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Secularization as a Passion for Absence: a Historically Situated Psychoanalytical Interpretation of Abraham Shlonsky's Contribution to Hebrew Culture

A Thematic of absence, lack, meaninglessness and death prefigure dominantly in Hebrew poetry of the 30's. In my research, I try to both historically situate and interpret this thematic in the Poetry of Abraham Shlonsky (1900-1973), the most influential Hebrew poet of that age. The main theoretical contribution of the thesis is an historical explanation of this Thematic using a psychoanalytical account of the secularization. I claim that an active desire or passion for absence was a reaction to the combined historical pressures of secularization, forced modernization and vulnerability to anti-Semitic violence. This reaction sought to construe and in fact to experience these essentially uncontrollable outside forces as arising from an inward need and desire. This desire and need tried to give shape and form to a yet unknown secular culture who sought to construct itself as a dialectical *aufheben* both canceling, conserving and going beyond the religious culture that preceded it. Shlonsky, one of the most dominant cultural figures, who gave vision and has implemented this new secular culture in Israel, was born in 1900 in a small Ukrainian village Krikov. Due to pogroms inflicted by the Russian White Army and then to the active repression of Hebrew culture under the Bolshevik Soviets, Shlonsky has immigrated to Israel in 1920. He settled in Israel and was an active pioneer in Ein Charod in the years 1920-1922. In 1922 he moved to Tel-Aviv and quickly became one of the most productive and trend setting personas in Hebrew culture.

Shlonsky can be said to be one of the main shapers of new secular Hebrew culture. His poetry and views have imported and brilliantly incorporated German Expressionist and Russian Symbolist dogma and praxis into the context of building a new Secular Hebrew culture. His views expressed in several seminal manifestos signaled a new internationalism, openness and interchange with other cultures. He has implemented his view not only through his poetry but also by a masterful translation of many of the world classics into Hebrew.

His poetry simultaneously shows a joyous celebration of the different styles of European poetry while at the same time relaying some of the most troubling emotions arising from that particular historical age. Shlonsky gave unique expression to the most central aspects of the

historical changes that proved the greatest threat to the self, most importantly to the loss of security and meaning that arose from the loss of sense of belonging to a traditional community that is situated in a particular place (the Shtetel). These essentially destructive and negative historical forces are recast as a 'passion for absence' a yearning for displacement and spiritual rootlessness, while simultaneously helping create and build a new viable secular culture.