations about the coming of the Redeemer, and complaints about the smoke in the room which brings yet more tears to eyes used to weeping are silenced by the Bastard who asks the old, hunch-backed Saloon-Keeper to open the door. He, in turn, asks them to put out an Elijah-cup so that it could be a night of watching, and, horrified, calls them "seed of Cain" when they say that if Elijah comes, they will throw their empty flasks at him for deliberately delaying the redemption and then will bring it themselves. When the hunch-back opens the door, Job enters unseen in a puff of smoke. The lodgers talk about Job and his attempt to enlist sailors for his ship, whereat one of them suggests that since they have nothing where they are, they ought to volunteer, and asks the Bastard what he thinks about the idea. The Bastard, in turn, asks a youth who is sitting by what he thinks about the idea. But the youth is lost in silent meditation. This seems to be his nightly custom, either because he has lost something precious, or because the weight of sin is heavy upon him, or perhaps because he likes to cry (p.117-119):

Into your bosom, I weep, O God,
Into your bosom, step-father,
Though you are too poor to save.
I am too wretched for you to adopt me as a son,
You are of great splendor, so how shall I title you: my Father!
Because you are for prayer,
And I for tears.

(He cries.
The smoke binds a wreathe to his head.)

From the vanities of my world Your hand took me
But to come into Your holy house you did not allow me.
Oh why does the star pour out its light unto the earth,
And why does the grass of my field become green under the heavens?
The eye is too dim to see.
Too heavy is the ear to hear.
On your door-step I roll in the dust and I cry, a step-son:
Open! Open unto me, God!
And like a face twisted with pain, are the heavens of lightning over me.
It is twisted,
Twisted is Man under the heavens,
But You do not see.
Where shall the afflicted go?
Unto whom shall they lift the bundle of their afflictions
From Cain until now,
From night to night, from downpour unto downpour,
While only the skies of lightening writhe over their heads,
And only the sole of the foot cries silently unto the earth,
But also it is silent
Like You.
Save, God, for many are the afflicted!

(aloud;)

Ach! smoke, smoke.
The floor, like an altar, sends up its incense here,
In vain, in vain does it ascend into
An empty firmament (p.120-121).

The Bastard responds:

Have ye ever seen: A wayfarer with his bundle in his hand?
And the bundle is pierced, and its gold slips out of it
Until it is completely gone,
But he has not noticed it?
And then the wretch runs about:
"Woe unto me! Woe unto me! Where am I to go?"
I have lost my wealth, all my wealth.
Give me alms! Alms!
That's fitting for you, stupid youth!

Happy are they who sew up their pockets
Stitch by stitch, patch by patch,
So that, God forbid, not a penny be lost,
Oh, fool!
And I--What is it to me? It's all the same to me!
I never had a bundle.
And in the bundle I never had wealth. / Nor wealth in the bundle
And also it was not lost. / Nor wealth did I Lose
So why should I cry?
Is it for me to seek a free ~~donation~~: alms
"Save, I beseech Thee, God!"
I am a bastard of a generation,
And behind the fence of fallen synagogues
CHAOS found me and gathered me up.
And he took me in his hand and led me
And said: See!
And I saw: A cross!
Two shriveled sticks--like crossed hands,
On its head---a crushed linen hat,
And on the stretched out arms a patched robe, So crucified as they
And thus he sticks out, stupid scarecrow at the navel (center) of the world,
He ~~And watches, and watches.~~ He watches
And we?
Like hungry ravens we dance about it
And we cackle: Tear! crow: R.R.I.P
But we do not dare to go down
To pick the leaves of the carob and the turnip
In the vegetable path. patch
And he let me further and he said: See!
And I saw: tablets of a covenant!
Great gates well-locked,
Like pursed lips guarding a secret.
And behold a small key, appearing a little
Like a yellow tooth in the rusted lock.
And the one who was leading me said: Open!
And I turned the key once and twice,
And the lock jumped, and the gates were opened: Scolded
A cunning visage, bald, sticks out its tongue at me
And grins...
And I also twisted my face and stuck out my tongue,
AND WE WINKED AT ONE ANOTHER.
But all of a sudden---A great wind!
And the gates were closed.
And the one leading me said:
"And now go where you will."
And so I went.
And is it bad?
Is it bad to be man forsaken
Under the empty firmament,
As if winds had cleaned it out with a broom for sweeping
In honor of the holiday of Waste?
See me:

Just so (stam)
Hands in the pouch, a pipe-stem in mouth,
Under the empty heavens I move along,
Bastard and foundling.
And it makes no difference to me
That the days already crawl on all four
Like bent-over shriveled old men,
Like you, oh hunch-back,
Waiting for the last day.
And it makes no difference to me
That also we, foolish children, waste-children,
Already groan that we are tired.
And mornings gape wide a yawning maw at us,
And at nights the moon widens an eye round with astonishment at us.
And mornings and nights, nights and mornings,
And it makes no difference to me.
Ha, old hunch-back? Is it not so? (p.121-123).

At this point, Job breaks into the conversation, announcing his identity, much to the consternation of the group, who marvel at his strange but handsome hoary-black appearance. While the youth and the Bastard have said some things that were not entirely true, nevertheless they appeal to him, and the entire group would be fit to be his sailors. As the candles go out, and the smoke weaves itself into black tallesim which slip over the shoulders of the assembled, Job begins to read the Final Covenant, written on the Torah of night:

1. In the beginning was the Wretchedness and the Wretchedness was with God. 2. And God created man in the image of God, Wretchedness He created him. 3. And it came to pass that man began to increase on the face of the earth and the black tav which was Cain's began to be erased from the forehead. 4. And they saw delight that it was good and wretchedness they saw that it was bad and bitter and they condemned the name of God. 5. And God brought a flood on the earth. 6. And Noah made the White Ark because God had commanded him in order to save himself.

7. And it came to pass when the waters subsided that God repented of the White Ark which he had commanded to make. 8. And He was troubled at heart for He said, why should man flee from the flood and it is the great Wretchedness. 9. And God appointed a rushing wind and it dashed the White Ark to pieces until it became little splinters. 10. And it was very evil to Noah because of the ark and he asked his soul to die and he died.

11. And it came to pass at midnight that God descended and hewed black wood from the paradise of pains. 12. And he made a great ship and he called its name D'vai (Wretchedness) for it is the Deliverance. 13. And God commanded Job concerning the ship and He said 14. Behold I have anointed thee as chief of the sailors though no sailors are with thee. 15. For behold man is small and he desires the small salvation but the great deliverance he understands not for it, it is life upon earth. 16. And now go thee out and thou shalt go on distant seas, and many lands thou wilt traverse to get souls for thy ship.

17. And there shall approach unto thee an afflicted man knowing sickness and he will cry heal me I beseech thee oh man of God. 18. And thou wilt answer and thou wilt say, far be it from thee for thou art the great.

19. And there will come unto thee one who has suffered a flux and a leper and will supplicate gather me from my leprosy Job. 20. And thou wilt answer and say far be it for ye art the holy.

21. And there will come the unfortunate and oppressed and the poor of the people and they will call out save we beseech thee, save we beseech thee. 22. And thou wilt answer and say far be it for ye are the saved.

23. And thou shalt read before their eyes the words of this last evangel and they will mock thee and despise thee. 24. And a great multitude will gather against thee to cast stones at thee to slay thee. 25. As for thee, do not stand in fear nor let thy heart fall for I have made thee a redeemer and in thy hands is the deliverance (p.125-126).

After the group agree to go with Job, the Hunch-Back tells them not to go inasmuch as an assembly (ruin) is being held in the courtyard of an ancient synagogue at midnight to plan the building of the White Ark. Job's ship wails three times, and the Hunch-Back tells how the blind Shamash saw Elijah getting his shofar ready, but there is still a chance to prevent his blowing of it. When the group hears the waves dashing against the black ship, they want to cast off immediately, but Job refuses, telling the Hunch-Back to show them the way to the assembly (p.127-129).

The opening stanzas of the next section Chatzot, (Midnight), introduce a debate between three voices (in the original version: Moses, Jesus and

Elijah) on the manner in which redemption is to be brought about. The first voice, having heard the roar of the world's opened cicatrice, declares that the fragmentized pieces of the Tablets of the Covenant must be replaced by new tablets as a harness for man to draw the wagon in which is God over a thorny road. The second voice maintains that there must be another crucifixion and cross, inasmuch as the old cross has been thrown off, cut up, and used to seethe meat in overturned church bells. The In-Between voice angrily urges that it is not increased burdens that man needs, for he is small, but rather corn so that he will be able to shoulder a burden (p.130-133).

An uproar breaks out among a group of prophesiers present who furiously complain about the arrival of a group of black-garbed individuals whose coming bodes ill. When Job condemns the assembly meeting in this tottering ruin for attempting to restrain man from cleaving to life and for causing man, in his pain, to beg for salvation and to look for "other stars", the prophets are angered at this "fool" and demand that he be burned for his derision of them; but the first voice reasons with Job, whose ship he says, is empty of man, and who rolls in the smoke as before he was cured. Job is outside of the camp, as is written. How then has he dared to come here and to attempt to seduce others. Does Job want the plague and man's groaning to increase? Does Job despise man's painful plight and groanings for salvation? The First Voice concludes by asking the Second Voice, the Healer of the Sick to heal Job.

Job angrily refuses this healing:

> You who taught to go to pains,
> And also went,
> You who were Pain
> But to be it you did not teach,

The theme of the dead body of the black Ark is probably "the dead Redeemer". It recurs throughout the poem see p 115 ff.

You Iscariot of the Wretchedness
Who for the thirty shekels of the small salvation
Imprisoned the great deliverance!
Not a fungus on a bleak day,
Not a leprosy in the flesh,
Which a high priest heals,
Is wretchedness,
It is a star on high,
A lodestar whose gleam does not cease,
As the brightness of sun and moon are not gathered up---
And about it turns the earth
On which man walks,
Walks with the two soles of his feet,
For there is none besides it,
And why do you disturb him: Redemption!
And he yearns,
For other stars!
And in his yearning he despises his journey-star.
Leave off of Man,
Let him go to his burdens and love them,
For that his Deliverance! (p.136)

The Second Voice restrains the Prophesiers who want to crucify Job for fear that men will take up the wrong cross and the First Voice declares that whether man will it or not, he will be redeemed not for his own sake but for the sake of. . . Job condemns the "redeemers-for-the-sake-of". When a Bat-Kol declares in favor of Job, the First voice dismisses it with Rabbi Joshua's formula, and orders Job to send his men away, and Elijah to blow on the shofar for man is small and the small salvation alone will come to him.

After a verbal skirmish between the In-Between-Voice and Job in which the former asks Job to flow the shofar himself and join the white assembly, which Job refuses to do, Job warns them that if they attempt to destroy the Black Ship, they are lifting the axe against the world, and utters a few obscure words about carrying someone dead into his ship (P.137-139).

This section ends in confusion as an old man, a blind person, lepers, and an idiot refuse their erstwhile rehabilitation and ask for

a return to their condition of rebellion (the Elder) and their afflictions, and Job and his group leaves. The prophesiers cry out: Son of David, the hour has arrived for you to come! (p.140-141)

Two settings alternate repeatedly in the last section of the poem, a section itself bearing the name of the entire poem, D'vai (Wretchedness). The first sub-section is set in heaven where the Chained-One (Messiah), bound to God's empty throne which is draped in black, wonders, now that the hour has come, why God, who has for so long desired man's redemption (the Great Hand of the clock), does not spread over the small hand (the Messiah)at this midnight hour. Job tells the chained one that the time has come that the small hand should drop off altogether, and asks why the throne is empty. The Chained-One tells him that last night like a bereaved father, God kissed the wounds of the earth, while not binding them, and today kicked the throne of glory, ordered it draped in black; ordered the gates of heaven closed, and its windows draped with clouds. But for a moment, the Chained-One saw through a parting in the curtains an Atzeret-Chag on earth, the longing of all men for redemption, a scene which afflicted him greatly. Job berates him for not recognizing the God of Wretchedness at whose feet he rolls, and denies that the Chained-One is the destined Messiah; rather the myriads of the completely afflicted on earth who sit by the sides of the roads are unknowingly the redeemers. Job gives him the final covenant to read and devour (p.142-145).

Into the tremendously excited gathering of people who are expecting with great anticipation the three-fold breaking of the Messiah's chains and his coming to heal all the blemished, the Four Types of Blemished (Baalei Mumin) make their way, with the prayer that all men be as blemished as they are (p.145-146).

After eating the scroll, the Chained-One doesn't know whether he has been cleansed or whether he has been smitten seven-fold. He accuses Job of having ensnaring mankind and conspiring against God. Now, says the Chained-One, my task will be seven-fold more difficult for I must also redeem God from the nest of the bat. But it will not be, cries the Chained-One, momentarily defying Job, and again breaking down as he repeats some of the central phrases of the Final Covenant, and telling Job to enslave him forever (p.147-150).

On earth, mankind nervously wavers between excited anticipation and doubts concerning the Messiah's breaking of his chains, and the village idiot appears on the scene announcing that he is in mourning for the rooster who will be killed by the bat, and has come to say Kaddish in hopes that the men will say Amen for him, to which they amusedly agree (p.148-150).

The Messiah tells Job to go down to earth and tell the sons of men that the Messiah is not coming, but Job tells him that he is going to destroy the White Ark completely and with it any hope or expectation for redemption, so that only the great clock-hand of the God of Wretchedness will remain. Now, continues Job, has come the time for the death of the Messiah. "See the vision and die" Job commands, and the Chained-One speaks:

> An ancient ship dumbly trembles,
> And the breath of a hidden mouth puts out the light-houses.
> The masts bend from the weight of the sails,
> Oars grind.
> Sailors with shut eyes row silently.
> And opposite them two darkening cliffs like tablets of the covenant:
>
> WRETCHEDNESS AND TOIL (p.150-152).

The vision is complete! cries Job.

Still expecting momentarily the blowing of the shofar, mankind notices that it is growing thickly dark. They hear the ship's sirens and see it preparing for departure. Elijah's tallis blackens; he blows the shofar. A sound is emitted like the groan of a dying jackel or a consumptive cough. The blind Shamash of the ruin sees a wagon full of mowing which upon stands Wretchedness with a pitchfork. Bend down oh sheaves, the Shamash cries, before the gatherer. All lift their eyes to the shore and they see a coffin being bourne into the ship. As the poem ends, the village idiot breaks forth with: YISGADAL V'YISKADASH SHMEH RA-A-A-A. . . . (p.152-153).

CHAPTER II

Anyone who has read the foregoing precis of "D'vai", which summary itself represents a stage in its clarification, will look understandingly upon the critical confusion of critical opinion regarding the poem. Before proceeding to a statement of our own as to the theme and meaning of "D'vai", it would be of help and interest for independent analysis to survey the views of critics and attitudes of them taken towards the poem. This body of analysis resolves itself into a few major issues: the issue as to whether the poem is a representation of the actual situation, of particular conditions, or whether it is a statement of an abstract metaphysical principle; the issue of the poem's obscurity; the issue as to whether the poem represents negation or affirmation; the issue as to whether the poem has inherent value or is of value only in terms of later work; the issue as to whether the poem is Dionysian or Apollonic; the issue of the artistic value of Shlonsky's innovations.

Let us examine, now, briefly, critical opinion on these issues.

First, was it the poet's intention to represent, through his poems, a particular contemporary situation, or was it his intention to express a universally applicable proposition regarding man's condition?

According to one critic, "D'vai" is the summary of Shlonsky's entire world-outlook in the first period of his work. There is not even the remembrance of a hint of any concrete background embodied in the poem. Absolute pessimism appears as a metaphysical truth, as the conclusion of an investigation into the chronicles of man, and the final summation of research into man's ways at all times.[10]

Another critic takes the opposite view. The poem is symbolic of the actual, Shlonsky telling a real story in symbols borrowed from the Bible and the New Testament in which he gives expression to the spirit of the times, to the despair of modern life, to the echoes of revolution from the East, to the fate of Judaism, and all in the poetic camaflouge of symbols. According to this critic, the lepers outside the camp are the Jews of the Galut, for leprosy is a symbol greatly appropriate to the psychology of the Jewish social condition in a gentile world. The word of the priest admits of only one interpretation: it is the healing word of Zionism (Ho leprous brothers/Come and let us go to atone the face of the earth--/ Perhaps produce will answer us from every furrow and from every womb--/ Perhaps the teats will fatten with milk--/ Perhaps God will answer/ For there is nought aside from you, oh Earth. Nought aside from you.)[11]

In the confrontation of the first issue, we note, then, two diametrically opposed views, and we shall see this opposition in considering other issues as well. Both critics agree on the manifest fact that the poem is symbolic. The first, however, views it as the symbolization of the totality of existence, the second views its symbolism as a kind of allegory of specific situations and attempts to discover the correspondences all along the line. We shall see that, in a sense, both views are correct as far as they go.

Secondly, does the non-explicit nature of D'vai, the fact that its meaning is not immediately apparent, result from artistic weakness? Is it obscure as a result of obscurantism? Or does its "obscurity" testify of the poet's intuitive apperception of truth as expressed in the non-reducible symbol?

Ben-Or, whose eclectic statement of criticism on "D'vai" will serve, at the end of this section, as a rounded summary of critical opinion on "D'vai", takes the view that the obscurity of this early work of Shlonsky is to be explained by the fact that the poem represents a first-stop, so to speak, in his development. Its obscurity is one of several artistic weaknesses manifest in the poem.[12]

Again, according to Uchmani, the obscurity of Shlonsky's early work, including "D'vai", is a result of the obscurity and inchoate nature of his own thinking and his negativism, and that as he wrestled with himself and matured, his thinking, and, as a result, his poetry, became more lucid.[13]

It is only fair, however, at this point, to remind the reader, that Shlonsky, in his mature years of creativity, beyond the period in which elements of affirmation appear in his poetry, revised "D'vai". The critics who view the "obscurity" of "D'vai" as a sign of artistic immaturity and/or obscurantism forget that this late revision shows an unmistakeable, a marked direction not toward more explicitness, but toward greater economy, greater ellipsis of thought.

While Israel Cohen admits of excessive distortions, and unnecessarily abstruse images here and there as passing phenomena in the poetry of Shlonsky, and explains them as the stumblings of a pathfinder, he, nevertheless, defends the abstruseness of "D'vai" on two grounds: First, its meter, rhythms, and tone are a true expression of Shlonsky's generation; secondly, like Stefan George, Shlonsky deliberately posed difficulties for the reader in order to elicit his attention and concentration. Shlonsky's poetry is not for the lazy reader. The reader is forced to attend to

unusual and new verbal fusions, metaphors and symbols. He must patiently meet the poet half-way.[14]

There is general agreement among the critics that Shlonsky's "D'vai" is pessimistic. And if a critic here or there sees some glimmer of affirmation in "D'vai," he sees it in terms of a seed which will come to fruition only in later poetry. Mordecai Yaffe characterizes Shlonsky's early poetry as a road leading from d'vai to stam. In the beginning of his poetry, a bat-kol of resignation and endurance arises. The world, man and nature are steeped in the attitude expressed by the word stam, and are encompassed in night just at the dawn of Shlonsky's creativity.[15] David Aran, sees in the second part of "D'vai," the supercession of the very idea of redemption and in its place, man's destiny as the sanctification of chastisement. He notes that it is the God of wretchedness Himself who destroys the White Ark of Noah (salvation), that the hero of the second part of "D'vai" is Job, the champion of suffering. The two sides of the poet, the part that yearns for God but is not able to approach Him (the Youth), and the cast-off bastard, the forsaken one, who demeans the worth of any good in this world, are united only in the unity of the Black Ship of Job which moves blindly toward the darkening cliffs of Wretchedness and Toil. In "D'vai," according to Aran, the rock is rolled over any positive way out of man's condition. It presents a world without a beam of light, a world of absolute pessimism.[16]

Another critic, A. B. Yaffe, feels that "D'vai" is suffused with the tragic approach to existence. He sees this in the bitter despair expressed in the poem, in words heavy with pessimistic implications ("The earth is a worn-out whore") and in a hint of man's primeval sin, the departure from

blessed primitivity, which brought man to a loss of his wholeness and to destruction("We have sinned in that we have gone far from you", say the erstwhile lepers to the apes). Throughout the poem, we find heat, barren ground, the search for a sacrifice. The lepers are no sooner cured and turned to husbandmen when famine and drought, over which they have no control, confront them. In the Tuval-Cain section, Yaffe sees a confirmation of the tragic approach in indications of a treadmill cyclical view of history, and a belief in the eternal suffering of man. What existed in the beginning (B'reshit), exists also today (mea hashishi): The offering of man is not acceptable; his attempt to escape from the fate of Tuval-Cain ends in chaos; the failure of any rebellion is foreseen and it is foredoomed; as for him who does not despair, there is prepared for him continuous dissatisfaction ("We have flown at every storm and have not been sated"). No solution is in store for man save "stam." When the heroes of Jewish and Christian myth meet at the end of D'vai, it is not for purposes of plot, but for a symposium on the way of the world. All of them recognize the bitterness of Fate in its despairing cruelty, but the fact that in all of them is hidden the seed of rebellion, belief in deliverance, only deepens the tragedy. It may be that there is a faint possibility of deliverance, but even this is not certain. (But) perhaps it is there in the deep darkness in which the ship journeys. But the poet does not bring tidings of its coming. He only asks, "When? When will the spring finally return?"[17]

The only positive elements, of which Yaffe will admit whether expressed in symbol, image, or situation are those which will assume decisive dimensions only in later poetry.[18]

Steiner, writing in Hadoar,[19] reminds us that Shlonsky was one of the young Hebrew poets who appeared in the Palestine after World War I, and were unable to find ease in Zion. They were children of revolution, pain and war, and brought with them the atmosphere of fever and storm, pain and the pathos, which seemed to have intensified in the land of the prophets. They saw nothing ideal in their own burning, febrile existence and nothing idyllic in the harsh struggle of labor on the land, and in the life of a flaming world flowing with blood. When Job, the symbol of wretchedness and toil prevails over the Messiah, he has liquidated the traditional redemption to which the generations have looked, and established the solitary existence of the Great Deliverance, life on earth. The burdened and afflicted are the saved of the Great Salvation. Man should not yearn for the cheap redemption in such forms as political renaissance, for there is no other redemption greater than that expressed in the pain of man and his toil. In this period of his writing, Shlonsky's creativity is not marked by the joyful expectation of national redemption. His poetry is born out of the chaos of individual agony and it is, therefore, difficult for him to rise to the level of positive communal values. It is possible that the nihilistic moodiness in his poetry only serves to hide his faith in the future which lay hidden in his subconscious, but nevertheless it is absolutely impossible to see in his work a representation of the positive messianism which resounds in the poetry of those who believe in national redemption.[20]

Let us bear in mind, in terms of future discussion, that there do not seem to be any among the critics who see any value in Shlonsky's early "pessimism." They ascribe this K'firah either to artistic weakness,

to exhibitionism, or to intellectual immaturity, forgetting that the later Shlonsky whom they praise as a leader and guide "relapses" again and again into the same kind of "negativism". They seem, with exceptions, of course, to be blind to whole volumes of poetry, which in Shlonsky's own words, "weep blood, page after page."[21] Secondly, the critics seem especially aggrieved that Shlonsky does not relate himself positively to Zionsim, Chalutziut, or Socialism, which they regard as incumbent upon him as a poet. Thus, they take the attitude that the negative element is tafel in Shlonsky; the positive element, ikar. The process of his work, then, they describe as either dialectic, purification, or inner struggle, in which the negative element is weeded out. Thus, D'vai is of interest to them only in terms of his later work. We shall see to what great extent this view is erroneous. But first, let us glance at some examples of the critical attitude outlined above.

Let us note, at the outset, that Steiner, for one, admits that it is difficult to decide which is the essence of Shlonsky, the Emunah or the Kfira, between which, caught in the trap of contradiction and paradox, he wearies himself.[22] Mordecai Yaffe, on the other hand, sees Shlonsky's work in terms of process, movement from the stormy chaotic early poetry, through "inner necessity" to "Al Ha-millet" and tranquil completion.[23]

The world of complete darkness, of absolute pessimism, the world of D'vai, was a world, says Aran, in which Shlonsky was not imbedded. He frees himself from it and goes up on the king's highway of the chalutzic vision exemplified in Gilboa.[24] Aran forgets, that Gilboa is relatively early, following almost and immediately after D'vai, and that for many

long years after this, Shlonsky returns to the dark world of despair.

Seemingly unable, from a socialistic standpoint, to accept the validity of Shlonsky's early views, Azriel Uchmani asserts that despite the fact that D'vai was always a volume of poetry close to the heart of Shlonsky, it really was not the first book into which Shlonsky put his entire being. Gilboa, however, was. In direct proportion to the clarification of Shlonsky's world outlook, his poetry became filled with the blood of affirmation. True, Uchmani admits, his poetry was always well-done, but it was at times unhealthy and ugly: ". . . his handsome face was more like a mask than a living face." Uchmani makes it clear that when he says world-outlook he means only one thing: "That tied to the future, to the affirmation of life, to the love of man, to the will to eternity, to the faith that we would win out---through Socialism." It is not only the creative method and material, the word, the sentence, the image, with which Shlonsky wrestled in his early years. He wrestled primarily with another poet that sat inside of himself, not a worse poet, but a very difficult one from himself, one foreign to himself: "I will not deny that I used to wait for the decision of the struggle with trembling for I knew that it was of concern not only to you, but of concern to all of Hebrew poetry." Across the chasm that gaped between Shlonsky's hope and Shlonsky's despair, (that) there was no possibility of a bridge. On the one side everyone had to remain in his great lonliness and solitary pain. Shlonsky witnessed all the great evils of the world, exploitation, sorrow, pain, ugliness. The question arises, Why? Who caused this? Every poet is responsible to ask these questions. But Shlonsky wanted to argue that he should only ask the questions, only to wonder, not to

give an answer. For twenty years, Uchmani says, Shlonsky wrestled with the "Acher" inside of himself until he, too, realized that each poet must give an answer, though each in his own way. So that, despite his flights behind the symbol, despite his vain attempts at answers, despite his deceptive answers, and despite his unfaithfulness to the poetry of "chulin," and his backsliding yearnings for "shabbos" poetry, he always remained a poet of reality, constantly wrestling with it. Then, too, (and here Uchmani is speaking directly of "D'vai") Shlonsky tried, with forceful appeal, to prove that the casting off of the ship of existence into the empty darkness was itself the answer, the meaning and the purpose of existence. "Then you sang marvelously of the night. And we said: True there is night but the dawn also breaks forth."[25]

A. B. Yaffe, also, speaks of "D'vai" mainly in terms of his later work:

> Today we find interest in these dramatic poems especially since motives and ideas are found in them whose role is great in the later more mature poetry of the poet. [26]

The two dramatic poems which constitute "D'vai", he continues, with all their dramatic weakness, and poetic error, are forceful proof that they are not fruitless attempts, but forward gropings of a poet who is searching for himself. The movement forward along with the continued re-use re-workings and maturation of motifs, ideas and symbols that appear at the very beginning of his work, is very characteristic of Shlonsky.

> The poet never forsook the road which he paved for himself; he never betrayed the forms which he developed, but brought them to a more complete level of perfection with every additional stage in his development. The end of Shlonsky's poetry is already foreseen in its beginning. [27]

Just to illustrate the vast differences in approach, evaluation and categorization of Shlonsky's poetry, and particularly "D'vai", we offer

one more example from critical literature. Israel Cohen, writing in M'oznaim,[28] and using the well-known categories popularized by Nietzsche, characterizes the poetry of Shlonsky as Dionysian as apposed to Apollonic. In justification of this view, he points to reign of darkness, shadows, and drunkeness, and the dream-like atmosphere in the poetry of Shlonsky. He describes the world of Shlonsky's creation as Okeanus without a coast. Shlonsky's poetry derives from the senses, the blood of the poet, from intuition and the psyche. It is musical as opposed to plastic. On the other hand, Ben-Or, reflecting the views of many other critics and their reactions to Shlonsky's initial poetry, objects to it on the grounds that it was too cerebral, too fashioned, and worked-over. Many saw in Shlonsky's poetry the work of a technician, the work of the intellect and not the heart, of a linguistic virtuoso but not of a poet overcome by the "ruach ha-kodesh."[29]

The eclectic approach of Ben-Or[30] will provide us not only with a summary of critical opinion on Shlonsky, but will give us some insight into the causes for the discrepancies noted above between the approaches of various critics. Whole modernists in Hebrew poetry appeared before Shlonsky, it was only with the emergence of his poetry that the great battle between the "old" and the "new" broke out in the hitherto tranquil field of Hebrew Poetry. In the twenties, his poetry appeared to be strange, astonishing, obscure, un-understandable and even inartistic when compared to the poetry of Bialik, the heretofore unchallenged master, and his followers. The community of hebraists viewed Shlonsky's work as intellectual machination, and did not quite know whether he was clowning, mocking, or serious. To them, his work seemed to be a negation of both reason and

emotion. His brilliant control of language was admired, but his verbal inventions were not regarded as an enduring contribution to the Hebrew tongue. In addition, Shlonsky sharpened the edge of the controversy by militantly criticizing the standards, forms, and aims of the previous period and its followers whom he regarded as epigones. He organized a literary movement in behalf of the avant-guarde, led in the rebellion of the "young poets" against the old, and became a sharp polemicist. In the eyes of the guardians of the sanctuary of Hebrew poetry, he appeared to be an insolent rebel, who overthrew the sancta of accepted tradition. He was accused, perhaps with justification, of being drunk with the delights of innovation for its own sake inasmuch as every piece of work was a daring attempt to create novellae in Hebrew poetry.

Elements of his poetry which were viewed as "new" could, however, be traced back to poets of the Russian Revolution such as Alexander Blok, Sergei Yessenin, and Vladimir Mayakovsky, and further to the French symbolists whose use of symbols, imagism, startling verbal fusions, and novel rhythms undoubtedly influenced Shlonsky. Nevertheless, it must be recalled that Shlonsky invested these techniques with distinctively Jewish and Palestinian color and content.

The lie can be put to the accusation that Shlonsky was in love with innovation for its own sake on the basis of the reminder noted by many and repeated by Ben-Or, that the content of what Shlonsky felt and wanted to say, required a form very different from that required by the thought-content of previous Hebrew poetry which was sometimes tame as compared with the thoughts of Shlonsky which were at once stormy and brooding.

Ben-Or lists three elements in the weltanschaung of Shlonsky:

A) A despairing, nihilistic, anarchic denial of order, meaning or purpose in existence, an attitude arising out of the terrors of World War and the confusions of revolution; B) the pain of a people that had lost thousands of its sons in the devastations of the Ukrainian pogroms; C) the struggles of the developing chalutz movement which wrestled with the realities of the homeland in the period of the third Aliyah.[31]

> And the romantic-idyllic, descriptive-plastic classic poetry, whose pleasant language, too, had become overused and trite in the mouth of the epigones, was not fit to serve as the means of expression of an agitated and agonized generation which was struggling with itself and the terrifying world.[32]

Compared to the tranquil poetry previously accepted as standard, Shlonsky's work appeared to be a wild mixture of dizzying motives and images, of changing reckless rhythms, apalling rhymes, and clownish expressions. And so prominent was the arrogant anarchy of Shlonsky that his audience was not sure whether there stood before them a scoffer or a Pagliacci. They did not know whether to laugh or cry when he desecrated the romantic values in which they had believed.[33]

Add to this, his seemingly far-fetched, yet, in reality, piercing images, his use as symbols of many both well-known and erudite Jewishly traditional elements, in a foreign and undreamed of context, his introduction of roshei-tevot into poetry, his bitter irony and sarcasm arising from despair, his expressionistic descriptions of a decaying world with rotting foundations, and we can well understand the tumult that broke forth in the Hebrew literary world.

After outlining the criticism, positive and negative, on the form and content of Shlonsky's poetry, which helps to explain the wide variance in critical analyses of D'vai, and which gives a fairly rounded

picture of the reaction of the Hebrew literary world to it, Ben-Or goes on to deal predominantly with the single issue of the meaning behind Shlonsky's symbolism: Is Shlonsky allegorizing a particular situation or is he making a statement which he regards as universally applicable to existence in general? Ben-Or takes both sides, first espousing one vigorously and denying the other; then, seriously denying the one and espousing the other.

Ben-Or, at the outset, asserts emphatically and most definitely that it is clear that in "D'vai" we do not have descriptions of particular agonies, nor reference to any real situation, nor ascriptions of particular causes to particular evils, nor prescriptions for specific cures for them. For it is in the very nature of symbolism to strip away any reference to particulars, inasmuch as all particulars constitute a narrowing of vision. Rather symbolism aims at the absolute and essential generalization, the universal. Not only this, but Shlonsky represents the extreme in this tendency, the stripping away of any remnants of particular times or events, and the full act of abstraction from the existent. In "D'vai", we view the entire sweep of man's history from the aspect of eternal wretchedness.[34]

But, unhindered by the extremeness of this first evaluation, Ben-Or proceeds to state unequivocally that "without doubt" "D'vai" has reference to three real aspects of reality, three situations: The general human condition (this would, of course, agree with his first statement), the Israeli milieu, the problem of Chalutziut). And, in general, the poem is a reflection and expression of the confused period in which the poet worked.[35] As an example of this approach to the poem, Ben-Or notes that

many see chalutzic sentiments in some passages in the poem, the song of the young husbandman, for one. From this approach also, the "Leprosy", as was noted above, would be the psychological condition of Galut-Jewry; the flood and the looked for "Other Wind, Other Rain and Other Sun", the revolution and its expected aftermath. The Apes, Cows and Tuval-Cain would represent the three stages in the economic development of man, viz., the hunting, agricultural and industrial stages. Tuval-Cain is the symbol of urban civilization and modern technology which destroys the world, desecrates all sancta, exploits, and oppresses, and spills blood like water. This synthesis produces rebellion, revolution and revenge without giving man a sacrifice to offer unto God.[36]

Proceeding with the second part of D'vai, Ben-Or notes that it is concerned with the solutions offered by Judaism and Christianity to the wretchedness of man, and that it eventuates in the victory of Job, the captain of the black ship. That is to say, that wretchedness is the foundation of human existence on earth, the highest principle which rules over the world, and, therefore, there is no use in searching for an "out", for redemption from afflictions, because affliction itself constitutes the Great Deliverance. The two final sections of part II argue this strange assumption, which is made after Moses demands new tablets to harness the evil inclination and the burning out of evil from the land, and Jesus yearns for a new cross so that man will have an altar, a sacrifice, so as to overcome life's bitterness through the infusion into it of meaning and purpose. While on the other hand, Elijah and the Messiah argue for a real ameliorative material solution for man, Job finally triumphs over them all (the restraining of timely redemption) because

according to his late revelation and recent anointing, Wretchedness is Deliverance. In this sense the kaddish of the idiot signifies the complete end of any hope for redemption. The final vision is that of the darkening cliffs of Wretchedness and Toil toward which man silently and blindly row. And the black ship, moving in darkness, is existence itself.[37]

This is a quite acceptable, if brief and superficial, analysis, even though it cannot be said to be at all original with Ben-Or. Nevertheless, there is no little discomfort and dissatisfaction manifested by Ben-Or at the conclusion of his remarks. He refuses to accept the idea that Shlonsky's conclusion is identical with some of the basic presuppositions of Buddhism, that existence is a harsh burden; and salvation, escape from it. Rather, Shlonsky seems to say, even though there is no higher content in existence than Wretchedness and Toil, in these there lies dormant a seed of rebellion against that very condition of existence. Still unsatisfied with this conclusion, Ben-Or throws up his hands with the remark that this first stop in Shlonsky's work, is artistically weak and obscure, and that the reader never reaches the intent of the poem, whether to arouse us to action or to urge fatalistic submission to our destiny.[38]

Finally, we can explain, at least partially, the consternation of the readers of Hebrew poetry who first turned the pages of D'vai through the remark of Uchmani that with the appearance of Shlonsky's writings there occurred that which happens at the beginning of a period. Its emergence was felt to be all the more sudden and shocking, in that up to that point all the poetry was attached link to link with what preceeded it. From Shlonsky on, there begins a new dating in Hebrew poetry not only in the "how" of the writing but also in the "what", in content.

Shlonsky permits himself new elements based on daily, "vulgar" matters, "not only flowers of grace, but also the dung of sheep."[38a]

CHAPTER III

Part A

Having reviewed critical opinion on D'vai, one feels that his initial confusion, egendered by the poem itself, is doubly confounded by the discrepancies between the Peirushim. This discrepancy is partially, if not entirely, due to the fact that Shlonsky's Parshanim each have their own axe to grind. We have seen Shlonsky chided for not being a model literary exemplar of affirmative Socialist art, for not seeing in chalutziut a pleasant idyll or in Zionism all that is necessary for the Jew, for not writing according to the rules of the old masters, and for the inadequacies of readers who could not understand him. Nor has this writer (without claiming to have made an exhaustive study of the critical material), ever seen Shlonsky viewed in the light of the major themes and problems of twentieth century literature in general. This, too, accounts for the cloudiness and haziness of critical understandings or interpretations of D'vai. We must recall that Shlonsky, in his up-bringing, travels and studies, was an example not only of one type of twentieth century Jew or Israeli, but also an example of a type of cosmopolitan twentieth century man. The context of modern Hebrew literature is too small a compass with which to gauge his worth, not large enough a frame for us to see all of his poetry's meaning.

Perhaps there is another source of the lack of clarity in critical writing on D'vai, and an absence of any single analysis which will satisfactorily account for the totality of all the elements in the poem. D'vai can best be described as a multi-faceted jewel, reflecting in its many planes, many aspects of existence by the light, to be sure, that

comes to it from the outside. Some critics become so involved with one facet and what it reflects, that they forget the form of the entire cut stone and that, which as a totality, it expresses. Or to put this in another way: A given critic will perceive a relationship between the symbols used in "D'vai" and some aspect of reality. He will then industriously show all the correspondences, and will say, "D'vai is about the condition of the Jew," or "D'vai is an expression of the economic processes through which mankind has developed toward Socialism," or "D'vai depicts the state of the artist in the twentieth century and the possible artistic solutions open to him in a bourgeoisie society." Now there may be justification to the particular interpretation given to "D'vai" inasmuch as the central problem or theme or principle that unites the entirety of the poem is so all-embracing as to include, validly, all these interpretations. The only trouble is that, invariably, the critics never get around to stating what the underlying principle, aim, theme or problem is that the poet is trying to express and which gives their particular interpretation its validity. The critics hold forth at length on the poem's meaning; they became excited and agitated; they gasp and stammer; they sigh patronisingly over poor Shlonsky's early artistic and spiritual poverty. But, they never do get around to uttering the clarifying word that would give us the map of the labyrinth and the key to its entrance.

Let us pause here, without delay, and with compassion for the reader, and state simply and plainly that upon which we will later expand: D'vai is a poem about values, the absence of them, the need for them, the possibility of finding them.

The healing, the altar, the sacrifice of Part I of "D'vai", as well as the redemption of Part II, all stand for values that will bring healing to our spiritual malady, meaning and purpose to our bitter lot, redemptive amelioration of our wretched condition.

We must recall here, in order to pierce to the crux of our poet's intention, that the quest for values is an over-arching theme of twentieth century literature which itself reflects a deep concern of contemporary man whether articulate or unrealized consciously.

Under the impact of the shattering events of the twentieth century, the synthesis of values rooted in the ideologies of the Renaissance and Enlightment crumbled to dust and ashes. This spiritual catastrophe was rendered even more excruciating in certain segments of Jewry inasmuch as this disintegration of the frame of values which served to structure life, was telescoped into another previous collapse of the traditional values, the synthesis of medieval Jewish life, much as two cars of a train which encounters a head-on collision telescope into one another in an agony of destruction.

At the time that "D'vai" appeared, the world had not yet recovered from the trauma of World War I, and was dazed by a major revolution. Capitalism was now showing unmistakeable signs of decline. Man groped in a dizzying kaleidoscopically shifting maze of ideologies. The world, as Ben-Or puts it, was "still crouching on its ruins and screaming for deliverance."[39]

Eastern European Jewry suffered great physical loss and even further spiritual decay, a process that had been taking place for decades, in the affects of the turmoil of bolshevist revolution and white counter-

revolution, in the murderous Ukrainian pogroms. The chalutzim of the Third Aliyah, of the G'dud Ha-avodah of which Shlonsky was a member, endured the painful struggle of building up the waste places without the benefit of the romantic elan felt by their Zionist predecessors who had sung the vision of return. Shlonsky's bitter wail to the empty firmament was uttered in pain in behalf of myriads of others who knew not how to utter it.

It has been pointed out that as a poet of his unfortunate, despairing generation, a generation stripped of all holiness, a poet who bears a marked resemblance to the Bastard of the Final Covenant, who was found by Anarchy without tallis or tephilin behind the fence of the fallen synagogue --- Shlonsky never sang the conventional songs of youth, love or nature, but rather the laments of an afflicted man in the vale of tears.[40]

One critic[41] speaks at length about the fear or fears manifested in Shlonsky's poetry: fears going back to his childhood, the fear of pogroms, of Petlura, Deniken, Sklurow; of loneliness and abandonment, when as a boy he was sent far away from home; the fear of the Jew in a Gentile world; fear of the Dnieper; fear of wars; fear of the ugly cruelty of the city. This critic upbraids Shlonsky for not conquering these fears, for not seeing that they were not cosmic, for not realizing that they had material causes, for not seeing them in the light of economic determinism. We must note, however, that in D'vai, at least, Shlonsky is unwilling as yet to believe that all the wretchedness of life can be placed into this framework and redeemed through it. His fear, if we accept the critic's assumption, is so very painful because

it is for Shlonsky unrelated to any higher purpose.

From what was said above, it would follow that one does not have to go far to find parallels in twentieth century literature to the content and concern of "D'vai". Selden Rodman writes:

> Poets in the past had assumed the existence of God. Fate or necessity was the adversary with which the Greek hero waged tragic warfare. Since the Renaissance, the idea of progress had given meaning to life. But, with the decay of these assumptions, came spiritual despair. Reflecting this atmosphere, the modern poet has searched feverishly for a faith.[42]

Either the poet became dissillusioned with political action, despaired of human effort through democratic organization, and ended, as in the case of Rimbaud, with an anarchic philosophy of the poet's isolation from and opposition to such activity, searching for an absolute in the mystic and the occult instead,[43] or he sought certainty in conversion to Catholicism (Paul Claudel), or found faith in a religion of love (Rilke), or looked to Marxism for redeeming necessity (Berthold Brecht), or accepted the intellectual certainty offered by the orthodox church (Auden, T.S. Eliot).[44] Keeping in mind that some of these tendencies arise out of a situation in which a positive, constructive outlook is still possible, and others out of such a suffocating, narrowly horizoned prospect that only an obscurantist or abnegating solution is available, the main point to remember is that the driving force beyond all these drives and directions was the collapse of the spiritual structure that had once supported these poets.

In order to further butress our proposal from the proof of literature of our time, that the value vacuum is both the motive force and crux of Shlonsky's "D'vai", let us consider points of similiarity in but

a few of a large number of important writers of the twentieth century from which we could choose. Compare the agreggation of the earth's disinherited, the beggar, the blind man, the drunkard, the suicide, the widow, the idiot, the orphan, the dwarf and the leper in the group of poems called "Voices" by Rainer Maria Rilke with the similar grouping in "D'vai". *

Compare the condemnation of the structure of bourgeoisie technoligal-urban society embodied in the words of the priest at the end of the Tuval-Cain sequence in "D'vai" with A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man by James Joyce in which the writer uses vignette after vignette recalling his personal life to strip away the facade behind which lies the decaying structure of values of the society of his time. A traveller from the barren wastes of Shlonsky's "D'vai" would not think unfamiliar that desolate place of anarchy, doubt and spiritual sterility depicted in Eliot's Wasteland. The same excruciating sense of the tortured vacillation between hewing to the path of tradition and spiritual freewheeling conveyed by Kafka's Castle is communicated also by "D'vai". And finally, bringing us up to our own time, whether we endlessly and purposelessly roll the rock up the crag with Camus' "Sisyphus" or blindly and dumbly row with Job on the Black Ship through Cosmic Night, we are performing the same task; we are cast into the same existentialist darkness.

* C. F. MacIntyre writes of Rilke: "Who can beat this catalogue of life's unfortunates?" It certainly seems to be exceeded in Shlonsky's "D'vai".45

Part B

Before proceeding with a proof of the proposal that the theme of "D'vai" is the search for meaning, for a way to redemption through the discovery of values that will fructify the present spiritual sterility of mankind, we must first state this thesis in a little more detail, and then say a brief word about our approach to the interpretation of the text, which is, of course, the basic material of our analysis.

"D'vai" is of great interest inasmuch as it presents both "essentialist" and "existentialist" approaches to the problem. In part I, "Leprosy", the spiritual condition of mankind is presented, and Shlonsky seems to be working toward the possibility of a transcendant answer, a source of value in a truth about the nature of existence, toward the possibility of Rifut Olam, a final divine healing truth. But this approach is truncated in part I, and the attempt appears to be abortive. Any attempt in this direction ends in further decay and sickness. Shlonsky then gives up this approach, and, as we come closer to the end of "Leprosy", darkness is coming upon us. Part II, "The Final Covenant", takes place in complete darkness, within, as Shlonsky explicitly tells us, the symbol of Night. Where the over-riding concern of Part I is Rifut Olam, the search for communication with God, the search for an acceptable sacrifice and an altar, the compelling facts of part II are the death of the Messiah, the cutting-off of communication with God, a revelation which, with bitter paradoxicality, indicates that revelation is impossible. Shlonsky's conclusion apparently with reservations, as we shall see, is that there are no values as previously conceived, there is no outside redemption, no particular way to redemption, that the blind and dumb toil

and wretchedness of human existence has no perceptable goal, that our lot is endless night with no expectation of dawn, and above all, the sooner we realize this, the "better off" we are. If there is anything which gives dignity to man it is that realization, and that is what Shlonsky intends when he says that the most deformed (spiritually)---from the essentialist point of view---are the redeemed and the saved, the redeemers and the saviors. This view is already foreshadowed in part I, as we shall see. Part II is not as Ben-Or puts it[46] an argument for Shlonsky's view, rather, Shlonsky uses a biblical type of cosmology and scriptural revelatory approach as if to indicate, again with paradoxical irony: This is "ultimate truth"; this is how our condition came to be.

Part C

Now in approaching our analysis of the poem, the main point to be doubly underscored is that we must give each and every image, symbol, and "dark saying" the most careful attention possible. This is required either out of acceptance of a Jungian type of approach to art in which the utmost respect for visionary symbols as representations of the archetypes of the collective unconscious is demanded, or whether out of respect for the painstaking intellection of the artist.

Indeed, Shlonsky's summate and painstaking craftsmanship is revealed in the set of oppositions which he weaves into the dialogue of the opening pages of the poem. "Outside of the camp" (alienation) is opposed to "In the midst of the camp" (corporate life); "Autumn" and "the casting off" (ending, decay) to "Spring" and "sprouting" (beginning, growth); "There is no one among us who knows" to "the word of God is in the hands of the priest"; "shriveled beasts" to "full udders"; "pure flesh" to "impure of soul". Later, we see this tendency written larger in the massive opposition between the Tuval-Cain constellation of fire-machine-ape and the Ganges constellation of water-earth-cow. Again and again, we find this type of statement:

> Why have you recalled the cows
> And the apes you have not recalled. . .

and

> That which was too hard for the dung of the cows
> For that will be fit the claws of the apes.
> For that in which is not successful the dove,
> In that will be fit the raven (p.99)

Nor must we approach haphazardly the images of a poet who can describe clouds, as the situation requires, variously as the contents of a huge

rag wagon moving slowly, as the girding of sackcloth and ashes of a mourning sky, or as apes around an inscription portending disaster.

Secondly, in dealing with the multitude of symbols introduced in D'vai, we must be careful not to overlook the possibility that Shlonsky is making reference to ideas or images not only in biblical writings but also in rabbinic texts, in the New Testament and in various mythologies. This necessity of checking the symbols in these various sources is indicated not only by obvious characterizations based on biblical prototypes, or by well-known rabbinic formulations such as "we do not pay attention to a bat-kol," or in his use for titles of key-phrases used by traditional bible commentators in their exegesis such as "Vayhi" to signify imminent trouble or "Elohim" to signify judgement. We often find indisputable proof that Shlonsky is making a much more extensive and erudite use of mythical and traditional literatures than would appear to be the case superficially.

When Shlonsky writes: "If the world is a mad dog, I am the spittle dripping from its lips, I am the spittle!", he is indubitably playing on talmudic references:

> Five things were said about the mad dog: His mouth is open; his spittle drips from his lips; his tail hangs between his legs; his ears lie flat; and he walks on the side of the roads; and some say he also barks and his voice is not heard (Yoma 83).

When we realize that the poet is talking about the senslessness of poetry in a world that has no order or meaning, when we recall that the poet in other places repeatedly uses the image of walking by the side of the road, when we add to the spittle, the bark that is not heard, we realize at once, that Shlonsky is, (in using the mad dog

image), firstly thinking specifically of this source, and secondly, freighting his words with much greater meaning for those who know the source, even though the image still retains great power for those who do not know it.

Just as this mad dog sequence helps us to dispel any doubt that Shlonsky is deliberately and consciously using rabbinic sources for his own purposes in the same way that he uses so many elements from Jewish folk-cultic-ritual life, so does the passage (101) about the raven not returning to the ship because he smells corpse flesh and flies upon it. This idea has its source in a midrash (Leviticus R. 31) explaining why the raven did not return to the ship of Noah. The reader will also immediately recognize certain New Testament references such as, "Whosoever's flesh is not leprous/ Let him come and cast the first curse at her" (80), or the reference to the entire passage of Luke 7.36-50 in the harlot's wiping of the priest's feet with her hair (79). The compelling artistry of this latter usage in D'vai is that the image carries along with it into the context of the poem, the crux of the New Testament passage which is Jesus' statement (Luke 7.50) to the woman: " 'Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace' ". Now these more obvious examples of the constant use of classic sources for the purpose of his symbolism demands of us that we search for the sources of less obvious elements in an even greater range of mythologies and sacred scriptures and justifies our explanation of these symbols in terms of the role of the symbol in its original usage when, of course, the evidence warrants it. Secondly, this poetic method used by Shlonsky makes the further demand upon our methodology, if we are seriously interested in arriving at a true analysis of

D'vai, of looking into the original context of the symbol in order to discover Shlonsky's full intent.

When we emphasize the justification of our method of turning to classic sources for an understanding of many of the symbols used in D'vai we do not, in this, intend to exclude the fact that Shlonsky also makes use of the language of universal symbols or as Fromm puts it in his work on symbolism, The Forgotten Language, of "symbolic dialects." A reference to the latter work will indicate the approach necessary to decipher these symbols:

> The universal symbol is one in which there is an intrinsic relationship between the symbol and that which it represents . . . . Many . . . universal symbols are rooted in the experience of every human being. The universal symbol is the only one in which the relationship between the symbol and that which is symbolized is not coincidental but intrinsic. It is rooted in the experience of the affinity between an emotion or thought, on the one hand, and a sensory experience on the other.[47]

It is of great interest to us, of course, that Fromm uses as examples to illustrate this approach two elements which play such an important role in D'vai, fire and water:

> When we use fire as a symbol, we describe the inner experience characterized by the same elements which we notice in the sensory experience of fire; the mood of energy, lightness, movement, grace, gaiety,--sometimes one, sometimes another of these elements being predominant in feeling.
>
> Similar in some ways and different in others is the symbol of water--of the ocean or of the stream. Here, too, we find the binding of change and yet of permanence. We also feel the quality of aliveness, continuity and energy. But there is a difference; where fire is adventurous, quick, exciting, water is quiet, slow and steady. Fire has an element of surprise; water an element of predictability. Water symbolizes the mood of aliveness, too, but one which is "heavier", "slower" and more comforting than exciting.... But it (fire, also) conveys to us an experience of threat or terror, of the powerlessness of man against the elements of nature. Fire, then, can be the representation of inner

> aliveness and happiness as well as of fear, powerlessness, or of ones destructive dendencies. The same holds true of the symbol water. Water can be a most destructive force when it is whipped up by a storm or when a swollen river floods its banks. Therefore, it can be a symbolic expression of horrow and chaos as well as of comfort and peace. [48]

In stating these preliminary remarks as to our method of approaching the symbolism of D'vai, we must note also, especially inasmuch as it is a source of error among critics, that the chronological order in which elements appear in the course of the dramatic poems do not always indicate sequence of time, but may just as well signify intensification of the same idea, or a simultaneous approach to the solution of a problem, or for that matter, several other things. In short, Ein mukdam u'm'uchar b'Dvai. This is directly indicated by Shlonsky himself when he writes: "And once/ (Then it was a day like other days/ Just a day)" (85).

Further, we find ourselves with a hopeless task if we attempt to make any kind of absolute table of correspondences between characters or symbols in D'vai, on the one hand, and aspects of reality, on the other. One character may stand for several aspects of reality, and one aspect of reality may appear in several different characters or elements in the poem. For instance, it is not only the priest who speaks for the poet, but also the young husbandman, Bloni-Almoni, One-of-the-Many, Job, the Bastard, the Youth. But all of these figures represent not only Shlonsky, but other types and approaches as well. In this respect, and especially when we recall that Shlonsky's revision of D'vai is toward the elliptical and ambiguous, what Walter Kaufman wrote concerning Kafka's work applies also to Shlonsky's D'vai:

> In his simple style, comparable to the Book of Genesis, he fashions stories which, like those of Genesis, invite a multitude of different interpretations; and he does not want to be reduced to one exclusive meaning. As we read and reread the beginning of The Castle and compare it with the variant beginning printed at the end of the book, it becomes clear that Kafka went out of his way to rule out the possibility of one exclusive exegesis. Ambiguity is the essence of his art. . . . The world that confronts us and our life in it defy every attempt at a compelling exegesis: that life itself lends itself to many interpretations is of its essence.[49]

While it may not be necessary to mention it by this time, it will not hurt to remind the reader that, in accordance with our thesis, when Shlonsky uses physical symbols or images, he is referring to spiritual conditions. For instance, when Shlonsky describes the condition of the physical world, he is actually describing what he feels to be the spiritual condition of our existence.

Finally, in analyzing D'vai, parts I and II must be considered separately inasmuch as the approach, the "plot", the "characters," and the primary ideas are different, and, therefore, the entire set of relationships between the symbols and images change.

CHAPTER IV

The picture that Shlonsky draws of our spiritual condition is not a pretty one. It is a picture of wretched, languishing sterility. It is a description of a world in decline and decay.

> Barren is the earth
> and sterile every tree
> Bare from longing for produce and fruit
> And woman and beast when they give burth
> They pluck at breast and teat like a cluster of rotten fruit (93).

The fruit, the fruition are the values which might sustain man. But existence, life does not respond to man's longing:

> The earth stretches out limp:
> Parched
> And barren. . .
>
> Like a rebellious oxe the earth has hardened its neck,
> And the goad is dull. . .
> The great womb is shut up, it does not give its strength. . .
> The earth does not keep the seed alive (85-86).

Existence is sad, brings suffering and pain, and even has the quality of a loathsome disease. It is all ulcer and tears. It is leprous. It is characterized variously as an old, worn-out, used-up whore (76,79), as a roaring oxe gnawing at a dry trough, and as a baby sucking pus from a dried-out and diseased teat (76), which is to say that either there are no values to nourish us, or that those at hand are diseased and rotten. Existence, Shlonsky says explicitly, rolls itself in the dust (98) a sign of mourning and humiliation (dust and ashes being a universal symbol for excrement). The flesh of life is polluted and plagued and there is no wholeness, no untouched spot upon it (98). Like the sick boy of the Bible, it requires an Elisha to breathe life back into it (99). This would be the priest, of whom we shall speak in detail later, who says:

And you, earth,
Crouch at my feet and veil your face out of shame:
The prayer of all the lepers is in your clods.
Do not ask any more and do not assay,
Would that the earth would sleep in my bosom as in a sick-bed,
A moribund that has come to terms with its lot (106).

Existence is as sensless as a drunk, as disordered as a mad dog (100,) and worse, is unredeemed by any beauty or charm but is bleak and ugly. This attitude of Shlonsky toward existence is expressed through an entire series of images: The sky is described as a rag wagon moving slowly and lazily; the sun as a mangy monkey (97), or as blinking with its impostor face in its own foul light at the nakedness of the earth which is itself a drunken Noah in the last flood-pool (108); the endless mornings as a rabble of worthless men (97). Sometimes, the images used by Shlonsky to describe existence reach the level of the downright disgusting:

Behold there squats over us like a hippopotamus in green water
The heavens of tin.
Piss, heavens, your storms upon us (101).

These images of bleak and unremitting ugliness and sadness are supplemented by an entire series of phrases and words which lend an unmistakeable tone to the opening sections of the poem: wretchedness, leprosy, wailing dog, groaning, downpour, ashes, pollution, plague, rabble, dead infants, shriveled breasts, abominable flesh, horse-carcass, mangy kittens, pigs in pools, ulcer, weeping, consumptive ewe, scab, fungus.

Over all is cast the suffocating atmosphere of a depthless ennui, as the sun rises and yawns (97) and still another morning, another day forces itself upon the world (85). And finally, the poet is careful to impress upon us that this is the only existence we have to work with:

There is nought aside from you, oh world.
Nought beside you (78).

Having seen how Shlonsky describes reality, existence, we can now turn to his description of mankind itself. There is, as part of this description, a motif, that of "outside the camp", which forms an important link with one of the major ideas of part II, that it is only the stricken, the diseased, the suffering, the deformed who are truly the saved and "redeemed". That is to say, that only those who realize that they are bereft of meaningful values have even the possibility of finding a new orientation to life. But we shall deal with this theme in detail at a more appropriate place. Suffice it to say, at this point, that the "mankind" with which Shlonsky is now dealing, is the group "outside the camp."

The over-riding motif of the first part of "D'vai" is of course, that of leprosy. It is, indeed, the title of part I of "D'vai". It is of importance to recall certain salient points about leprosy in the Bible, inasmuch as the whole framework with which Shlonsky is working at this point, is leprosy in its biblical context.

The leprosy of the Bible is a loathsome, chronic, and infectious disease, but unlike the modern type it seems to have been curable through certain regulations involving quarantine and through the agency of priest, prophet, or holy man. We shall discuss the role of the priest when we turn to delineate that figure as he appears in "D'vai". "Linen and house walls were said to be leprous when thy exhibited patches of mildew, mold or fungus growth (Leviticas 13.47-59,14.33-37)."[50] Thus, the primary illness of those outside the camp is one associated with feelings of

alienation and quarantine from real, corporate life; helplessness, despair, resignation; and let us not forget, dependence for healing on an outside agency which represents the holy and divine.

Suffering in spiritual crisis, insecure and anxious about the future, longing for a return of a new birth of hope and productivity, rotting away with no means of their own to alter their wretched condition, and not even knowing the cause or meaning of their condition ("And why has it been decreed upon us to sit here . . .") they alternate between faith in the priest ("the divine word is in the hands of the priest") and loss of a faith in him ("And aunt used to say, day by day, that the priest would come/ And now Aunt cries") (74-75).

The sterility of existence is reflected in that of mankind. Abundant are the images of this condition. No flowers blossom; no children laugh; many infants are still-born; the women's breasts are dry; their flesh is too abominable for sexual congress; the children are as lost, orphaned, unattached and homeless as the wretched puppies, kittens and pigs fighting and tumbling in the filth (75). As the women say, even the grass of the field shrinks away from them, and even the beasts of the field and the birds of the air flee from their tainted flesh "for we are like the sewers of autumn in the alleys of a city" (79). In another place, this mass of humankind is depicted as offering up for sale, and cheap, gratis, their disabilities and deformities: a piece of a rotted nose, a burned arm, eye disease, a hump (97). This is all the resources they seem to have. Repeatedly the lepers and polluted are described as characteristically rolling themselves in dust and ashes, their hair unkempt and their clothes torn (74).

The condition of mankind according to Shlonsky is also indicated by the very word which Shlonsky chose as the title and key-word of the entire poem, דוי . It comes from the root דוה,[51] which is related to דאב , meaning to melt away, and hence, to pine, to languish, which is also the signification of many cognate verbs: אדב , דבא, דוב, זוב , and is kindred to דאג, It is applied to the languor of the sick or old person, to fear, or to pining away in grief. Its relation to דאגה, fear, terror, and דאבון, pining, wasting, is apparent. The root verb means to languish, to be sick (especially used of women in menstruation, (Lev.12.2) to be sad ("sick at heart"), sick of mind, afflicted, wretched. דוי, itself, in the Bible, refers to a languishing disease (Ps.41.14) and thus comes to mean uncleanness, something unclean, causing loathing (Job 6.6.7.) The rabbinic usage of the word adds the connotations of mourning and repining, depression, grief and affliction (Nidd.23b: "a child over whose death the father's heart is grieved"; Ber.16b: "let not our heart sink"; Kidd. 81B: "Let all those who mourn feel the affliction"; Naz.23a: "The Israelites are broken down"). The modern usage of the words is usually sadness, pain, affliction, sickness, faintness, loathsome illness. As an over-all designation of all the connotations and denotations of this word, which Shlonsky uses to describe the human condition, we have chosen, as the reader has undoubtedly noticed, the word, wretchedness.

This wretched group outside of the camp who are no longer pure of heart and whole of flesh but stricken, is that section of mankind which has suffered the collapse of faith in man, God, and the world, which no longer has a purpose-giving or meaning-yielding integrated system of values. But the suggestion is made at this point in the poem, and related

as we have noted, to an important idea in part II that it is just this group, only the group that lives in this suffering which has the possibility of sometime "entering into the gates of God", of finding a new relationship and orientation to reality. The others who live in superficial wholeness are not the saved, the holy, the great, the redeemed, whereas the deformed and sick are (cmp. 74 and 126).

Despite the wretchedness of the quarantined, alienated group outside the camp which represents a spiritually suffering mankind, nevertheless the sense of yearning as longing, permeates the dismal atmosphere in which they live. The content of their longing is one of the two constellations in which the poem's only positive symbols appear. (the other being the Ganges-earth-cow constellation). Their longing is at one point characterized very simply by the priest:

> "For what does the languishing, bereaved soul of man desire?
> Only its purity and a little tranquillity" (77).

But the specific point of their longing is clearly defined by a series of images which are gradually equated with one another and finally yield an unmistakeable meaning. The dominant yearning is for the return of spring, which has been inordinately detained and shows no sign of returning. "When? when will the spring finally return" are the opening spoken words of the poem. And when the priest later wants to describe the essence of the contents of his people's cry and demand from him, he says:

> And my people weep at the threshold of the Tent of Meeting:
> "When? When will the spring finally return?"

The fact that Shlonsky directs our attention to this symbol by giving it the initial place and then repeating it later as a delineation of the central need of the people, lends to that symbol a great

importance for interpretation. Spring, the symbol of rebirth, growth, hope, a future prospect, the stirrings of new life, renewed strength and productivity, is equated with return to the camp, normalcy, integration, true life. That all these connotations must be interpreted in spiritual terms and further, in terms of transcendent values by which man can live productively, in terms of redemption, is proved by the fact that return to the camp and the return of spring are opposite in the poem to the "word of God" (74) and that the fructification and fruitfulness of the earth is paralled by the "answer of God":

> Perhaps the produce will respond to us from furrow and womb
> Perhaps the udders will fatten with milk
> Perhaps God will answer (78).

The sense of yearning which permeates the group is expressed more actively in terms of a quest: the search for an altar, and the search for a sacrifice. We recall that these elements brought man into a positive relation with God, with the Absolute, with the Truth of existence; and the altar was a place of theophany and revelation, where God made His will and way known. The problem of the husbandmen in section two of "Leprosy" is that they have nothing to offer to God since the earth has remained barren. God does not seem to have favored the earth. They can neither find, nor build, an altar (86-88).

Life can be meaningful only when one has a relationship to the ultimate which arises out of a viable and productive way of life. When the vaiability of the system or structure of life comes to an end, is bankrupt or barren, the orientation goes to pieces, is lost, disappears. Truly, one has neither produce to sacrifice, nor altar upon which to sacrifice it. Yet, our own being demands some type of purposeful

orientation to existence, and we are thus forced to seek some way of life which will produce material for the "sacrifice" (korban-"drawing near") and to look for another altar.

This quest, this search for values is given poignant expression in the song of the waste road and the song of the young husbandmen as he sets forth on the waste road, the road yet untrodden (86). It is the road of the poet, of the chalutz, indeed, of any man in search of new values which can be found only with the utmost difficulty. There the word of the Lord comes wildly and primitively over one but wounds like the thorn of the desert. Every step is a new beginning, a declaration of "Let there be. . .", an act of creation, a b'reshit. The "young husbandman" has no hope for success, is not sure that his toil and journey will be meaningful or purposeful. He suffers, stumbles, strays and has no rest or encampment nor even a certain destination. The songs express Shlonsky's personal fear also, that whatever he is doing as a poet, as a zionist, as a chalutz, as a socialist, may make no sense whatsoever. Whatever meaning the journey has is given in the words of the old husbandman, in his retort to the young husbandman's disillusion and anxiety:

> No! For it is an ALTAR that we go to seek
> An altar for an offering that God will favor (88).

The final destination remains, to be sure, uncertain; the journey is directed only: "towards---".

The poet depicts the search for a faith in yet another place, and through the use of another symbol: Ararat, the place of stability after the flood, after the chaos and destruction, the place at which a beachhead was established for the recrudescence of life. Again the husbandman

is the archetype used for Man in search of faith:

> Tonight all the stars were picked off
> And like broken bones were scattered unwanted
> And what else is there left on which to gnaw?
>
> And the poets have envisioned unto us, saying:
> Spread out thy sails ye that go down to the sea
> For distant are the mountains of Ararat (85).

All of Man's hopes have been used up, dried out, broken. And it is not the fact that perhaps there is an Ararat that impresses the husbandmen but that it is "ooof. . . distant" (85).

There is such a remarkable piece of ancillary evidence in another magnificent poem by Shlonsky that what is indicated in the use of the term husbandman is a man in search of faith, of values in which we can place our faith, that it is worth quoting that poem in its entirety. Where "husbandman" appears in our poem as a bare symbol whose meaning must be divined, at the end of the poem "Go-thou" (Lech-L'cha) it appears as a clearly stated simile. At this point, the reader, I am sure, would spurn any detailed interpretation of a poem whose intent is so powerfully stated with such brilliant versatility and artistic genius:

> Go-Thou (220-225)
>
> ORDER
> OF PRAYERS FOR THE ENTIRE YEAR
> ACCORDING TO THE CUSTOM OF ASHKENAZ, POLIN, LITA, AND REISIN
>
> Thus was written on the frontespiece of the old siddur,
> In which my grandfather, of blessed memory,
> Used to speak to his Owner in the holy tongue.
>
> In such and such a year, my grandfather passed away,
> And was lead to the graves according to the custom of Israel,
> Dear Grandfather!
> Kaddish trembles on the lips of the world,
> And there is no one to recite it.
> And your posterity?

Oh my soul is like a mezuzah from which the Shaddai has been erased,

Grandfather will not come to kiss you.
He will not come.

And I went---
No tallis nor t'philin,
No Father in heaven,
No way prayer in the mouth of Mommy-Daddy.
Who under the stars there inscribed RIPS
In the firmament of the cemetaries? cemeteries

Not like Jonah in his time,
Who fled to Tarshish from before the Lord;
Did I go down into a ship going up to the Land of Israel.
I went up to beseech mercy and grace:
Forgive, Father in heaven!

I paid the fare,
I bundled up my bundle.
And wrapped up in myself, like the-bundle-of-Israel,
I listened to the hymn of chalutzim in the Holy:
Am Yisrael Chai
Am Yisrael Chai
Am Yisrael-Am Yisrael-Am Yisrael
Chai

But someone thrust out of my wrapped-up bundle,
Hunch-backed like a question mark:
--AND REB YISROEL?
And a destitute one like myself sat then by my side
And sang in my ears to me a well-known tune:
on the road stands a tree
and bows down to the earth.
a jew goes to eretz-yisroel
crying as he goes.

*

And in the cities of the sea there is the state of Italy:
A people like a song, and an aqua sky,
And paupers stretch out their hand
On account of an aria from Pagliacci.

And in the cities of the sea there is grey Britain.
And there is tumultuous France.
And there is Germany, and Holland and Switzerland.

And in the cities of the sea there is a state:
AMERICA!

--And I, Levi-Yitzchak of Berditchev, say:
Yisgadal, V'yiskadash Shmeh Rabo. . .

And only somewhere there weeps one pious mother:
Oi abrivellah der maman.

Oh momma-momma!
Is not Abraham your son dear to you,
And he goes poorly-poorly,
As if there were no son to momma
Pious momma on earth.

*

AND A SMALL LETTER IS SENT:

To his honor my father-my teacher and my mother who gave birth to me, may they live,
From their son, who is hidden from the eyes of God and man.
First I make known unto you, my beloved and my dear ones,
That I am, praised be His name, well and healthy.

And do not think, God forbid,
That I am depressed, and that my nights are as sleepless as my days.

And God sees,
That all my words are true and perfect.

But I have forgotten the essential:
Peace to my older-brother and to my sisters, the elder and the younger
And to my friend who is like a brother to me and more...
Let them not forget, for God's sake, to pray for their exiled brother...

For it goes very bad with him.

So are the words of the letter.

*

And in the year such-and-such
And I being in France without tallis and tephilin
Was looking for a prayer book and penitences
For a man in the twentieth century.

For behold
Today is thus-and-such a day of the week on Shabos
on which the Levites chanted
The psalm to the Father in heaven.
And where is the psalm to be sung to my members
Which are 365?
And if there is no psalm for them
Then where is the pauper's prayer?

*

And the Father in Heaven is so far, so far...
And I am not the Rabbi Levi-Yitzchak who had the merit
To speak of judgement with the Father in heaven
Face to face.

And I am not that Tzaddik who followed the cattle
Whose prayer was a whistle opposite the Holy Ark
(Oh the shrewd prayer of the Amei-Ha-aretz!)

I am one of the thousands of sons
Who were exiled destitute from the table of their father
To the sixth storey of a European capital.
And behold I am one of those who arise for midnight-redemption prayers
Because of disturbed sleep and to smoke a cigarette
(Oh the wine that is stored up for the step-children of God!).

Because there is a wind to the Autumn here and it beats like a shamash
On the soaked battlements of the sixth storey
And calls to slichos like the custom of the old-timers:
--Abraham!
--Here I am R.Elul!

What expression is there for me for prayer?
What way to penitence?
And the Father in Heaven is so far, so far.
So I will climb up on you at night, Eiffel Tower,
To pray by Radio to the Master-of-the-Universe.

*

Reebono shel Olom!
There is a sun in the middle of your world,
And it is like a shofar of gold
To assemble the devout to the worship of the Creator.

Reebono shel Olom!
There is a moon in the middle of your world,
And it is at its full,
Like a golden phylactery for your beautiful head.

Reebono shel Olom!
There is a man in the middle of your world,
And he is created in the image, and there is blood in his 365 sinews,

Oh a real portion of God Above.

But Reebono shel Olom!
There is a little one from among the thousands of Israel,
Whom you formed
And in whose body you apportioned the members,
And not one of them is missing, God forbid, from the quota of 248.
Then why have you made him like a husbandman who comes with his sickle

But finds no corn in the singing harvest?

Oh, WHY REEBONO-SHEL-OLOM!

Once we realize that Shlonsky is stating and re-stating, in part I, the same problem of the search for a faith in a period of the disintegration, of the chaos of values, then every passage which seems inexplicable otherwise, becomes a lucid and brilliant exposition of yet another aspect of the problem. One of the most difficult, if not the most enigmatic passages in the entire poem appears in the first meditation of the Priest. It is based, as the reader will see immediately, on Pirkei Avot 2.7:

> A black skull floats in my soul
> (Does anyone see?)
> And someone bereaved moans over it:
> Because you have drowned others. . .
> Wither shall I go with thee, whither shall I go with thee
> Broken-necked skull
> Like an ark on the breakers of a flood
> When my God has scabbed the dome of his heavens with clouds (76).

The Priest, whom, as we shall see, represents those in society upon whom men depend for values, bears within his soul a world of ideas which has died after overcoming a previous ideology-synthesis which, as in the Perek, is part of series of drowned "heads". His problem is the bearing of a spiritually dead world within his soul when he has nothing with which to replace it. He is cut off from the source of value ("When my God has scabbed the dome of His heavens with clouds"). Furthermore, his situation is rendered all the more difficult in that he is conscious of the process but has no assurance that the process will continue. Perhaps, there is no Being outside of the cyclical or developmental process Who "sees it" and thus gives it meaning. Here, also, we have another indication of the notion of Cosmic Decline or Cosmic Night which we shall discuss later in relation to part II.

But now, let us turn our full attention to the Priest, whose mention heretofore has been unavoidable in several connections, for he is after all the dominant figure in "Leprosy", its chief protaganost, its "hero".

It is, as we recall, the Priest to whom the decamped lepers and polluted look for healing, for the divine word, for whose coming they anxiously yearn, upon whom they feel completely dependent (74-76,78).

Shlonsky's Priest signifies, not as some critics would have it, only the religious leader, or the poet, or Shlonsky himself, but all those in society upon whom men depend for values, for a faith, for an orientation to life. This includes the thinker, the writer, scholars in the study of Man, as well, of course, as the poet, and Shlonsky himself. In our time, the task of these human sources of values, is conceived by Shlonsky to be one of the healing of a spiritual sickness, the restoration of life and creativity to a situation of decay, the task of integration in a time of disintegration.

Shlonsky chose to represent this social figure as the biblical priest. In the legislative portions of the Bible, the Priest appears as the intermediary between God and man, as the oracle of God's will, as legislator and adjucator, as guardian of the cult, and decisor on the way of life. But within this general background and penetratingly appropriate to the task of those in society who are most responsible for the solution of the contemporary problem of values, Shlonsky brilliantly places the priest within the specific context of his role as a healer of leprosy. The priest was the central figure in the biblical regulations for the cure of patients and for sanitary precautions regarding them.[52]

In the initial meditation of the Priest, Shlonsky draws the outline of the priest's role which he will later gradually fill in with more detail. He bears responsibility for a sick, decaying world: "And again on the palms I bear thee, world" (76). He longs to find the cure for it, which is his responsibility:

> And I have said:
> Would that I were a dog in order that I might lick your leprosy
> Harlot, washing in your blood,
> If it would be healing for you,
> If only it were healing for you
> Forever (76).

His Divine word is no longer healing or nourishing:

> And the Divine word,
> Like shriveled teats sag undesireably
> On the poor door of my lips. . .
> And I am only a breast which they have let drop
> For it is exceedingly dry. . .
> Behold an infant is clasped to the breast
> And sucks pus and cries. . .

As a result of his inability to give spiritual nourishment, to offer spiritual healing at a time when his people are suffering so greatly in their condition of spiritual decay, he himself suffers great pangs of suffering:

> And its bellowing, like fungi cleave to my soul. . . (76).
> Jobs in their leprosy roar;
> Jobs rub against me,
> And through the skirts of my garment they dig pierce their nails
> for the mercy of
>
> Healing!
> But it is not with me (77).

The Priest is cut off from the Divine source of inspiration("When my God has scabbed the head of His heavens with clouds") and he feels as if God has let him down, deceived him (77). That this is a very personal statement on the part of Shlonsky as the poet is born out by comparing this portion of the Priest's meditation with a much later poem

by Shlonsky which is his personal prayer as a poet begging God not to cut off the channel of inspiration:

> Oh, allow me to go on
> As one who bears a precious offering-gift with love to his appointed destination.
> For wherefore should my brothers beg of me:
> "Fill, fill our storehouses with plenty!"
> When Thou the gates of dew have shut (259).

The use of certain phrases such as "my brothers" makes this last quoted poem parallel in many ways to the many sayings of the Priest in "Leprosy", which along with a great deal of other evidence justifies the views of those that the Priest represents Shlonsky. But we are anticipating. That subject we will discuss in detail at another time.

The Priest is also characterized as Noah who bears the responsibility of saving the world from destruction, from the flood, by providing an ark in which the world may weather the storm of chaos. Again, these physical images must be interpreted spiritually:

> And yesterday, also, the priest bowed down at my feet.
> "Tuval--he said to me--Noah am I, the eternal Noah" (89). . .
>
> The Sun:
> Blessed is your coming, Noah!
> And where is the ark! The great ark.
> Tomorrow, behold, the flood (98).

The position of the Priest is also paralled by that of the Old Husbandman who represents the older generation which provided the values by which the younger generation must live (84).

Just as the Priest bears responsibility for the condition of the entire world, so he sees the solution of its problems as a social solution. His orientation is always toward the group and he desises each individual's concern over his own problems:

Only one flesh is the entire world,
Flesh polluted and stricken
So that there is no healthy spot,
And how good it would be (original version inserts here: for the flesh of the earth) were we to say:
"We."
But you
Each one of you feels only the pain of his own flesh,
Each one of you scratches his own flesh.
And when I crouched upon it, like Elisha over the child,
Then it cried to me: "Where are your brothers, my son?"
Woe is me! I thought that I would say: We!
And I say: I! (98-99)

When the Priest adopts an individualistic orientation, according to Shlonsky, he stands self-condemned. Whatever solution there may be for the spiritual problems of man, must be a social solution, since the earth is "one flesh". The priest, in referring to men, always speaks of them as "my brothers" (94,95). Steiner's contention (see p.27) that Shlonsky never rose to the level of positive communal value seems to ignore this side of Shlonsky's Priest.

To the agony of being unable to bring healing to man, which is his responsibility, is added the pain of being, nevertheless a visionary, in the sense of seeing all too clearly the full dimensions of the spiritual crucible of fire in which man is cast. He sees contemporary urban civilization as a smoking volcano about to explode. He sees beyond the strength of our technology, its decay and destruction. The mighty beast which blows the bellows with such great blasts, is, to the priest, "a wounded beast"; its fire, a lung spurting blood, the great rings of technology which gird the world, are like the rings about a crumbling barrel (90-91). The incense offering of civilized man to God goes up into the heavens like a dog into an empty house, going from empty room to empty room, when his master is not there and he does not know it (94).

The Priest's helplessness is depicted in many ways. If the world is disordered, chaotic, wild and senseless, then what the priest has to offer to his fellows is as coherent as a drunkard's ravings or the spittle of a mad-dog (100). His advice to spread the sail("you are the sail") and travel on to the distant Ararat, does not take into account the extreme fatigue and famine of the husbandmen whom he advises (85) and is after all completely stupid when there is no wind, no force to drive the sail onward, no meaning or motivation behind the journey (99). Though he decries the enslaving, destroying forces of the structure of capitalist society, he is helpless in the face of these forces (92,94-96). In his helplessness, he sinks back into obscurantism. One husbandman tells another: "I heard a whispered incantation. And he also consulted the teraphim." Surely it is an omen, answers the other (84). Whatever solution he, as the source of values, as the source of healing, as the providor of solutions, gives, he is accused of being deceived and of deceiving others (92). At one point, Tuval-Cain says to him: "How good it would be if your brothers did not know/ that we have spoken lies to them (92)." At best, he is capable of giving only consolation to the afflicted, of easing their pain, but not ending it. Neither can he heal the sick nor restore wholeness to those whose members have already rotted away, nor straighten out those who have already become deformed (78). On the one hand, it is intimated, at the very outset, that he is just as sick as the people, and on the other hand, he is accused of enjoying his own cleanness while the people languish away (78).

In fact, the Priest suffers a great deal of vilification at the hands of his people throughout the entire poem, from the very beginning

("Because of you/ Because of you/ Because of you") (79) to the very end. His chief accuser is Rotted-Nose who contends that the priest is hiding from the people because they have become loathsome to him. He is characterized as an Eliphaz, that representation of cowardly dogmatism and casuistry who refuses to face Job's condition squarely (78). This accusation is repeated near the end of the poem also, where the Priest is described as always at a distance, as worse than an Eliphaz, as conspiring to flee from the situation: "Cursed be the one that flees" (105). After the failure of the husbandman he is thought to be deceived:

> Is it not an omen!
> And even though it has not yet come to pass
> Behold I surely divine it clearly:
> The priest is deceived. . . (84).

Despite the fact that after the Tuval-Cain sequence, it is clearly the latter who is at fault for their horrid plight, it is the Priest whom the people condemn for leading them astray, for their continued sickness, and for the absence of an ark. Of course, there is justification in their condemnation insofar as it was the Priest who acquiesced in their turning to Tuval-Cain for aid (98-99).

These doubts expressed by the people about the Priest arise, at the outset, from the Priest's initial silence at the beginning of the poem. He has stayed away from the people for a long time and has not communicated with them. What Shlonsky is saying is that the artist or the thinker who attempts to create one ideology after another and they all prove to be unsatisfactory, who checks all the possible solutions for the problem of the human condition and ultimately finds none of them valid, has, finally, no recourse but escape from his task, or obscurantism, or silence. The motif of the silence of the Priest is later

developed in full in a sequence wherein the Harlot, who has always defended him, and has had faith in him, begs him to speak out, to pray, to do something. She reminds him of the terrible groaning all about, of the pollution of heaven and earth, of the lack of anyone but him who could beseech God. His silence (as is intimated at the very beginning of the poem) only results in the faster spread of the fungus and leprosy. But the Priest remains silent (107-110). Indeed he finally breaks his silence only to cry out in agony: "My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" In fact, the Priest's end is complete despair. He has killed the dove which could have brought stability; he has let loose the raven and it has not returned; his ark is broken (the White Ark of the final covenant in part II); he does not know whether to move forward or backward; he has lost his way. The healer of leprosy becomes a leper himself (106, 105).

We have emphasized the fact that the priest represents the intellectual in contemporary society. It follows naturally that the Priest expresses Shlonsky's own spiritual dillemma. This is proved by revealing parallels between references to the priest in "D'vai" and expressions of the poet in the poems Lech-L'chô (220-225) and Siyyum (259-260) in which he explicitly speaks for himself and reference to which have already been made. But the greatest evidence for this is the passage in "D'vai" in which the Priest speaks of the world as drunk and torn and as a mad dog; and speaks of himself as the drunk's song and the dog's spittle. Now, this passage appears as a completely separate poem in his collected poetry under the title, B'chofzi (In My Haste) where the clear implication is that the poem is a direct personal expression of Shlonsky himself(35).

David Aran, some of whose views we have already considered (see p.22), considers this poem to be the key-passage in all of Shlonsky's early work. While we do not attach quite so much importance to this passage ad does Aran, and feel that in limiting the significance of the Priest to a representation of the poet only, he does not go far enough, still Aran's remarks on the passage are highly valuable and worth our attention.

As we have already indicated, the Priest of D'vai is, according, to Aran, the poet, to whom leprous mankind cries for healing for their sickness, of whom they demand a solution to their problems.[160] Aran then proceeds to a detailed analysis of the passage mentioned above. We quote it for reference:

> If the world is drunken and torn--
> I am its wild song,
> I am the song!
>
> If the world is a mad dog--
> I am the spittle dripping from its lips,
> I am the spittle!
>
> I am the human torn with longing
> On another transmigration,
> The transmigration of Man (35, and with slight changes, 100).

This sharp statement, which so well expresses the quality of Shlonsky's early poetry, and defines his world-outlook, notes Aran, is composed of three stanzas, two of which, alike in structure, express the relationship that exists between the world in which the poet lives and his poetry. The use of "if" is completely rhetorical. The poem is a cry for release by a poet whose work can only be wild and unruly in a drunk, disordered world. The second stanza which is a sharper expression of what was said in the first stanza and a transmutation of "quantity"

into "quality", puts us into the very center of that outcry. While the first stanza characterizes the world and the poet and relates them to one another, the second stanza rolls both world and poet into one mad dog from whose mouth spittle drips, voiding the significance of both together. But this is not merely a fanciful image. In a world which lacks law and fundament, a world which is no longer the world in the accepted sense, poetry, too, ceases to be ordered poetry but rather breaks all the bounds of what poetry should be, a work of art, the creation of beauty. In such a disordered world, poetry becomes rather an expression of a curse, the fashioning of ugliness. The poem remains a poem only by virtue of the last stanza which speaks of the longings in the heart of the poet, that is the irrefutable, firmly planted human values which still remain there in the form of longings. It is these longings which annul the terrible implications of the first two stanzas and the rhyme that connects them: shir-rir, song-spittle.[54]

Even ignoring some of the aesthetic assumptions underlying Aran's remarks, it must be stated here that Aran has charged directly towards the point of this passage and then missed it entirely. Shlonsky is not concerned primarily with beauty or ugliness here, though, of course, his own honest refusal to write of "pretty things" in such a dismal world is involved. Shlonsky is concerned with the possibility of meaning, of purpose, of valid values. But, if there is no lawful world, if there is no order in the cosmos, then there is no essential truth even possible for man.

Having dealt quite thoroughly with the signification of the Priest in "D'vai", we turn now to his dillemma, the choice between the two ways:

Now I know!
The ways are two--Arise and choose!
Winters beat the drums of thunder unto me:
"Flood! Storm!"
And the trumpets of the wind answer them:
"Storm!"
But clods yearning for produce whisper unto me:
"Slowly! Slowly! --Like cattle! Like the earth!" (77)

This opposition between the two ways is carried out in a constellation of symbols. Associated with the slow way is the Ganges, the earth, cattle. Associated with the "fast way" the way of flood and storm (note that water in two different symbolic aspects is used, Ganges (healing, regeneration) and Flood (destruction with the hope of regeneration afterwards)) are the apes, and in a certain respect the cave of Tuval-Cain (technology). Again, this same opposition is carried out through the Raven and the Dove, and personalized through the opposition between the Harlot and Rotted-Nose and his followers the Rabble (Asafsuf). The reader will recall that the Priest sought healing for the people through a pilgrimage to the Ganges and an attempt to bring healing out of the earth through farming. Because of drought and weariness, this "slow way" fails. The Priest is then goaded into the "fast way" by Rotted-Nose, the Rabble and the seductive appeal of Tuval-Cain. The Priest's turning to the fast way is symbolized by the sacrifice of the Dove and the sending-forth of the Raven. The Rabble are then described as in a frenzy of superarrogation which could best be described by the simple sentence: "They take everything into their own hands." The end result, the reader will recall, is described in the last section of "Leprosy", which is entitled "Elohim" (signifying God's Judgement), as total despair, total decay, total destruction of hope for the future.

Now, the symbols involved in these constellations have been variously interpreted (some, such as the Dove and Raven, have been completely ignored, of course). The apes have been said to stand for the hunting economy, the cows for an agricultural economy and Tuval-Cain for industrial economy. The poem is then made to be a historical discourse. Why in the world a poet should choose abstruse symbolism to make the most elementary type of historic summary is not explained, however. That Tuval-Cain represents technological civilization is apparent to all, as is Shlonsky's abhorrence of urban life. Some critics go on to say that through the Ganges-earth-cows synthesis, Shlonsky is expressing his positive attitude to Chalutziut and life on the land as apposed to the Tuval-Cain image of life. This may, of course, be involved in what Shlonsky is saying in the "slow way" constellation, but it does not get to the hard core of the symbol, its underlying meaning. As we have noted, other specific interpretations have been made: The Ganges-earth is made to stand for Zionism and its redemptive value; whereas the flood and storm, for which Shlonsky shows an obvious disdain in the poem itself, is taken to mean leftist revolution, or perhaps its perversion.

Now, it is not our intention to dispute any of these particular interpretations (save, perhaps the "historical" interpretation) for in our view, all of these interpretations may be related to what we feel to be the underlying signification of the "slow way-fast way" symbolism in all its parts and aspects.

We have shown that Shlonsky is dealing with twentieth century man's difficult spiritual situation, with his search for meaning, purpose,

redemption in a chaotic world. We have shown how Shlonsky describes not only in "D'vai" but also in other related poetry, man's alienation from the traditional syntheses of value. And, finally, we have shown Shlonsky's concern, through the symbol of the Priest, with those in society upon whom men depend for values. It is in terms of our foregoing analyses, then, that the "two ways" symbolism must be approached.

There are two ways through which the problem of values can be approached when the problem arises, that is, in a period when the spiritual fundaments of life are shaken, either through a fundamental change in the structure of a society or in a period of decline and decay. We have, as we have said, an alternative. On the one hand, we may try to work with the traditional spiritual syntheses of value. That is, an attitude defensive, or protective of tradition, or submissive to it, may manifest itself in the attempt to validate tradition in terms of the new facts or conditions of existence, through reinterpretation, through the salvaging of elements still meaningful within a changed structure of life, or through a re-orientation to tradition by virtue of some form of faith or justification of its value in terms of stability, survival of value, etc. On the other hand, there may be a new attempt to create a new synthesis of value de novo on the basis of an overthrow of the traditional ideology, or there may be revolt, rejection, and subversion of it either because it is no longer meaningful in terms of the new conditions of life or because it hinders the aspirations and needs, material, cultural and spiritual of dominant groups in society.

In any situation in which society is undergoing a change, either because of the reformulation or the decay of its structure, the problem

of values arises and man must undergo the crisis of spiritual chaos, until a new integration in the realm of values is achieved. In any such situation, the vortex of the spiritual whirlpool are the various alignments to the traditional synthesis of value.

Now, the various alignments toward tradition may take forms of great complexity. The term "tradition" may be a religious orthodoxy, or a previously held common religious faith, or a philosophic approach, or an ideological or political commitment. Rejection of tradition may involve a rejection of any one of these on the basis of something entirely new, or on the basis of reaching back to espouse, in a new form, a synthesis of values which preceeded the one now being rejected.

Shlonsky's presentation of the basic dichotomy, the search for a faith either through tradition as opposed to the attempt to create de novo new values, includes or reflects many aspects of contemporary reality. But, it is the basic underlying choice that Shlonsky is emphasizing. Let us, therefore, consider in detail, the symbolism involved. We turn first to the "slow way."

Any traditional approach to the meaning of life, its purpose, and the values leading to redemption, whether they are based on traditional religions, or upon the tradition of western philosophy or upon the idea of progress in society and the development of man see in redemption a process which will be eventuated only gradually, slowly. Thus, the emphasis of slowness in reference to the earth in Shlonsky (77,82) or distance in reference to another redemptive symbol, Ararat (85). The earth symbolizes tradition in "D'vai" in terms of the hope for its fertility, in the hope that in the process of slow maturation, the word of God

will grow from it (78). We must note two very significant facts about the representation of tradition in D'vai; firstly, it is the way chosen by the Priest. He is looking for the essential redemptive or healing truth, a Divine truth, by which men may be guided. Now, traditional religion and traditional philosophy have both been essentialist in this respect. It is natural and meaningful for the priest to have chosen this approach. Secondly, that all the positive symbols in the poem, aside from those describing man's hopes, are associated with the slow way constellation of symbols. Now, the essentialist approach does, after all, represent the only approach for man in which the results or aims, or possibilities could be described as salutary, productive, and fruitful for man.

But, let us now turn to the symbol of the Ganges and see how Shlonsky cleverly uses it as a symbol of tradition. The most acute proof of this is Shlonsky's use of the phrases סבא רחיכא and אמהות טובות in reference to the Ganges, names which in other poems represent traditional Jewish faith (81). Secondly, when Shlonsky speaks of "the waters of the Ganges which flow slowly", he knows that we will think immediately of the waters of the Shiloah, which in Isaiah 8.6 represents one's own tradition, one's own way. Again we note the emphasis upon slowness, tranquillity, which we will see again with the cows. Again, this represents our quiet faith and its slow fulfillment. But the use of Ganges "beloved of Vishnu" adds a universal note to the poem, which is exactly what Shlonsky intends. It was through Vishnu that the "life and salvation bestowing waters" of the Ganges could "flow gently down to earth for the physical and spiritual refreshment of mankind."[55] Shlonsky did well to choose the river

held sacred by a larger number of people than any other river in the world:[56] "In this age, Ganges is holy (Mahabharata iii. 85,90). He who bathes in Ganges purifies seven descendents. As long as the bones of man touch Ganges water, so long is that man magnified in heaven. No place of pilgrimage is better than the Ganges (iii. 85,94-96).[57] Ganges, then, is an excellent symbol with which to represent the potential healing powers of tradition.

Nor would Shlonsky have chosen a more apt symbol than the white cows to represent the promise of fertility. (We recall that what is involved here is spiritual fertility). For the cow and the bull in ancient mythology are bound up at once with bodies of water and with fertility. Bulls were sacrificed to Poseidon by the ancient Greeks and were associated with rivers, river-spirits being imagined by the Greeks in bovine form. Hera was the goddess of the fertile earth. She was worshipped at Argos as the "Goddess of the Yoke" and was called "rich in oxen". The island sacred to her, Euobeoa, was also called "rich in oxen" and at the Heraion of the Argives sacred herds of cattle were kept, and votive images of cows were found there. There are stories of this "oxe-eyed" goddess of fertility changing into a cow. Her connection with fertility, in addition to being signified by oxen, agents of fertility, is also illustrated by the fact that at Argos ears of corn were called "flowers of Hera". In addition, we can note with interest, that certain rivers were sacred to her. She possessed medicinal powers to regulate the flow of the menses and to cure sterility, powers which were of particular interest to women, and which are another example of her fertilizing power. Originally, too, Hera was simply a local form of

earth-mother, "promoting the fertility of all her creatures, and identifying herself with their lives, marrying and upholding marriage, taking the herds under her protection and herself occassionally appearing in bovine form, creating and adorning herself with the lilies of the field."[58] White cows associating with the bull-god Apis and representing an agricultural fertilizing agent appear also in Egyptian mythology.[59]

In addition to using a symbol which universally represents fertility, Shlonsky explicitly associates the White Cows with fertility in the context of his poem. He speaks of "full udders", the dropping of fertilizing dung, the change of leprosy to seed, the swelling of conception, the pouring of milk on earth and man, the promise of tomorrow's produce (82).

Shlonsky uses water in two of its forms to symbolize both the turning to tradition and its overthrow. The use of Ganges "which flows slowly" to symbolize the potential fertility of tradition and the flood to symbolize the overthrow of all previously held values in order to start anew, is a parallel paraphrase of Isaiah 8.6ff wherein the identical situation is stated:

> Forasmuch as this people hath refused
> The waters of Shiloah which go slowly. . .
> Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them
> The waters of the River, mighty and many. . .

If we recall the flood story in the Bible, we realize immediately how appropriate is this symbol for the representation of the wiping out of a hopelessly corrupt and rotten situation so that a new start can be made.

The Flood and the Apes in "D'vai" are related, are part of the same complex of symbols. It is the Apes who announce the coming of the Flood (89,98). The Apes, like the Flood, are a destructive force, and both

signify a new beginning, B'reshit (81-82).

But a thorough study of "D'vai" reveals that the Apes are not only related to the symbol, Flood, but also to the Tuval-Cain grouping (the Ape is the smith), to the concept of primitivity, to the section which describes mankind's taking of the world into their own hands, and to a motif of wild self destruction. Now, all these motifs are inter-related, and, as we shall see, logically so. The Ape represents man without tradition, without values, an anarchic acultural man. The symbol Ape in "D'vai" is inimical and in opposition to the symbol Cow, which represents tradition. The Ape is part of the Tuval-Cain grouping inasmuch as is the synthesis of technology and urban civilization is, in Shlonsky's view, destructive of both the traditional value syntheses and human values in general. The Ape also represents the danger of man's self destruction when unguided and unprotected by tradition and its values.

In modern times, the resemblance between man and ape is not only recognizable, but also has a phylogenetic basis. But, in ancient times also, men saw in apes a resemblance to human beings (Erubin, 18a). Many ancient groups believed themselves to have been descended from apes, and in Jewish mythology, the apes were thought to have been one of the three classes of "men" descended from the builders of the Tower of Babel.[60] This was the group who wanted to take heaven in their own hands by ascending into it, and by setting up their own idols to worship there.[61] The Ape as a symbol of man in his self-destructiveness, in his relationship to his technology, and as a creature striving to overthrow the Divine order so as to establish his own values, is born out, then, in Jewish talmudic and midrashic sources.

What support of our interpretation of the symbol Ape do we find in the text itself? The text speaks of the "Apes of B'reshit", the primeval apes, which tear at man with their primitive claws until they return to their former primeval condition. Man regrets that he has gone so far from the Ape. While the Ape is hostile to the Cow and later, (after man turns to Tuval-Cain (90), destroys it, at the outset, the appearance of the Cows results in the dissappearance of the Apes (81-82). Without in any way diminishing the validity of our basic interpretation of the opposition between the two, and the fact that the former is the positive, creative element, and the latter, the negative destructive element, also express Shlonsky's faith in a return to the soil as a source of redemption as opposed to his deep-seated hatred of urban civilization which in his view, is the villain in the piece of modern life. Shlonsky sees urban civilization (S'dom and Bavel) as chariots to which Apes are harnessed speeding on without restraint to universal destruction and oblivion (95). This chariot of destruction appears as an image in the poem immediately after the mob begins to take existence into its own hands (95-101). But this frenzied self-arrogation leads only to a spreading of leprosy even to a greater extent.

It is as if Shlonsky were saying: Tradition which was once so fertile a source of values for human beings remains barren to us, either because of our impatience and weakness, or because it is really used up, useless, and sterile. But, if we overthrow our previous approach to the search for values via tradition, and begin with a tabula rasa to create our own values exnihilo, then we are worse off than before, and there is nothing to restrain us from destroying ourselves.

The attitudes of faith in the traditional values and in the traditional approach to the solution of the value problem, and the opposition to traditional values and desire for their overthrow are personified respectively by the Harlot and Rotted-Nose in their attitudes to the Priest whose preference for the traditional value synthesis we have already indicated.

The Harlot defends the priest in her faith that he will provide the "Everlasting Healing", "the word of Salvation," the "Word of God". She is described in D'vai as the Harlot in the New Testament to whom Jesus says: "Thy faith hath saved thee" (79). Her faith in the priest remains with her to the bitter end, when she begs the Priest to break his long silence in order to entreat God in the earth's behalf (107). In fact, she symbolizes the suffering, unredeemed earth itself (79). In her simple faith, she endures the scorn and abuse of Rotted-Nose who has faith in nothing (78).

Rotted-Nose was an apt title to choose for the protagonist of the anarchists and nihilists. The zav can be ritually purified; the leper can be cured, the harlot can be redeemed and forgiven. But Rotted-Nose's nose is actually rotted away. It cannot be restored by any of the Priest's methods or any of his healing devices. He has no stake whatsoever in the old values, and no faith in them. His attitude towards them is one of total despair. Tradition cannot cure; at best, it is capable only of consolation:

> There is only easing with him and not healing.
> Is he able to restore a nose to one whose nose has rotted
> Or can he straighten the spine of the hunch-back? (78).

He accuses the Priest of dogmatic, cowardly casuistry. The condition of mankind, he asserts, is loathsome to the priest and the priest therefore, wants to flee from his responsibility (79). Rotted-Nose is contemptuous of those who orient themselves in a submissive way to the traditional values and of those who seek atonement when they depart from them (80, 99). He scorns the preachments of the Priest, and confronts him scornfully, with demands for the so-called "Word of Salvation" which the priest is supposed to have (80). Just as the Harlot has faith in the priest to the very end, so, to the very end, Rotted-Nose derides the Priest and all who have any expectations that he will provide meaning or purpose for them:

> Woe unto you, Rabble!
> For you love only to beg forgiveness
> And to be led astray.
> And where is the Ganges? And where are the White Cows?
> You said: "You are the sail---"
> And where is the wind which will push the sails?... (99)

At the end of the poem, Rotted-Nose expresses complete despair in the possibility of any values whatsoever, from any source:

> Falsehood! Falsehood! Falsehood!
> It is only abominable-and-holy falsehood.
> For we desired not Ganges!
> For we loved not the chariot of the apes!
> Nor will the earth put us to sleep in an eternal cradle!
> We have only flown at every storm
> And have not been sated.
> We have only scratched ourselves with every sherd
> And it has not healed us.
> For the pain is too great to bear, worse than death,
> And ulcer daily sprouts and spreads (108).

In short, everything has been tried. Nothing works. There is no hope.

This devestating despair, according to Shlonsky, is the condition of a good segment of modern man. We have seen that the critic Uchmani (see p.29) expressed dissatisfaction with "D'vai" on the grounds that Shlonsky

does not indicate, at all, the cause of man's condition. Yet in Shlonsky's delineation of Tuval-Cain, we do see a factor belonging to reality that is, at least, partially responsible for man's spiritual destitution.

Tuval-Cain, the father of technology according to the Bible (Genesis 4.22: And Zillah, she also bore Tuval-Cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron. . .) represents for Shlonsky, the complex of modern industrial technology, urban civilization in the contemporary sense and capitalist society. We note in "D'vai" that Tuval-Cain creates S'dom, Amorrah and Bavel, the archetypes of the Evil City. The prominent role played in the symbolization of the cave of Tuval-Cain by the wheel, Fire and Bellows also point to technology, all three being familiar symbols, in ancient mythology, of human inventiveness, and technology. The wheel is said to be, in fact, man's first invention, and the role played by fire in both the myth of Prometheus and the prehistory of man is familiar to all. Furthermore, Shlonsky's negative attitude to bourgeois city life is well attested to by much of his other poetry, in which he speaks of the terrors of עיר . To Shlonsky, the city is a blighted heap of confusion in which misfortune appears at every turn, suspicion lurks in every corner, and ennui spreads everywhere like the thick smoke of factory chimneys suffocating everyone.[62] Other critics have noted Shlonsky's approach in this respect. Herbert Howarth interprets the poem, "Blowing Corn", by Shlonsky, in this way:

> We are two hundred thousand in Tel Aviv, it seems to say. We came to this land to remake it, and to do that we should plunge our hands into the soil. . . as the boys and the girls of the farms do today. Why are we idling in the town? The Gentiles compelled our fathers to be townsmen for years, and our longings for Palestine was mixed with the longing to be in the open, to

> go to the earth again and roll with it in natural harmony. We poets who stay in the town are demented. Above all others, we should know that happiness does not come from idleness. It comes from the immersion of self in sacrifice for a purpose.[63]

Though it entices and is seductive, Shlonsky says about the complex represented by Tuval-Cain, though men may place their faith in it, and seek through it, values to replace the ones destroyed by Tuval-Cain himself, nevertheless, its end is doom and destruction both spiritual and physical and man will be swept along into the general annihilation. Let us see how Shlonsky in the pages of his poem develops this idea.

The Waste Road taken by the farmers leads to Tuval-Cain. This signifies the attempt to find redemption through modern technology. But, this Waste Road leads away from Tuval-Cain, also, inasmuch as Tuval-Cain is a destroyer of values and the road is, therefore, a result of him. Men seek help from Tuval-Cain in the building of the Ark to take them to Ararat. At the head of all roads, sits Tuval-Cain, seductive, enticing, open to all who come (88).

The cave of Tuval-Cain is a terrible, soot-eaten maw (the city devours its inhabitants; technology its creators). A giant wheel revolves at its threshold, and inside is a bush which takes fire whenever an unseen bellows blows upon it. Cain, we are given to understand, turns the wheel, and God blows the bellows. Both are captives of Tuval-Cain; both are his servants. In the cave, the men who turned to Tuval-Cain for help, are enslaved, hurled about, whipped. They are as if cast into a chariot which is thundering on directionless to chaos (88). Man, in the modern industrial capitalist city, is like a squirrel in a treading cage. In the cave of Tuval-Cain, the tender violet and tender infant are both crushed in iron tongs. The cave's smoke soots the very heavens

and creates clouds which are like apes around an inscription portending destruction (90-91). The city, technology, etc., is related again and again to the Cow (tradition)-destroying Apes (91).

Modern, capitalist, urban technology's seemingly great strength hides incipient decay, collapse and destruction (92). It will collapse, but not before it has utterly confounded, wasted and ruined mankind. Perhaps, it signifies a new beginning, but it may also represent a destructive millenium. The process set in motion cannot be stopped either by Tuval-Cain or by the Priest or by anyone, and it is a process in which the struggling generations, to whose backs wretchedness is lashed, are ruined (93).

It is not the much sought for ark that Tuval-Cain produces but rather S'dom and Bavel which rend the people the people as with an iron blade. But, the city also puts the soul of steam in the people and prepares them for revolt. We recall the dismay of the people in their inability to produce from the earth an offering acceptable to God. Now, they say, if the smoke of the city is not an acceptable incense, then we will rise, Cain against Able (Man against Earth) for the last time, and to commit the final destruction. If we find no meaning in our lives, they seem to be saying, we will destroy the world and ourselves with it. (93). The city cannot give men God. Rather are both Man and God in modern society enslaved together, endlessly turning the grindstones of an empty mill (93).

Never before has the world been so ugly. Never before, such a plague of smoke, such a fungus which spreads poisonously over the earth, such a mood of bleakness in the world. These are the creations of Tuval-

Cain (96). Furthermore, Tuval-Cain creates a situation in which life is so filled with ennui and is so meaningless that all man's tomorrows are like flies hosting on the flesh of the world, or like a hydra-headed beast, whose heads, no matter how quickly you cut them off, always grow two back in each one's place.

Now, the Tuval-Cain experience is an important one in the issue of man's search for values, for a meaningful ideology. For it is only after this experience that mankind rejects the Priest and his approach completely, overthrows all traditional values and turns full steam and full speed in an anarchic, nihilistic direction, forcing the priest to lead them in their superarrogation of spiritual authority and their overthrow of all existing order.

Shlonsky's attitude to this can be seen in his giving the title, "Vay'hi" to this section, which suggests, according to traditional biblical exegesis, that trouble is coming. In addition, Shlonsky's title for the last section of "Leprosy", the section which describes the dreadful results of this attitude on the part of Man, is "Elohim", the name of God which, in traditional exegesis, signifies His attribute of stern judgement.

The crux of the matter is the Priest's turning, as a result of the accusations, taunts and pleading of the lepers and the Rabble, away from the Ganges-earth-cows approach to the Flood-Ape approach.

> Truly not in silence now is God,
> And that which was too difficult for the dung of the COWS
> For that will still be capable the claws of the APES,
> And for that in which the DOVE is not successful,--
> The RAVEN will be fit! (99)

In order to demonstrate his new approach, the Priest sacrifices the Dove, dips the Raven in its blood and in leprosy and sends it out over the earth. The Dove, again, represents the Agada of the past, and as Shlonsky points out in several other poems, a generation which once destroys agadot can never again believe in them. This is exactly what the Priest refused to do previously:

> What use would there be in a sherd,
> Had Job not cursed his day,
> But his God.
> What use in the ark
> Were a RAVEN to bring this time the olive leaf (98).

The sending forth of the Raven is equivalent to forsaking trust in God, in the value of tradition, and to ending the possibility of the Shechina-dove's ever returning to dwell with mankind. The sending forth of the Raven, which is tameh, impure, and which represents the symbol night in many poems of Shlonsky (as the dove represents also the dawn), marks the onset of Cosmic Night in D'vai, a theme which we will later discuss. Genesis Rabbah 33.6, commenting on the verse, Genesis 8.7: "And he sent forth the raven", applies to it the verse in Psalm 105: "He sent forth the darkness, and it became dark." While tradition has proved spiritually sterile, nevertheless, to forsake it results in absolute and unending darkness.

Until man finds new values, the priest tells the masses, until the coming of the other wind, the other rain, the other sun, man must live in painful despair. Their wind will be raging heat; their rain, storm; their sun, a vat of blood (100).

It is then, too, after the sacrifice of the dove, that the Priest utters the poem, to which we have already referred in detail, which

describes the world as drunk, leprous, disordered and mad (100).

There follows a chaotic, frenzied, mad sequence in which the mob, with Rotted-Nose at its head, seizes control of the chariot of the apes and drives them on without constraint to the crushing of all the earth, all tradition, all meaning, all order in existence. The mob feels itself to be tremendously exalted and powerful. They themselves, they cry are redemption itself, the Ararat against which the ark of days rubs (101). The entire cosmic egg, the entirety of existence is in their hands, the whole world, and they can toss it back and forth, split it to release either dove or raven, shove it back down God's mouth, or swallow it themselves to create a new world (101-102). Both the sun (the source of creative energy) and the earth itself, are referred to as the egg. The egg has hatched for thousands of years, and the mob is impatient now, and wants no more hatching, but is ready to split it open. It is described as a hollow nut, an ownerless ball, and a sheep ready for the slaughter. But, it is not a new creation that springs forth from the cosmic egg, now in the hands of the mob, but a raven which alights on the corpse-flesh of the world to devour it (101-102).

Shlonsky's symbolism here, can be explained in terms of the motif of the Cosmic Egg as it appears in ancient mythology. It is an image that appears in Greek, Orphic, Egyptian, Finnish, Buddhistic and Japanese mythology. Some see the image of the egg in the biblical cosmology of Genesis. It also appears in the Cabalah. It is the source of existence, the turning of non-being into being. When it split, creation appeared. Within it lies the fertile seed-power and inexhaustable dynamism of nature.[64] In the Orphic mythology, the first great god was Eros who

sprang from the primeval egg, and he represents the principle of generation, through which all the gods and the whole world were created. But, the entire creation of Eros or Phanes was swallowed by Zeus who then created the world anew. In this myth, the idea is set forth that the ruler of the world is also its creator.[65]

Shlonsky's symbolism is thus clear. Mankind's superarrogation of spiritual creativity without reliance upon God or tradition is what is referred to as the hatching of the egg of creation, the tossing of it about, the swallowing of it, or, on the other hand, the rejection of existence by trying to shove it back down God's mouth from whence it was disgorged. The result of man's taking of the order of the world into its own hands is darkness, despair, and destruction, all symbolized by the Raven which springs forth from the egg.

It is, in fact, an act of vengeance upon the world and God, in which mankind is engaged, an act of vengeance ("Like God in S'dom") for the fact that they have found no offerings, that no offerings were accepted by God, that they have never been able to find a valid orientation to Existence or meaning in it. Man is represented in the archetype of Cain rising against Able (Abel) (the world) for the last time, to destroy him forever. Indeed, all of the images in this section portend destruction. God and Cain (man's own prototype) appear as two blind Samsons who have become enraged against mankind. If we finish this thought, we can see a cosmic temple of the Philistines crashing down upon all of existence. Man is pictured as a wild gambler turning the wheel of fortune, which is technology, to his own undoing (102-103).

And what is the aftermath of man's attempt to be the creator and ruler of existence? Man turns into a series of anonymous "someones". The plague has grown deeper. The promised new world, the other wind, rain and sun have not appeared. The entire earth becomes more leprous, plagued, rotten filthy and putrid than ever. Only ravens begin to flock ceaselessly. The priest appears, ulcerous, his ship is torn to bits, and he too, has become a leper. The end is a wail of woe, as men rot away in their leprosy (110).

This is the dilemma of man: When he seeks values through an orientation to God and tradition, the result is spiritual drought, famine and sterility; when he seeks to create values of his own, overthrowing previous values entirely, the result is chaos and self-destruction.

We are thus led into the theme of Cosmic Night, a theme which becomes a major motif of part II. But, the idea that there is really no hope of finding meaning in life in the form of true essence is already foreshadowed in part I. There is the implication at the very beginning of "Leprosy" that spring may really never return (74), and that our existence will remain leavé a wintry, dead, unfertile one forever. The struggle between tradition and <u>creatio ex nihilo</u> in the search for values is characterized as an endless meaningless dance of apes and cows, who now tear at each other, and now intertwine tails in a dance of reconciliation, while behind this image, is <u>stam</u>, a cipher, a void (109). The idea that night has fallen on man and that there will be no dawn, no way out of spiritual chaos, is expressed again through the image of the leprosy of God:

Do you see: Night.
I know:
From some great terrible wound
Of some Ancient and Exalted Leper
Flows, flows this black blood.
You have become leprous, oh God! (106).

Mankind's night is the leprosy of God.

Finally, one more motif will afford us an excellent introduction to our analysis of part II. It is the motif suggested in the speech of One of the Many at the beginning of part I, a motif that along with the theme of Cosmic Night, is the link between parts I and II of the poem:

Who will come into the gates of God:
The pure of heart and whole of flesh?
And will they cast the leper and polluted outside of the camp?
And what desire does God have for those who are whole,
For the whole who have not been smitten?
The God of the stricken is God!
We are the camp, and THEY are outside of it (74).

Though only one of many can see this, it only is those who realize that all values have collapsed and that there is no surety in any new ones, who have some kind of paradoxical hope of reconstructing man's spiritual condition. Only those who realize the full depth and despair of the human condition are in a position to somehow rise above it. The meaning of the passage quoted above becomes clear only when collated with the last words of the final covenant (126) in which the afflicted, sick, leprous, oppressed and destitute are characterized as the great, holy and saved. In order for man to find meaning in life, he must go through and beyond the acceptance of the blackest pessimism and despair. Only then is it possible that he may rise out of it with a new positive and affirmative faith. This is the proposition developed in part II of "D'vai," "The Final Covenant".

CHAPTER V

The problem in part II of "D'vai," "The Final Covenant", like that of part I, is the problem of a meaningful orientation to the universe. But, we recall that while it is still day in part I, all of part II takes place within the depthless darkness of Cosmic Night, a manifestation merely foreshadowed in part I. The question of "The Final Covenant" is then, a paradoxical twist or re-phrasing of the question of redemption: What is redemption, when there is no possibility of redemption as we have conceived it? What is Man's destiny in an existence devoid of meaning? What orientation toward existence is possible for a man who lives in the world of Cosmic Night, upon which no dawn will ever rise?

Shlonsky not only explicitly states the theme of redemption through the frequent use of the concepts of G'ulah, p'dut, and y'shuah, and through the full-scale debate on redemption which takes place during the poem; he also weaves into the poem the very mood of redemption through the skillful use of elements from Jewish tradition.

Near the beginning of part II, we overhear a conversation among the bitter wayfarers in the saloon, the content of which is speculation about the coming of the Redeemer: ". . . that when the Redeemer comes, the source of tears will be dried up/ Is it possible (117)?" Also, the motif of the lel sh'murim, the night of watching, is introduced:

> And you, as on a seder night, set up the cup of Elijah.
> And it will be a night of watching for us:
> Perhaps he will come (118).

The outcome of the poem is ominously foreshadowed, when, upon the opening of the door, not Elijah, but Job, the conqueror of the Messiah, enters (118).

But above all, Shlonsky plays again and again on the theme of Chatzot, Midnight, an image saturated with the mood of redemption in Jewish tradition. The assembly of redemption takes place at midnight; Job's conversation with the Messiah takes place at midnight; the people's gathering in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah takes place at midnight. Indeed, one of the sections of the poem is entitled "Midnight." And above all, this image not only serves to keep the theme of redemption in our minds throughout the poem, but it also serves to emphasize, at one and the same time, the ideological opposite of redemption: Cosmic Night. But of this, we shall hear more later. Shlonsky carries out the midnight-motif in his depiction of the relationship between God and the Messiah as one between the big hand of the clock and the small hand. When they cover one another, it is midnight, the hour of redemption. It is Job's wish, as he puts it, that the small hand (the Messiah) will fall off the clock entirely to leave the hand of the God of Wretchedness by itself (142).

The associations in tradition with redemption brought to mind by the image of mid-night are manifold. We think of the rehearsel of "It Came to Pass at Midnight". Furthermore, there are interwoven with this motif, many other elements, such as the theme of chatzot mentioned above, which play symbolic roles throught the poem:

> Pious men and men of good deeds are accustomed to rise at midnight, to pray, supplicate and weep over the exile of the Sh'chinah and the destruction of the Temple. . . And they learned this from what is told about David the King, peace be upon him, who said: "At midnight, I will rise to give thanks unto Thee (Psalms 119.62)". . . . and there are

You should quote a primary source

those who prepare a rooster to awake them from their sleep.[66]

Without anticipating over-much, we might note that this very rooster also appears in the course of the poem.

We turn now, to the second important over-all motif of "The Final Covenant", the symbolic counterpart of Chatzot, and also its complement, the motif of Cosmic Night. Shlonsky encases us in the symbol of night at the very outset of the poem, and, moreover, tells us that he is doing just this:

> On the golden ladder of the setting sun
> Hairy evening slowly descends
> To visit the grounded ship.
> Like an ARK the black ship moves,
> And the lighthouses on all the coasts are extinguished.
> The wind sounds a hasty alarm:
> "The ship is anchored!"
> And is dumb.
> And a ladder links out to the dumb shore,
> And it, like its ship, is in the symbol of Night (111).

Job's first words reiterate the theme of night and evoke the mournful mood of the eve of the Ninth of Av, as he begins with a formulation reminiscent of the kinot, ---B'lel zeh: "On this night, night-owls spring forth from ruined nests (111)." In addition to the night-owls, bats, and night spirits which haunt the pages of the poem, there is the thick smoke and darkness with which the atmosphere is suffused, the darkness of Egypt from which there is no escape, and which extinguishes candles, lights, lighthouses and even stars (111-113). And when, at the end of the poem, the men with Job cast off in the Black Ship, which like an Ark, bore Job's revelation to the shore, it is in complete darkness that they move (127). The night is at once the Ark which bears the Revelation, the Black Ship, and the contents of the revelation itself, the word of God, which Shlonsky, by way of a pun, transmutes into the weeping

or tears of God (D'var-Elohim/ Dimat-Elohim). Night is the message that put the great pain into Job (115-116). And it is an ark in another sense, in the sense of being a coffin (aron) which bears the dead and mourned rooster, harbinger of dawn (139), which the bat of night has killed (149). Night is the Wretchedness of the poem's title, the realization that this is man's situation, that there will be no dawn, no redemption to give meaning to our present life, that there is no light of direction and revelation from God as to where we should go or as to how we should live. Existence takes place in complete darkness and we are on our own.

We are immediately reminded of the first night of mankind, which is the prototype of Shlonsky's image:

> Our Rabbis taught: On the day upon which man was created, when the sun set upon him, he said: Woe is me, inasmuch as I have sinned. The world grows dark for me and returns to Chaos and Void, and this is the death fixed upon me from the Heavens (Avodah Zara 8a and 8b).

What happened to Adam, Shlonsky is saying, is what is happening now to mankind. But there will be no dawn.

It is of interest to note that Shlonsky's inaugural poem, the poem that he places at the very beginning of his collected works, describes his first "revelation" as coming to him at midnight (11).

> Someone called to me: Hearken!
> Someone called my name.
> What?
> Who?
>
> Eli said: Lie down again!
> Eli said: It is in vain!
> Eli said: There is no vision for my eyes have dimmed.
>
> But again One calls to me: Hearken!
> But again One calls my name.
> How shall I answer: HERE I AM!?

Midnight. Aged Eli gasps on his couch:
"My sons... Oh my sons..."
And already existence crouches in me, Wounded like the setting sun
Among the corpses of my clouds.

I know: Behold the Lord will come.
Behold he will come in storm and kiss your wounds.
And Eli is very old. And the sons of Eli are churls.
And I am still a lad.

But behold existence roars, behold it pains and shouts,
And in the red east a finger of lightening calls to me.

--Speak, Lord, for your servant hearkens!

Secondly, the poem that follows this in the collected works, is significantly entitled "Nights", and is part of a cycle of poems entitled, "Stam". The very first line of the poem shows how explicit Shlonsky could be in presenting his development of the symbol of night: "On our threshold (that is, at the very beginning of my poems) crouches Night like the stone of the altar/. . . . Oh, open ye gates of the mouth, and let the blood of the pain spurt out/ like a black bird, Halleluyah." (13)

What is the nature of God, the World and Man, in the night of existence? We might note at the outset the seeming contradiction that whereas in "Leprosy" (in which men are still searching for order and meaning, for values) we are never quite certain as to whether God exists or not, whether He has hidden himself or is not there at all, in "The Final Covenant" (in which the hope of redemption is given us) we know that while God has cut himself off from Man, He nevertheless, exists. Behind this poetic statement, the following thinking seems to be implied through a kind of faulty reverse teleological proof: If God's existence is shown by the fact that there is order and meaning in the world, and if there is no order and meaning in the world, then it would follow that the previous assumption that there is a God breaks down and there is no God.

But, if the very nature of Existence is such that there is no order and meaning in it, in the sense that we have previously understood these words, then the existence of God does not depend on order and meaning, and is not disproved when we find that actually there is no order and meaning. But, such a God is a God of Wretchedness, a God of anguish, who weeps as He kisses the earth's wounds, but does not bind them. (115-116). This description of God is repeated again by the Chained-One (Messiah), who also describes how God cut Himself off from men and disallowed appeal to His Throne of Glory:

> Like a bereaved father he moaned last night,
> And in His bosom the ball of the earth, borne like a child of old age,
> He carried, kissing its wounds. . . .
> And today
> He suddenly kicked his throne of glory and roared:
> Drape it with black!
> Shut the gates of the Heavens!
> And their windows cover with clouds (143)!

The world, then, is wounded and weary. To those who are trying still, to find, whether through reason or revelation, some truth of existence in the form of essence, the world is a woman after her time, after her wearing out (130)---barren. To the cynic who has dispaired of this approach to existence, and knows no other way:

> . . . on all fours the days creep already
> Like old, bent-over, shriveled men. . .
> Waiting for the last day.
> And it makes no difference to me
> That also we, foolish children, children of the waste,
> Already groan that we are tired.
> And mornings gape wide a yawning maw at us,
> And nights of the moon widen an eye at us round with astonishment.
> And mornings and nights, and nights and mornings,
> And it makes no difference to me (123).

An existence without purpose or meaning is a tired, worn-out, bored, and stupid existence.

And yet, this is the frustrating end of the attempt to find values rooted in an essential truth of existence and the result of the aim of basing redemption upon such a truth. This was the end of the men depicted in "Leprosy" whose life was composed of a series of endless tomorrows, and whose struggle either for or against traditional values was a stupid buttocks to buttocks dance of apes and cows. It is a living leprosy (110). Significantly, Shlonsky has the assembly for redemption meet in the ruin of ancient synagogue called "the ruin of Elijah (128-130)." The old concept of redemption, too, is the collapsed ruin of an ancient structure.

Man seeks to heal his spiritual condition by scratching his wounds with sherds, scraps of old value-systems, the fragments of old tablets of the covenant, while the wound itself roars: "Man! Man! Do you still hold fast to thine integrity? Curse God and die!" The multitudes who expectantly await redemption, salvation, who yearn for it, who pine, "Messiah! Messiah!", who listen for the sound of the breaking of the Messiah's chains, who speculate about the results of his coming, who think that with his coming, the crooked-backed will be straightened, the blind made to see, the deformed, healed; all these are doomed to shocked frustration and amazed despair (142-145). The "small salvation" or "little redemption", as the traditional concepts of redemption are called in "D'vai", whether they be that of a personal Messiah, messianic age, progress through reason, or dialectic process, are symbolized in the poem by the White Ark, the White Donkey, and the White Shofar (white is the color of the day-break as opposed to the black of night) (148). The White Ark or Ship is smashed by God and Job, the White Shofar is dry and

cannot be blown and the White Donkey refuses to move. But, this occurs only after the White Assembly called to build the White Ship has threatened to destroy the Great Redemption which is Job's evangel. The traditional concepts of redemption which are at best concessions to man's weakness and smallness, nevertheless, are a threat to man's ultimate realization of the Great Redemption, which is the acceptance of life without essential meaning, and their progress forward from that point (126-129). Thus, in order to realize that stage of man's approach to existence, all previous concepts of redemption must be destroyed. Though man attempts to chase away the great bat of night with lights, though he trys with flaxen wick and great chandeliers to illuminate the darkness into which he is cast, though he runs about and cries: "Increase light! Increase light!", though he attempts to resist his condition with vain delusions, though he looks to the stars, symbols of vain hopes, it would be better for him to accept his condition and recognize that the portion of Man is "Much night, few stars (112,113,114)." And it is the task of Job to put out the lights and to force man to accept all the implications of living in endless Cosmic Night (114). On the Black Ship of Job, Man's existence fully realized for what it is, not one light is kindled (113).

We turn now to the figure of Job. As the priest was the protagonist, the "hero" of part I, so Job is the protagonist, the hero of part II. The priest has taken his turn, and now Job takes his. We can note here a parallel to the Bible if we recall that the Priest represented authoritative dogma, while Job represents an anti-dogmatic approach, an iconclastic approach to old theological conceptions. We note also that while, in part I, it was the sick people who turned to the Priest for

everlasting healing, it is Job in part II, the prototype of the sufferer who suffers without meaning to his suffering, who comes to the people unbidden with a message and a mission and seeks among them a following. The role of the Priest and his responsibility is defined by the people (either because God does not exist, or because He has forsaken the Priest) whereas Job is commissioned by God, at least according to the words of the covenant which he bears. The people welcome the kind of answer the priest would give, but they reject the message of Job, for the Priest would tell them the true way of life, whereas Job's teaching is that it is impossible to know such a thing. In using Job as his symbol, Shlonsky seems to be referring particularly to Job. 3.3-10, where Job curses the day, and asks that thick darkness seize both night and day upon which he was born:

> Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark;
> Let it look for light but have none;
> Neither let it behold the eyelids of the morning (verse 9).

Everything about Job is dark and black. Smoke follows him continuously and he is swaddled in it as in a hairy cloak (118). His eyes and beard are black, the tallesim woven by his smoke are black, the light given off by his stars and torches is black (124-125, 134).

He has come with two tasks: The first is to put out the futile lights (the false delusory concepts of redemption) and to break open the shutters and doors which the people have closed against the night, so that the darkness and night may come in (realization of man's condition and destiny). His second task is to seek sailors for his Black Ship, men who will accept the conditions of existence and, nevertheless, struggle through it, without any hope of achieving anything:

On this night there thrust forth night-owls from ruined nests.
On this night also bereaved spirits rove about,
With beak and claws every closed shutter to tear.
Tear ye, tear ye, spirits, owls!
In my distant way also my fingernails grew wildly,
I also will move with you from window to window
To tear its shutters.
Soar, oh sails, like the flags of tidings,
Vomit, chimneys, your smoke like incense
To the cities of the coast.
Let it roll up to every opened door
And to every ear:
SAILORS have I come down to seek for my ship (111). . . .

Stay! Stay! Why do you flee? I am he!
Captain of the Black Ship!
Unto you have I come!
And I have sent the smoke unto your dwellings,
In order to put out the candles, which weep wax at their feet,
And let it be night!
Give ear, how my ship wails!
It assembles YOU: To be sailors unto it, wielders of her oars.
Stay! Draw nigh to me, and I will tell you.
Tidings are in my mouth (114).

There is no doubt that just as the Priest represented one problem of the poet Shlonsky, so Job represents another. Shlonsky's own message is one of night, a message rejected by the people, and one which the poet himself is not very happy about bearing. Note the comparison between the following passages taken from D'vai in which Job is speaking, and other poetry by Shlonsky in which the poet speaks for himself:

On your spread out feet, Night,
The tears of God you have given unto me. . . (115).

Night!
You gave to us the great pain
And it burns continuously in our flesh
Like a sun which your feet have trodden. . . (15).

At this point, we will indicate sketchily that which we will discuss later in great detail, the destiny of Man as set forth in the covenant which Job bears. Job anchors his wondrous Black Ship, which is empty, he being both the Captain and the only person upon it (119). The ship is

like an ark which bears a Sefer Torah. No voice is heard upon it and only intermittently it emits the sound of a warning siren. Smoke pours from it. To the people on shore, it is strange and frightening, a sign of ill-omen (113-114). Though this ship, which is equated by the poet with Night, assembles the people, it is misunderstood and condemned by them as it always has been in the past (114-116). Now, the ship, which is the Night whose helmsman is Job, the prototype of meaningless suffering, bears a revelation, a covenant. The covenant is in biblical form. It has the elements of Biblical cosmology, of ultimate Divine revelation, as if to say: Here is an authoritative revelation of the truth of existence. A covenant is at once the form of relationship between Man and God, and, if we are to carry out the parallelism with the Bible, would also be a message of redemption. Job is anointed, just as were the prophets, to bear this covenant to the people. Just as the ark of the covenant, the Black Ship is equated with Night, so the covenant is written on the Sefer Torah of Night:

> Like a Sefer Torah roll out your parchment, Night.
> And let black tallesim descend on the shoulders of Man. . . .
> And he (Man) is called to come up to your Torah (112).

Coming up to the Torah is again equated with taking hold of the oars of the Black Ship (112).

The crux of the covenantal revelation bourne by the Black Ship, Night, on the Torah of Night is the Pdut Ha-gadol, the Great Deliverance, which term is applied to the Black Ship, which was built out of the black wood of the Gan-Eden of pains. Now, the name of the Black Ship is D'vai, Wretchedness, which is also the Name of God. Thus, the Great Deliverance is pain, wretchedness, and also the very meaning of existence, life on

earth itself, life in which we must strive on in our suffering though there is meaning neither to our life or suffering, unless it be the striving and suffering itself (125-126). Wretchedness is the essence of existence, there being no other essence to existence. Wretchedness was with God in the beginning and of it he made His creation (125-126). The realization of just this is the Great Deliverance. When the Bastard drinks from the cup of Night, he says, "L'chaim", which is to say that he accepts and welcomes the living of life in darkness (127). But, in general, men reject the very meaning of life and thus spurn the name of God, because such an existence men conceive to be evil and bitter, and they do not accept and understand that wretchedness is existence itself and the acceptance of it the Great Deliverance or the Great Salvation (126-127).

It is just this rejection which Job experiences when he first calls men to his Torah, to the Black Ship, to the Night. He is afraid that dawn will come, in his view, a false dawn, and wipe the message off the scroll of night. And in his discouragement, he almost decides to cast off again just as he had anchored (115-116).

What is the reaction of the generality of men to Job's message? They are alarmed at his appearance and they flee terror stricken from before him, not wanting to accept, realize or come to terms with what he represents (111,112,113,114,115). They disappear, the streets empty and all shutters and doors are closed to him; for men hatd darkness and night worse than death (113,114,115). They think of Job not only as a bearer of evil tidings but also as a drunk, a fool, a madman, a jester who wants to seduce men to his madness (114). His message appears to be

not only harmful, but wierd and crazy to them. Those whom the meaning of darkness and night has almost overcome, strive to dispel their anguish through drinking, through intoxication and forgetfulness. This, too, is a form of flight from the meaning of existence (124).

To whom, then, does Job ultimately appeal, and in whom does his message evoke a positive response? It is the poor and afflicted, the suffering whose clothes are torn and who live in the turbulent slums of the city whose alleys twist like bodies under the rod among whom Job hopes to find sailors fit for the Black Ship of Night, among whom Job expects to find those who will understand his tidings (112-113). It is the wretched, pained ones, those who are sleepless from spiritual wretchedness and pain to whom Job calls over and over again (115-116). But, it is especially in the saloon (Bet Marzeach: also, House of Mourning), the place of the bitter of spirit, among those who stay up late into the night that Job seeks sailors to man the Ship of Night (116). There, in the saloon, are wayfaring temporary lodgers, men used to crying, men who have no roots, who are unsettled, and marginal in relation to society. Among them are those who realize that "there is no escape from this smoke", who have no stake in remaining on shore and who love to row (117-119). They are men who manifest, in their bitterness, an unwillingness to be redeemed by any outside force, but only by their own hands:

> --And if he (Elijah) comes, with empty flasks we will stone him!
> --For he deliberately restrains the redemption.
> --What profit would there be if we should kill him and thus destroy it forever?
> --For then we would bring it by ourselves.
> --With an outstretched arm (118).

It is also the deformed, the hunch-back, the blind, the dumb, the imbecile who follow Job, and reject the healing proffered them by the

men of the White Assembly. These are the men who, in terms of the present approach to existence, are twisted, deformed, blind and perverted, and who have no stake in the present religious orientations. Shlonsky, in using these deformed figures, the Baalei-Mumim, seems to be referring to Leviticus 21.16-24, in which the deformed have no part in the way of the time of life, or in approaching God, but are, by law, alienated from these:

> And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: Speak unto Aaron, saying: Whosever he be of thy seed throughout their generations that hath a blemish, let him not approach to offer the bread of his God. For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath anything maimed, or anything too long, or a man that is crooked-footed, or broken-handed, or crooked-backed. . . . he shall not go in unto the veil, nor come nigh unto the altar because he hath a blemish; that he profane not my holy places, for I am the Lord who sanctify them. . . .

We are thus, yet again, led back to the idea expressed by Shlonsky that it is the afflicted and deformed who are the saved, just as was expressed in "Leprosy" in which the de-camped lepers and the polluted and cast-off are called the camp itself, and in which God is called the God of the afflicted (74). But, here another idea is added: that this category of mankind contains not only the redeemed but also the redeemers. Note here the last four paragraphs of the final covenant itself:

> And there will come nigh unto thee an afflicted man, knowing pain, and he will cry, "Heal, I beseech thee, man of God." And thou wilt answer and say, "far be it from thee, for thou art the great."
>
> And there will come nigh unto thee one who has suffered a flux and a leper and he will supplicate, "Gather me from my leprosy, Job." And thou wilt answer and say, "Far be it from thee, for thou art the holy."

> And there wilt come unto thee the downtrodden and the oppressed and the poorest of the people and they will cry out, "Save, we beseech thee; Save, we beseech thee. And thou shalt answer and say, "Far be it, for ye are the saved."
>
> And thou shalt read before their eyes the words of this final evangel and they will deride thee and also condemn thee. And a great multitude will assemble against thee to cast stones at thee to stone thee to death. But thou, be not affrighted nor let thine heart fall, for I have made thee a redeemer and in thine hand is the Deliverance (126).

But those who appeal most strongly to Job, who, he feels, will make the best sailors for his ship, and who respond most readily to Job, are the Youth who suffers miserably after the loss of his faith, and the bitter, cynical Bastard, who never had a faith to begin with (118,124).

Whether from a sense of sin, guilt, great loss or pure sentimentalism, the Youth weeps and "confesses" to himself nightly. He has lost his faith, but desperately yearns to regain it. Though he cries into God's bosom, he thinks of himself as a step-son of God. He cannot pray to God, as God would wish, but can only cry. He has lost his illusions about the traditional values, but they have not been replaced:

> From the vanities of my world thine hand hath taken me,
> But to enter into thine holy house Thou hast not given unto me (120).

Though he claims that God cannot save or see, he prays to God to save the afflicted. He says both that God is of great splendor, and that His face is twisted in pain as all existence twists in pain. Thus, he still wavers back and forth between belief and denial. While to himself he cries out to God, and at the most, demeans God's ability to save, and bemoans His silence, it is only aloud that he speaks of "an empty firmament" (120). Nevertheless, he seems to have lost all hope in the future, any sense of aspiration, or expectation of spiritual fertility. Both the worth of the stars (hope), and the green grass (hope, new birth) are

demeaned by the Youth:

> Oh why does the star still pour its lustre to the earth,
> And the grass of my field, why does it grow green under the heavens?
> The eye is too dim to see.
> Too heavy is the ear to hear (120).

The words take on an additional sharpness when compared to the words of Shlonsky's contemporary, Abraham Broides:

> So long as the green trees in the land do grow
> Man's worth is not voided, his life not hallow. 67

Just as the Youth represents both Shlonsky and an aspect of his generation, so the Bastard represents another characterization of both the poet and his generation: A bastard generation, a generation that never had a Father (note the search for the father in James Joyce and Thomas Wolfe), a generation that was born faithless, born into ownerlessness, rootlessness, alienation, a generation born into the value-vacuum, the void left by the disintegration of all value syntheses. Where the final version of the poem reads simply, "I am a Bastard of a generation," the original version has the full thought: "I am a Bastard of a Generation without prayer or God". We are at once reminded of the lines in "Lech-L'cho" in which Shlonsky speaks of himself as "without tallis and tephilin", as being "so far" from the "Father in Heaven", as being "exiled from his Father's table", of being "a step-son of God". The Bastard has faith in redemption. Any speculation about it he characterizes as "grinding of vanity" (118). In criticizing the youth, he mocks at all those who were lucky enough to have a faith to begin with and did not keep it in repair by their own arduous labor, and now having lost it, beg for the free gift of salvation.

His own case is different for from the very beginning, he saw Divinity as a stupid scarecrow at the navel of the world, and the tablets of the covenant (the tables of value of Nietzche) as concealing a fraud. He is overwhelmed by a total feeling of aloneness. The world is completely empty and devoid of any meaning whatsoever. His "religious" attitude, if we can call it by that name, is signified by the phrase; "It makes no difference (121-123)."

In addition to the masses who reject Job's approach to existence, and those who are especially attracted to it and are especially suited to it (the wayfarers, the Youth, the Bastard), there are those who represent orientations to existence contrary and inimical to Job's teachings. These viewpoints, represented by the First Voice (Judaism), the Second Voice (Christianity) and the In-Between-Voice (Socialism) are set forth during the debate on redemption in the course of the proceedings of the "White Assembly".

The most prominent concern of the First Voice, explicitly Moses in the original version and obviously Moses in the final version, is the question of the restoration of the authority of revelation in the form of the tablets of the covenant. Man hopelessly scratches his spiritual wounds with scraps of the old shattered tablets. But man has come to the point where his pain is about to overwhelm him and he is in danger of uttering the death-cry of cursing the totality of revelation and its source (130). Man needs desperately the restoration of the Law. He needs a task, a meaningful, purposeful burden. Man needs to be harnessed to a wagon in which is God, and to draw the wagon to God's destination. This is, of course, a direct reference to Judaism's teaching of man's

responsibility for the establishment of the Kingdom of God (132). Job, who is opposed to any of the usual concepts of redemption as delusions, and who wants man to accept existence without meaning, Moses considers to be sick and outside of the normal bound of real life, (outside the camp, as it is written). Moses bases this opinion on an appeal to the ancient revelation. Job's approach will result only in a spread of the spiritual sickness of man, and in an increase of the pain of life when the situation is already bad enough as it is. He condemns Job for despising Man's pitiful cry for salvation. Man is small and only the "small salvation" will come to him. Moses wants Jesus to heal Job but Job refuses just as Job's followers later refuse rehabilitation from their condition of rebellion and perversity, and just as the deformed desire a return to their deformities. None of them want healing, satiety, or even hope if it means submission to the "Law of Existence", to any preconceived concepts of existence or rules for procedure in life. In Job's view, they are the "great (135,140-141)." Moses' conviction is that man will be saved whether he wants it or not, for his salvation is not for his sake but for the sake of something beyond him (137). Again, we are reminded of the Biblical concept of "L'maan Ha-shem". But, even when a new revelation in the form of a Bat-Kol declares in favor of Job, in accordance with the final covenant which Job bears, Moses, The First Voice, repudiates this on the basis of the traditional formulation: Ein mashgichin B'vat-kol (138).

It is the view of the Second Voice (Jesus, in the original version) that while the pain of life is very great, Man could endure it in terms of bearing a cross, that is, if there were a cross. It is not because

of his burdens that man cries out, but because he has no cross to bear (which would again lend purpose and meaning to man's suffering). Man, in his lust for life, has thrown off the cross of Jesus' first crucifixion and with its scraps, had made a fire to cook the meat of life in overturned churchbells. Since the validity of the first crucifixion has been undermined, nothing remains but for Jesus to be crucified again so that man would have a new cross to enable him to bear the suffering that is the lot of man. This is salvation, according to the Second Voice, and this salvation is near (130-131, 133,137).

It is the opinion of the In-Between-Voice (Elijah, the traditional exponent of social justice) that man is small only in relation to the transcendance of God. It is God's transcendence, the heaviness of his demand, the obscurity of his revelation, that is the root of sin and evil, and for this, God, not man, should be rebuked (131). In fact, man doesn't need gods, Law, or cross. Man is at the end of his resources, is weary and needs an unbinding from his burdens, not new loads. But, if Man does have a spiritual task to perform, he must be fed, he must be in physical condition to bear the load, and these who represent the divine, the prophets of God, religious leaders, should fight for amelioration of man's poverty and an improvement of his material conditions. This alone is true salvation, and it is urgent that this salvation be brought swiftly to man. In this cause, he tries to enlist Job, who refuses saying: "I will not play on flutes that are not mine (131-133,139)."

Job upbraids the entire assembly of the "White Ark", the assembly for redemption, for meeting within the precincts of the ruined synagogue, which is on the point of total collapse. The original version, which

includes a reference to the collapse of the old teachings, proves that this is a reference to the tottering structure of values and concepts upon which all conventional ideas of redemption are based. Man is on the point of accepting his earth-bound and wretchedness-bound condition of existence and you disturb and delude him (cries Job) with false hopes of an end to wretchedness, and with delusions of redemption. But, man does not despise his condition; it is you who upset him with notions of other-worldly salvation. This is the source of his spiritual pain and groaning complaints about his wretchedness. Thus, his natural and inescapable destiny becomes abhorrent to him and he begins to want escape to "Other stars (135)."

By implication, Job upbraids Moses for inconsistency inasmuch as Moses taught to go out to pain and himself did so. Jesus he criticizes for not teaching others to accept pain, to be it, while he himself was pain. But, Elijah above all he condemns, calling him the Iscariot of Wretchedness who for thirty shekels of "small salvation" would prevent the Great Deliverance, which is acceptance of existence as it is (136).

Further, Job strenuously objects to Moses' positing of a purpose or goal beyond man himself. Man himself is the goal and purpose of Man (137).

Those who accept my position, continues Job, are the really great men, "the light of whose stars is black," the men who have given up hope, or rather see hope in the darkness itself which they know to be their lot. As for any other position, the fact of the darkness of existence will eventually overwhelm and vanquish it (138).

Finally, any attempt to deny or destroy Job's teaching will mean the destruction of existence itself:

In-Between-Voice

Your ship we will split with an axe.

Job

And I say to you: the world.
And over IT you will be waving the axe (139).

What is the destiny of Man, then, as conceived by Shlonsky and as implied by the fulfillment of Job's mission and his justification by success?

Firstly, Man is cut off from God. The Throne of Glory, the traditional place of appeal to God in agadic literature, is left standing empty and draped in black (142-143). God acts like a father who has lost a son as he carries the wounded earth about in his bosom. (143) He orders the gates of Heaven to be closed and its windows covered (143). Perhaps God, too, is in the nest of the bat, is bound by the nature of existence not to intercede in behalf of Man, inasmuch as this would be contrary to the nature of the Divine itself (147).

Secondly, there is no possibility of redemption. This is symbolized by the death of the Messiah, and paralleled by the murder of the rooster, harbinger of dawn, by the bat, symbol of night. Again, Shlonsky is presenting a mythological-cosmological drama as if to say: This is what has transpired on high, in the very council chambers where the nature of existence is determined. As a result, this is our condition and destiny. The end of the possibility of redemption or actually, the absence of any possibility of redemption is imaged and symbolized repeatedly. When the hour of midnight, the hour of redemption arrives, the Messiah wonders why

the Big Hand doesn't stretch over the little hand (the Messiah) so that redemption will come. Job announces that actually, the hour has come for the small hand to drop off the clock of existence forever, leaving the hand of the God of Wretchedness, in whose image Man was made, to circle about alone (144,151). Again, reference is made to a krioh being torn in the garment of salvation, a statement which recalls at once the Divrei N'chama of Deutero-Isaiah and the traditional sign of recognition of death, and which foreshadows the death of the Messiah in D'vai (147). The Messiah, overcome by the words of Job's scroll, begs for enslavement in perpetuity (148), while the white donkey upon which the Messiah was traditionally to ride, refuses to move and the white shofar refuses to be blown (148). Job announces to the Messiah that he is going to completely destroy the White Ark, the hope of salvation, so that man will never look out into the seas or towards distant coasts in expectation of its return (151). The villiage idiot (at least he is so in the eyes of the people) announces to the people that the rooster has been killed by the bat, though actually nothing died. There was nothing to be killed or to die in the first place. But, nevertheless, the rooster is surely going to die. The village idiot claims that he is the orphaned one and he has come to say kaddish in hopes that the people will act as his minyan and say "amen" after him. Meanwhile, in heaven, Job tells the Messiah that he is about to die, that he is at the Mount Nebo of his life. Later, the people see a coffin being bourne into the Black Ship, it being the tomb of the concept of redemption as well as man's new estate, and the ark bearing him in complete darkness towards his destiny.

At this point, the idiot cries out loud the first few words of the Kaddish but breaks off. Even for an idiot, it would be imbecilic in terms of what has occurred, to utter a prayer for redemption.

That Shlonsky, in referring to rooster and bat, is symbolizing redemption and its negation is proved by an agada on which his symbols are obviously based. In a homily of Rabbi Simlai, concerned with the punishment of sectarians and the reward to the Jews at the coming of the redemption, a parable is told, based on the verse in Amos (5.18): "Woe unto you who desire the day of the Lord!/ Wherefore would ye have the day of the Lord!/ It is darkness, and not light." In this parable, the rooster represents the day, redemption; the bat represents the night, the very negation of redemption (Sanhedrin 98b-99a). Shlonsky's ingenuity provided him with an incidental set of symbols which fitted perfectly the major themes and symbols in the poem, such as Cosmic Night.

Taking everything into consideration, what, according to Shlonsky, is the best possible orientation for man and what is the worst? First of all, the chaos in the realm of values will remain. This chaos is not a disturbance in the natural order of existence, but the nature of existence itself. Shlonsky suggests this through the paraphrase of a well-known biblical expression which has always signified anarchy: "Each one to his tent, oh Man/ Each man to his plagues (150)." Now, if man rejects Divine Revelation, the nature of divinity itself, and the nature of existence, then Man rejects existence itself, rejects the Great Deliverance, acceptance of the human condition (125-126). If he refuses to accept this fact of life, then he refuses to accept the implications of such an

existence and therefore, is impeded from dealing with them, and is caught in a vicious circle of frustration and disappointment. Nor does he understand himself, for Man is made in the image of the God of Wretchedness. Furthermore, any false notions of redemption, of finding valid values, restrains Man also from seeing the God of Wretchedness face to face (144). This is another way of saying that we will never know the truth of existence until we are able to give up our false and self-deluding attempts to escape our destiny. Man's cries for redemption are as silly as the jester's play before an audience (144). If we carried the thought further, we might say that all existence laughs at him. Man himself is his own redeemer. There is no outside redemptive force. Man is alone and bears the burden of the totality of life. He ought to courageously shoulder that burden without any expectation of help beyond him (145,146).

The best that could happen to man is the fulfillment of the prayer of the four blemished types: "May it be accepted that ye be like us (145)." The fulfillment of this prayer would mean that man had accepted, nay, exulted in what previously had appeared to be his spiritual deformity, the lack of values, the lack of a faith, the absence of expectation of achieving values or faith. Ironically, Shlonsky implies: "Would that God would grant this prayer."

The best that could happen to man is for the Black Ship to set forth in complete darkness, its sailors, who row silently and blindly, realizing that before them is only WRETCHEDNESS and TOIL, both with no purpose assigned to them by anything above and beyond either Man or existence itself.

Though what we have described above is the overwhelming philosophical approach of the poem, we would be amiss to omit any mention of two notes struck during this symphony of wretchedness which do not accord with the major themes and which reveal, perhaps, a certain degree of ambiguity in Shlonsky's thinking, as if he were saying to himself: "Am I mad to think this? Am I deceived?" Neither one of these references which we shall point out would by itself raise a question in our minds. Together, they raise the issue of ambiguity or, at least, a degree of tentativeness in Shlonsky's early thinking. Furthermore, both these allusions made by Shlonsky are very similar to one another.

In our analysis of the first poem, "Leprosy", we discussed in detail the implications of the song of the priest in which both world and poet are described as disordered, wild, mad, meaningless. Now, to this poem, published separately, Shlonsky affixed the title, "In My Haste." This could be a reference to the statement in Psalms 31.23: "As for me, I said in my haste: 'I am cut off from before thine eyes'"... The title would then imply: This is an early judgement, one which has been rejected upon further consideration. Secondly, it is the shoteh of the village, the fool, the village idiot, who announces the death of the Messiah, the end of the concept of redemption, who breaks off after the first few words of the kaddish. It may well be that Shlonsky, having seen his dark vision of the destiny of man, was not sure whether he had seen the "God of Wretchedness face to face" or an hallucination as deceptive as that of an idiot.

CHAPTER VI

In summarizing our findings, we must first note that in Shlonsky's "D'vai" we have a volume of carefully planned and executed schematic poetry in dramatic form. The poem is a product of involved and complex intellection. Yet, it is cerebral without the loss of the "bloody horse" which Roy Campbell found lacking in the poetic disciples of the "New Criticism":

> You praise the firm restraint with which they write--
> I'm with you there, of course.
> They use the snaffle and the curb all right;
> But where's the bloody horse? 68

Shlonsky's first major creation reveals a creator with acute descriptive powers ceaselessly fructified and nourished by the imagination of a visionary. In attempting to express the condition and destiny of Man, he draws upon symbols of universal appeal which speak the language of the earth itself, symbols revealing to the searching gaze depth after depth of meaning, symbols enriched by Shlonsky's profound erudition. His images brilliantly convey the delicate nuances of moods and attitudes compounded of intellectual, emotional and spiritual elements inextricably combined.

To be sure, the poetry of "D'vai" is "obscure" poetry. The symbols require associative thinking, and often, reference to classical sources for their full elucidation. One symbol, like one picture, replaces, in Shlonsky's poems, one thousand words of an analytical exposition which could never quite grasp the essence of a situation with the full complestation of which a single symbol is capable. Moreover, Shlonsky's statements are full of ellipses. They often remind the reader of the way in

which proof-texts are only half-quoted in rabbinic literature, leaving the reader to fill in the rest. Yet, the poetry is not "obscure" for the sake of obscurity, but for the sake of greater ultimate clarity; it is not obscure out of dullness, out of obscurantism, or out of an attempt to hide faulty thinking, but because of the poet's hope that the reader, in expending greater energy than is usually demanded for comprehension, will arrive at a more thorough understanding of what the poet is communicating.

As for Shlonsky's pessimism, it is the pessimism of a prisoner who wants desperately to escape from the bare-walled, windowless, impregnable fastness of a cell, a prisoner who has tried everything, thought of every possibility, considered every single chance even of the remotest kind, and has come to the undeniable, unavoidable realization that there is absolutely no way out; and who then sits down on the wooden plank he uses for a cot and says to himself: "Well, where do we go from here?"

Nor can it be agreed with some critics that "D'vai" has only the same value as the faltering strokes of a painter's first preliminary sketch, or the first stumbling steps of a baby beginning to walk. It is a full-blown, well-developed and carefully controlled work which treats of a central theme of twentieth century literature and which contains within it many of the major motifs found throughout Shlonsky's later work.

Aimed at a universal statement regarding the condition of Man and his destiny, "D'vai" insofar as it attains to this aim, expresses also the true situation of the particulars of man's existence.

Shlonsky's work was conceived during the dark night of the intellectuals, and in his clime and zone, night fell earlier than in many

other places. His poetry grew out of a historical situation in which the doors of the cosmic court of spiritual arbitration were slammed shut to any constructive proposals. His writing must be considered alongside all those literary works which express spiritual crisis, and which arise like a moan from beneath the ruins of the collapse of all systems of value by which men formerly lived, whether centered in God, Reason, Progress or Process.

"Leprosy" depicts spiritual sickness and solitary confinement, sterility, and unmassuaged, unrequited yearning for the healing of meaning and purpose. It depicts the failure of the intellectual to provide that meaning, to re-establish tables of values, either through the revitalization of traditional values or through the authorization of new ones.

Part II, "The Final Covenant", argues the acceptance of a world without meaning, an existence without essential truth, and the alienation of Man from any transcendent source of value. It implies the necessity of resignation to a life without faith in any creed, any commitment, any future, or any hope of eventual redemption.

What remains after the stripping away of fraudulent faiths, false hopes, and delusive values, is the dignity of Man, alone in the pitch-dark universe struggling blindly and silently towards no certain goal.

The meaning of life, if there be such meaning, is just that struggle and striving in toil and wretchedness.

FOOTNOTES

1. בן-אור, אהרן, תולדות הספרות העברית בדורנו, כרך א', (תל-אביב, תש"ד) ע' 225-226. שט"נר מ., "רעיון הגאולה בשירה העברית החדשה" בהדאר ספר יובל, כ'30, בעריכת מנחם ריבולוב (ניו יורק, תש"ב) ע' 318.

2. בן-אור, ע' 222; קרופניק, ברוך, אנציקלופדיה לספרות ישראלית וכללית, (תל-אביב, 1944) ע' 1824.

3. בן-אור, שם; קרופניק, שם.

4. בן-אור, שם; קרופניק, שם.

5. "בדמי יאוש": השלוח, תרע"ט, כרך ל"ה, ע' 274. (בן-אור, שם;) לחובר, שמואל, אברהם שלונסקי ביבליוגרפיה (תל-אביב, תש"י) ע' 5.

6. בן-אור, שם; לחובר, שם; קרופניק, שם.

7. בן-אור, שם; לחובר, שם; קרופניק, שם.

8. בן-אור, ע' 224; יפה, א.ב. "בין 'דור' ל'על המלאח'" ביבול (תל-אביב [ללא תעריך]). ע' 51; לחובר, שם, ע' 5; שלונסקי, אברהם, דור, (תל-אביב, תרפ"ג-תרפ"ד).

9. שלונסקי, אברהם, שירים, כרך א' (תל-אביב, 1954) ע' 74-153.

10. ארן, דוד, "שירת אברהם שלונסקי" באורלוגין, בעריכת אברהם שלונסקי, חוברת 12, מרץ, 1956 (תל-אביב, 1956).

11. יפה, א.ב. "בין 'דור' ל'על המלאח'" ביבול (תל-אביב [ללא תעריך]) ע' 51.

12. בן-אור, תולדות, ע' 237.

13. אוכמני, עזריאל, לעבר האדם (תל-אביב, 1953) ע' 152-153.

14. כהן, ישראל, "לשירתו של שלונסקי", במאזנים, כ'5, חוב' 6 (תל-אביב, תרצ"ו), ע' 661-662.

15. יפה, מרדכי, "אברהם שלונסקי", בהדאר, כ' 34, ג'1 (ניו יורק, 1954) ע' 114.

16. ארן, ע' 160-161.

17. יפה, א.ב., ע' 51-53.

18. שם.

19. שט"נר, ע' 316.

20. שם.

21. שלונסקי, שירים, כ'א', ע' 324.

22. שט־נר, ע' 316.

23. יפה, מרדכי, ע' 114.

24. ארן, ע' 161.

25. אוכמני, ע' 151-155.

26. יפה, א.ב., ע' 51.

27. שם.

28. בהן, ע' 662.

29. בן־אור, ע' 219.

30. שם, ע' 219-239.

31. שם, ע' 219-220.

32. שם.

33. שם, ע' 221-222.

34. שם, ע' 224.

35. שם, ע' 225.

36. שם.

37. שם, ע' 226.

38. שם, ע' 226-227.

39. בן־אור, ע' 224.

40. שם.

41. אוכמני, ע' 155.

42. Rodman, Selden, One Hundred Modern Poems, (New York, 1951) p.xii.

43. Ibid. p.xi-xii.

44. Ibid. p.xii-xxii.

45. MacIntyre, C.F., Rilke, Selected Poems (Berkely and Los Angeles, 1956) p.134.

46. בן־אור, ע' 220.

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48. Ibid. pp.16-20.

49. Kaufman, Walter, Existentialism from Dostoievsky to Sartre, (New York, 1956), pp.122-23.

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51. The information in this section is gathered from the Samuel P. Tregelles translation of Gesenius Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids, 1954) p.192; Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli etc. (New York, 1950), p.284; Reuben Grossman, H. Sachs, M.H. Segal, Compendious Hebrew English Dictionary, (Tal Aviv, 1938) p.69.

52. Madeleine and Miller, Harper's... op.cit., p.389.

53. ארן, ע' 160.

54. שם, ע' 157.

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57. Ibid.

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62. כהן, ישראל, ע' 663.

63. Howarth, Herbert, "An Evening With Israel's Poets", in Commentary, vol.8, no.5, November, 1949, p.448.

64. Campbell, op.cit., pp.276-277.

65. Guthrie, op.cit.,p.319.

66. א"זנשטין, יהודה דוד, אוצר ד'נ'ם ומנהג'ם, (נ'ו יורק, 1938) ע' 141-142.

67. בן-אור, ע' 216.

68. Vereck, Peter, "The Dignity of Lyricism" in the New Republic, vol.130, no.22, 1954.

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