

Thesis
1853

UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING
Department of German

'BASHTENDIKAYT' AND 'BANAYUNG': THEMES AND IMAGERY IN THE EARLIER
POETRY OF ABRAHAM SUTZKEVER.

by

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Stirling.

May 1991.

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the poetry which Sutzkever wrote between 1935 and 1954, emphasising the themes of the poetic word and the poet's role. During this formative period Sutzkever established his complex of images, and laid the foundation for the often hermetic later poetry.

The earlier work is characterised by tension between the aesthetic and the ethical, the *ikh* and the world. The earliest manifests both strands, combining Romantic individualism with awareness of the social nature of poetry. In 'Valdiks' (1940), nature imagery develops into an inner language expressing an aesthetic vision, giving way in the war years to doubts, but also to a conviction of the poet's ethical task ('Di festung', 1945). In Israel Sutzkever achieved new confidence in his poetic identity, which he expressed through Jewish and biblical imagery ('In fayer-vogn', 1952). The African environment gave him a sense of freedom and renewed nature inspiration, and he explored new imagery of paganism, sensuality and myth ('Helfandn bay nakht', 1950-1954). The *poeme* 'Ode tsu der toyb' (1954) is the climax of the first period, resolving the conflict between aesthetic and ethical, past and present, and pointing the way towards the mature aestheticism of the later work.

The study focusses on significant aspects of this process. Sutzkever's constant underlying theme is the nature of poetry itself. He investigates this through permanent images which develop specific symbolic connotations and become a metapoetic language. The resolution of the conflict between the aesthetic and the ethical lies in Sutzkever's belief in the equivalence of the spiritual and the corporeal, in the power of the word, and in the unbreakable *goldene keyt* of birth, death and renewal. The

later aestheticism is foreshadowed in this period by the idea of the essence of poetry as the ineffable silence which the poet struggles to reach through the word.

PREFACE

Chapter 6 has developed from a paper entitled 'Changing perspectives on two poems by Sutzkever', delivered to the third Oxford Winter Symposium on Yiddish Language and Literature in December 1987, and due to be published shortly in the series Winter Papers in Yiddish. Chapter 9 contains material published in Yiddish in my article 'Avrom Sutzkever's "Ode tsu der toyb" ', Oksforder Yidish. A Yearbook of Yiddish Studies I (1990), 115-139.

I am deeply indebted to M. Mordkhe Litvine of Paris, whose wisdom and interest have inspired me throughout this research, to Abraham Sutzkever for illuminating conversation and correspondence, and for providing me with valuable material, and to my colleague and supervisor Dr Brian Murdoch, who introduced me to the poetry of Sutzkever, and whose scholarship, enthusiasm and patient supervision have constantly encouraged me.

NOTES ON ABBREVIATIONS, TRANSCRIPTION AND SPELLING, AND CONVENTIONS OF REFERENCE.

1. Abbreviations of frequently cited works.

a. Editions of Sutzkever's works.

(These are the editions which are cited in the text or in footnotes. A complete list of Sutzkever's published works can be found in the bibliography.)

L	<u>Lider</u> (Warsaw, 1937)
VG	<u>Vilner geto 1941-1944</u> (Buenos Aires, 1947)
YG	<u>Yidische gas</u> (New York, 1948)
PV1	<u>Poetische verk</u> , vol.1, (Tel-Aviv, 1963)
PV2	<u>Poetische verk</u> , vol.2, (Tel-Aviv, 1963)
YH	<u>Lider fun yam-hamoves</u> (Tel-Aviv - New York, 1968)
FOM	<u>Firkantike oysyes un moyfsim</u> (Tel-Aviv, 1968)
TsP	<u>Tsaytike penimer</u> (Tel-Aviv, 1970)
F	<u>Di fidlroyz</u> (Tel-Aviv, 1974)
EN	<u>Di ershte nakht in geto</u> (Tel-Aviv, 1979)
Ksy	<u>Fun alte un yunge ksav-yadn</u> (Tel-Aviv, 1982)
Ts-b	<u>Tsviling-bruder</u> (Tel-Aviv, 1986)

Note: Sutzkever has often given volumes of poetry the same title as a cycle or group of poems which forms part of the volume, or has called a cycle of poems by the name of one of the poems in it. In the study, book-titles are underlined, while poems or poem-cycles appear between quotation marks: thus the volume Ode tsu der toyb contains the long poem 'Ode tsu der toyb', and the cycle 'Valdiks' is part of the volume Valdiks.

For poems up to 1963, the edition used is normally the Poetische verk in two volumes (Tel Aviv, 1963). If there are significant differences between the version of any poem as printed

in the Poetische verk and an earlier version, attention will be drawn to the fact.

b. Secondary literature.

- Yoyvl Zalman Shazar, Dov Sadan, M. Gros-Tsimerman, (editors), Yoyvl-bukh tsum fuftsikstn geboyrn-tog fun Avrom Sutskever (Tel-Aviv, 1963)
- Catalogue Abraham Novershtern, Tsum vern a benshivim. [Catalogue of the exhibition to mark Sutzkever's seventieth birthday]. (Jerusalem 1983)
- Yikhes Dov Sadan, Yeshayahu Avrekh, Khavé Turnyanski, Khone Shmeruk, (editors), Yikhes fun lid/ Yikh-
uso shel shir. Lekoved Avrom Sutskever (Tel-Aviv, 1983)

2. Transcription and spelling.

The system used in the study for transcribing Yiddish into Latin letters is that devised by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in 1937, the main principles of which are set out in Uriel Weinreich's College Yiddish, fifth edition, (New York, 1984). However, where a name, either of Yiddish or other origin, has a familiar orthography in English, this has been used, even in transcribed Yiddish text: for example 'Aaron Zeitlin' rather than 'Arn Tseytlin', 'Worms' (the German city) rather than 'Vorems', 'Père Lachaise' rather than 'Per lashez'. One exception to this is the treatment of Sutzkever's name. The poet himself transcribes his name in Latin letters as 'Abraham Sutzkever', and this form is used when the name appears in English text in the study. The name 'Abraham', however, sits oddly in a transcribed Yiddish text; when the name appears therefore in Yiddish quotation it is transcribed as 'Avrom Sutskever'. Vilnius is referred to throughout by its historical Yiddish name Vilna.

INTRODUCTION.

International interest in Yiddish literature in general and in the work of Abraham Sutzkever in particular has been growing steadily during recent years. Increasing numbers of his works are being published in translation: apart from numerous translations of small groups of poems in journals, his poetry features prominently in the bilingual Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse (1987). There have been foreign-language editions of his work, including Burnt Pearls, a selection of ghetto poems in English, translated by Seymour Mayne (1981), Kanfey shekhem, ('Wings of granite', Hebrew translations of Sutzkever's 'Lider fun tog-bukh'), edited by Dan Miron (1983), and the French collection of prose and poetry, Où gisent les étoiles (1988), edited by Rachel Ertel. A German translation of Griner akvariyum is currently in preparation, and there are two new editions in English, The Fiddle Rose, translated by Ruth Whitman (1990) and A. Sutzkever. Selected Poetry and Prose, translated by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav (1991).¹

Until recently Sutzkever has been seen as the last of the great Yiddish poets. He is now beginning to be considered as an important figure in world literature: Benjamin Harshav begins his introduction to the new anthology with the words: 'Sutzkever is one of the great poets of the twentieth century'.² It is therefore important that a body of critical literature be established. So far work on Sutzkever has been limited to several studies in Yiddish and Hebrew, and the introductory remarks in the above-

1. Full details of all these editions appear in the bibliography.

2. A. Sutzkever. Selected Poetry and Prose, trans. by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, 1991), p.3.

mentioned anthologies. The only academic dissertation to date is Ruth Wisse's study of Griner akvariyum. In order that Sutzkever's work may be seen not only in the context of Yiddish literature, but against the background of European poetry, systematic analysis of development, imagery, themes, influences and affinities is essential. This study attempts to form the basis for further work in these areas, particularly in the field of comparative literary studies.

The events of Abraham Sutzkever's life are closely linked to the evolution of his poetry. He was born in 1913 in Smorgon, near Vilna in Lithuania. Two years later, the town was the centre of fierce fighting between the German and Russian armies, and the Jews were ordered to leave. Sutzkever's family fled into Russia, and Sutzkever's early years were spent in Siberia. The formative influences of this time were the awesome natural environment - the snow of Siberia becomes one of the fundamental images of his poetry - and the figure of his father, who died there a few years later. (The image of the father and his violin are also permanent symbols in his work). After the war the family moved back to Lithuania, to the town of Vilna, which Jews have always called the Jerusalem of Lithuania; for centuries Vilna had been one of the foremost centres of Jewish culture and scholarship, and in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century it was in the forefront of socialist and Zionist activity. Sutzkever grew to maturity therefore in a centre of contemporary secular Jewish culture, which was also deeply conscious of its ancient religious and scholarly tradition. In his teenage years he started writing poetry which was strongly influenced by the Polish Romantic poets whom he had read in the Polish-Jewish *gymnasium* which he

attended. He later spoke to Shmerke Katsherginski of his ignorance of modern Yiddish literature at that time:

Genug tsu zogn az ven ikh hob in 1927 ongehoynb tsu shraybn lider hob ikh nit gevust fun Peretsn, shoyn opgeredt fun di yidishe shraybers vi Kulbak, Leyvik, Halpern.³

In the early thirties he became involved with the lively Yiddish literary group *Yung Vilne*, but in contrast to the social *engagement* and emphasis on modernism in this group, his early poems were aesthetic and Romantic, and he remained on the fringes of the group. A fellow writer describes the attitude of the Young Vilna poets towards the young Sutzkever:

Zey hobn alts gezukht dem pshat, dem nimshl, di tendents, dem nutsn, vos aza min lid ken brengen der zakh fun der proletarisher revolutsye. 'Kunst leshem kunst?' Fun dem hot men demolt in 'Yung-Vilne' veynik gehaltn.⁴

He found acceptance with a different group of Yiddish poets, the *Inzikhists* or Introspectivists in New York, whose ideas were influenced by contemporary European and American poetry; they experimented with free verse and Expressionist imagery, rejecting any emphasis on specifically Jewish themes. Their credo, expressed in the first number of the periodical *In zikh*, stressed self-expression, freedom of form, and the legitimacy of art for its own sake:

Als poet, als kinstler darf er bloyz zayn imshtand di gedanken zayne aroyszugebn in der pasiker form, az es zol derfun bashafn vern a kunstverk. Un dos iz ophengik bloyz on eyn konditsiye: az di gedanken zoln zayn zayne eygene, az zey zoln zayn an emeser rezultat fun der baheftung tsvishen zayn zel un dem lebn, un az er zol zey aroyszugebn in yener form, in yene emese bilder, in yene emese farbn un tener, vi zey vebn zikh oys, vi zey antshteyn un dringen im durkh in dem labirint fun zayn neshome.

Nito keyn grenets tsvishn 'gefil' un 'gedank' baym hayntikn mentsh un baym hayntikn dikhter.

3. Novershtern, *Catalogue*, p.101.

4. Mikhl Astor, 'Sutskevers poetisher onheyb' in *Yoyvl*, pp.22-43, (28-29).

Mir zenen *yidische poeten* dermit, vos mir zenen yidn un shraybn yidish[...] Men darf nit keyn bazundere 'yidische temen'.⁵

Contact with both these groups was of seminal importance for Sutzkever's development: from the poets of *Yung Vilne* he gained experience of contemporary Yiddish literature and was exposed to ideas of social *engagement* which later became an integral strand of his own poetry, while the Introspectivists, especially Aaron Glants-Leyeles, who remained a lifelong friend, broadened his poetic horizon to embrace modern developments in Europe and America.⁶ Sutzkever's first volume of poems, *Lider*, was published in 1937, and by the time the Germans entered Vilna in 1941, he was an established poet.

Two ghettos were set up in Vilna. A Nazi 'Task force for the Occupied Territories' was established under Alfred Rosenberg, and Sutzkever and other Jewish intellectuals were forced to collect cultural and literary documents to be either destroyed or sent to Germany to constitute a record of Jewish culture after the planned annihilation of the Jews. Sutzkever and his colleagues hid large quantities of material. In September 1943, when it was clear that the ghetto was going to be liquidated, he and his wife escaped and joined the Polish and Jewish partisans in the woods. They remained there until March 1944, when the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee under Ilya Ehrenburg, who had read one of Sutzkever's longer poems, 'Kol-Nidre', managed to have the Sutzkevers air-lifted to Moscow.

⁵. J. Glatshteyn, A. Leyeles, N. Minkov, (editors), *In zikh*, 1 (1920), 18-19.

⁶. Sutzkever's correspondence with Leyeles lasted until the latter's death in 1966. cf 'Briv fun A. Leyeles tsu Avrom Sutzkever', *Di goldene keyt*, 127 (1989), 26-47.

In Moscow Sutzkever wrote his prose account of the German occupation of Vilna, Vilner geto. After the liberation of Vilna, he returned and salvaged from the rubble the hidden documents and poetry which he had written and buried during the ghetto period. It is remarkable that throughout the war years he never stopped writing poetry. He testified at the Nuremberg Trials in 1946, after which he and his wife and daughter travelled through Europe and settled in Israel in 1947. After some opposition - for the climate of opinion in Israel at that time was deeply hostile to the Yiddish language - Sutzkever managed to establish a Yiddish literary and cultural journal to foster the work of Yiddish writers all over the world. The first issue of Di goldene keyt appeared in Tel-Aviv in 1949, and Sutzkever has edited the journal ever since.

This biography is significant for an overview of Sutzkever's poetry, because the development of his huge and continuing *oeuvre* is closely bound up with the events of his life, and the stages in the development of his poetic consciousness are linked with the three places which could be called spiritual homes for him: Siberia, Vilna, (the Jerusalem of Lithuania), and Israel (symbolised by the 'new' Jerusalem which had grown out of the old, denoting for him and Jews everywhere the continuity of the Jewish people and the survival of their spiritual and cultural heritage). These symbolic stations in his life and poetry are juxtaposed and often fused in his work; the first and the last of them, Siberia and Israel, are linked throughout by the key images of snow and fire, which ceaselessly develop and change: the fusion in the early Israel period of the snow/fire imagery denotes the achievement of a certain inner harmony.

The internal conflicts which his poetry has struggled to resolve are also illuminated by his biography. The Yiddish poet Melekh Ravitsh wrote of Sutzkever:

Sutskever iz in tifestn tokh a poet estet, a poet in sheynkeyt, durkh sheynkeyt far sheynkeyt. Er iz ober arayngeboyrn gevorn in aza shtot, aza folk un aza tsayt, vos hot in zayn poesiye arayngbrengt dem tseykhn fun der nationaler etik. Un volt ikh farglikhn Sutskevers poeziye tsu a geveb fun a shtof, volt ikh gezogt az [...] di lengs-fedem in zayne lider zaynen loyter estetik, ober [...] di breyt-fedem, vos farvandlen zey in dem festn geveb fun zeyer nationaln un sotsialn zayn, zaynen loyter etik. Yidishe etik, algemeyn mentshlekhe etik.⁷

These remarks pinpoint two very important interrelated aspects of Sutzkever's poetic development: first, the aesthetic core of his poetic impulse, and second, the tension between this inherently aesthetic motivation and the wider social dimension, which was at least partly imposed by the outward circumstances of his life.

Another critic who has recognised the aesthetic core of Sutzkever's poetry is Abraham Novershtern, who asserts that in almost everything which Sutzkever has written, the innermost theme is Sutzkever's own poetic *ikh*, or the nature of poetic creativity:

S'iz bikhlal shver ontsuvayzn oyf velkher nit iz tsentraler shafung Sutskevers (akhuts 'Sibir'), tsi oyf a lider-tsikl in zayns a bukh, vu ot di teme zol nit figurirn, oder oyf a tsentral ort, oder in der forem fun a derekh-agevdiker bamerkung.⁸

Such poems are called 'metapoetische lider' by Novershtern, and the term 'metapoetic' will be used throughout this study to

7. Melekh Ravitsh, 'Estetik un etik in Avrom Sutskevers lider', Yidisher kemfer, 22 May 1959, p.11.

8. Abraham Novershtern, 'Der nartsis un der regn', in Yikhes, pp. 187-210, (p.188). Novershtern is not entirely correct in excluding 'Sibir' from this subject matter; chapter 3 demonstrates that the revised version of the Siberian poem represents a significant stage in Sutzkever's exploration of the nature of poetic consciousness.

denote poems and images which focus on the nature of poetry itself.

Ravitsh's image of the woven cloth implies fusion of the aesthetic and the ethical in Sutzkever's work: undoubtedly Ravitsh was correct in perceiving this harmonious interweaving of both impulses by the time he was writing this article in 1959, but this 'densely woven fabric' was only achieved after a previous formative period characterised by fluctuation and struggle for primacy between what Ravitsh has called the 'aesthetic' element in the poet's nature, and the moral and social exigencies of external circumstances. In the early stages of his creativity, the impulse was almost entirely aesthetic and solipsistic; Sutzkever himself has said of that period:

Ikh hob mer gevolt dergreykh'n beymer un shneyen eyder mentshn. Ikh hob oysgeklibn far mayne leyener shtern un grozn.⁹

The poems of Lider (1937) and Valdiks (1940), and the *poeme*¹⁰ 'Sibir', whose complex history began in 1936, were a gradually intensifying probing into the nature of the poetic *ikh*, and the aesthetic impulse was preeminent. Even in the first collection, however, Sutzkever touches on the social role of the poet (for example in the poem 'Cyprian Norwid'), and in the late thirties his poetry begins to look outward to the events developing in Europe. The ethical dilemmas intensify in the war years, as Sutzkever, in common with most artists, struggled with his aesthetic impulse towards beauty, and his desire to create poetry, on the one hand, and the great existential questions on

9. A. Sutzkever, 'Togbukh-notitsn', Di goldene keyt, 42 (1962), 166.

10. In Yiddish a shorter lyric poem is called a *lid*, while the term *poeme* denotes a longer, usually narrative poem. The latter term will be used in this study for this type of work.

the other: the quest for *meaning*, and the possibility of justifying poetry in the face of moral and physical devastation. Even in the poetry of the ghetto years, the search for the essence of poetry continues and deepens, and gains a new dimension by being infused with the moral imperatives of the time.

The first great fusion of the aesthetic identity and the ethical role of the poet is achieved in the poems of In fayer-vogn (1952), written during Sutzkever's early period in Israel. This harmony is achieved through the experience of Israel, which for him embodied the important concepts of continuity and rebirth, and a sense of being a link in the 'golden chain', another key image in his work. At the same time, many inner problems arising from the past are still unresolved.

The volume Ode tsu der toyb was published in 1955. The volume consists of three sections, which, taken together, can be perceived as a significant turning point: 'Griner Akvariyum', a series of fifteen short prose pieces, looks back and universalises the Holocaust experience; 'Helfandn bay nakht', a cycle of poems written after the poet's visit to Africa in 1950, frees the *ikh* and points forward to a new aestheticism, and the tension between these two permanent strands of the aesthetic and the ethical are fused in the *poeme* 'Ode tsu der toyb', in which the poet draws together all the themes and dilemmas of the past years and arrives at a new assurance of his poetic role.

The decisive significance of the *poeme* 'Ode tsu der toyb' has been discussed by Mordkhe Litvine in his article 'Der driter period in Avrom Sutskevers poeziye'.¹¹ Litvine's theory of periodicity in Sutzkever's poetry forms an important basis for this

¹¹. M. Litvine, 'Der driter period in Avrom Sutzkever's poeziye', in Yikhes, pp. 122-146.

study. He suggests that the concept of periods is based on the changing relationship between poet and world, the

geenderte shaykhesn tsvishn der velt, gezen fun ineveynik, un der ineveyniker velt funem poet: tsvishn ayndruk un oysdruk: dem shtrom fun velt tsum dikhterishn ikh un dem shtrom funem ikh tsu der velt.¹²

In Sutzkever's first period, from the nature inspiration of the thirties, through the war years when external circumstances forced the world in on the poet, the formative first years in Israel and the new experiences of Africa, the impression made by the world on the poetic *ikh* was the dominant factor. The *poeme* 'Ode tsu der toyb' is seen by Litvine as a 'vegslup', a signpost pointing in a new direction:

[...] mit der poeme 'Ode tsu der toyb' heybt zikh on an ibergang tsu a tsveytn period. In im vegt alts shverer dos proyetsirn funem ineveynikstn neshome-bild oyf der velt, vos zi iz efsher bloyz mitl, medium, onlen far der zelbstinkarnatsiye funem vort. Un dos vort fun zayn zayt vert alts mer opfreg un basheyd fun zikh aleyn, fun eygenem dikhterishn protses [...]. Alts shtarker dominirt der drang tsu gefinen di letstgiltike glaykhenish far der eygener tuung, farn bading bikhlal fun dikhter, eyntsaytik subyekt un obyekt far zikh gufe.¹³

This study will on the whole corroborate Litvine's view of the general development of the work from the predominance of *ayndruk* towards the 'proyitsirn funem ineveynikstn neshome-bild oyf der velt', that is, the predominance of *oysdruk*, and also his emphasis on the significant role of the *poeme* 'Ode tsu der toyb'. It can be argued, however, that Litvine's division of the work into *three* periods is somewhat arbitrary; Sutzkever's ode can be seen as *the* decisive drawing together and moment of liberation from the intense aesthetic and ethical conflicts of the first period, after which the inward search for the essence of poetry,

¹². *ibid.*, p.125.

¹³. *ibid.*, p.125.

the 'letstgiltike glaykhenish' continues almost uninterrupted, with the poet exploring and developing the impressions and images which have been established during the first twenty years in order to find a way of giving expression to the ultimate reality, which he calls the 'finklendiker iker', the 'vort-neshome', 'di shtilkeyt', or 'yenem alef-beys on verter, vos im zol far-shteyn/Heysherik un regn' ('Oysdresirte khayes', PV2, p.356).

The vehicle for this poetic development is Sutzkever's complex net of imagery. It is important to define at the outset what is understood by the poetic image in this study. Critics differ considerably in their definition of the key concepts of 'image', 'metaphor' and 'symbol': C.Day Lewis, for example, regards the image as being identical with the poem itself:

[...] the image is the constant in all poetry, and every poem is itself an image. Trends come and go, diction alters, metrical fashions change, even the elemental subject matter may change almost out of recognition: but metaphor remains, the life-principle of poetry, the poet's chief test and glory.¹⁴

For Lewis the poetic image is 'the human mind claiming kinship with everything that lives or has lived, and making good its claim';¹⁵ the reality which the poet expresses is created through the *relationship* of one image to another in their particular context in the poem. Lewis seems to equate the image with the metaphor, but distinguishes it from the symbol, which 'is denotative; it stands for one thing only, as the figure one represents one unit. Images in poetry are seldom purely symbolic, for they are affected by the emotional vibrations of their con-

¹⁴. C.Day Lewis, The Poetic Image, (London, 1947), p.17.

¹⁵. *ibid.*, p.35.

text so that each reader's response to them is apt to be modified by his personal experience'.¹⁶

Archibald MacLeish draws on Lewis's analysis, and also sees the 'means to meaning' as lying in 'a certain relationship of images'.¹⁷ He draws more precise distinctions between metaphor and symbol, metaphor being 'a carrying-over [...] of a name, applicable to one object, to another object to which it is not applicable: an 'alien name': a name which becomes 'alien' in the process of transference. There are always, that is to say, two objects, two 'things', in any live metaphor.'¹⁸

MacLeish gives more weight to the symbol in poetry, using as a definition the words of Coleridge:

A symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the particular, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general: above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal.¹⁹

MacLeish calls this 'the complete definition' and he goes on to say that the 'analogie universelle', which, in the words of Baudelaire, is the object of poetry, is 'comprehended in one way by symbol and in another by coupled images. In a symbol the one 'thing' is in front and the other behind. In coupled images they stand there side by side.'²⁰

Jung's work on symbols is particularly interesting when considering Sutzkever's poetry. Jung is interested in primordial

¹⁶. *ibid.*, p.41.

¹⁷. Archibald MacLeish, Poetry and Experience, third edition (Harmondsworth, 1965), p.66.

¹⁸. *ibid.*, p.81.

¹⁹. *ibid.*, p.78.

²⁰. *ibid.*, p.79. MacLeish does not make it very clear whether he sees a difference between the two 'things' in a metaphor, and the idea of 'coupled images'.

images arising from the collective unconscious, but it is remarkable that several of Sutzkever's key images, such as the tree, the cornstalk, the figure of the mother, the mountain, the twins and the mirror, correspond to Jungian archetypes. This inner affinity to Jung's world view is seen in general in Sutzkever's awareness of the complex relationship between spirit and matter, in his fascination with myth, and in his conviction of the inherent relatedness of all generations, expressed in the image of the chain. These aspects of Sutzkever's imagery will frequently be alluded to in the course of this study.

Jung's definition of the symbol, and his observations about the essential difference between a symbol and a sign, are of great value for any study of poetic imagery:

What we call a symbol is a term, a name or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us.²¹

Jung also allows for the possibility that symbols cannot be easily deciphered, but may be merely sensed. In contrast to the sign, which is 'always less than the concept it represents, [...] a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning'.²²

The way in which the terms 'image', 'metaphor' and 'symbol' are understood in this study of Sutzkever's work draws to a certain extent on these three sources. The image in his poetry is a picture created in words, or a 'thing', as MacLeish puts it, which, in the context of the poem, seems to stand for something more than itself: conveying either emotions or ideas of the poet,

²¹. Carl G. Jung (ed.), Man and His Symbols, third edition (New York, 1969), p.3.

²². *ibid.*, p.41.

or giving the reader the perception of some kind of reality other than the everyday significance of the subject of the image. The image can be a simile, in which case the two components co-exist, with the 'actual' object having greater reality than the image which forms the comparison. In the metaphor, the 'actual' object and the image have equal reality, and can both be perceived by the reader, and Lewis's theory of the importance of the relationship between the two parts of a metaphor, or between two metaphors, is particularly appropriate to Sutzkever's poetry.

However, in Sutzkever's later poetry the metaphor does not always need two components: the autotelic or absolute metaphor, where the original object seems almost to vanish and the image possesses an independent life of its own, is a significant feature of the later work. The symbol in the narrower sense used by Lewis, of a concept which denotes one other concept alone, hardly exists in Sutzkever's poetry, but if the idea of a symbol is broadened to encompass the ideas of Coleridge and Jung, then Sutzkever's work is rich in allusive symbolism.

The relationship between the poetic image and the idea or object which it evokes is a complex and constantly shifting one. It is true to say of Sutzkever that he creates images to express his themes, but at the same time the themes and ideas emerge *through* the images, and evolve with them. In this way both themes and images are constantly developing and changing. Throughout his whole *oeuvre* there are certain key images, which recur, develop, and combine with other new images to form a complex symbolic language. In the early poems the images are used impressionistically, and the simile tends to predominate: the signifier and the signified have separate, recognisable identities. This coincides with the predominance of *ayndruk*, the impression of the world

upon the poet's psyche. Gradually these images become denser, become metaphors, infused with the particular meaning which has evolved through Sutzkever's use of them, and in the later period, after 'Ode tsu der toyb', the imagery becomes increasingly a web of absolute metaphors, where there is less and less distinction between signifier and signified; the images tend to have an autonomous identity, containing nevertheless the resonance of their origins and poetic history. The development of Sutzkever's themes from *ayndruk* to *oysdruk* is therefore mirrored in the increasing hermeticism of his images, in their tendency to develop from transparent simile to the opaque absolute metaphor.

The imagery reflects several interrelated ideas underlying Sutzkever's poetic inspiration. First there is his belief in the power of the poetic word, which has a reality equal to or transcending the reality of objects in the physical world. So, for example, he wrote of his days in the ghetto:

Ven di zun gufe iz, dakht zikh, farvandlt gevorn in ash -
 hob ikh gegleybt beemune shleyme: kol-zman dos lid farlozt
 mikh nit, vet mikh dos blay nit fartilikn; kol-zman ikh vel
 in toyt-arumringlung lebn dikhterish, veln oysgeleyzt vern
 un a tikn bakumen mayne yesurim. (YH, p.5)

This blurring of boundaries between matter and spirit extends to all beings: there is underlying anthropomorphism in his view of the universe: stars, minerals, stones, grass, corn, and many different creatures all are imbued with sentient life. Similarly, time boundaries cease to exist: Sutzkever speaks with equal conviction to the dead and to those as yet unborn. Consonant with the fluidity of this universe is the idea of the cycle of life, death and rebirth: nothing dies, everything is constantly being absorbed, preserved and renewed.

These ideas do not emerge completely formed at the beginning of Sutzkever's poetic creativity, but gradually evolve through his experiences and the images which express them. Since the keynote of his *Weltanschauung* is fluidity and change, it is appropriate that one of the main attributes of his images is their propensity to develop, transform themselves, and combine with each other to form new expressions of the changing ideas. It is consistent with the underlying themes that images of metamorphosis abound throughout his work: often, in imagery reminiscent of Ovid, the real being is covered by a strange disguise- the girl in the elephant skin, the snowman 'in a kleyd fun hoyt', the human being within the tree, the tiny life-form preserved within the piece of amber²³. Consonant also with the idea of the equivalence of all entities in the universe, is the synaesthesia in his imagery. This sometimes takes the form of the combining of different senses with each other, (as in Baudelaire's 'Correspondances', where 'les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent'²⁴) but often the unity of all entities is shown by the interchangeability of attributes and actions: as when lips kneel, bones smile, or ears gaze.

The images which evoke and develop Sutzkever's themes fall into several groups. There are the two poles of snow and fire; snow characterises the poet's childhood home in Siberia, and because he felt his poetic inspiration to have begun there, the image of snow becomes closely linked to ideas of rebirth through the poetic word. Fire is a motif from his early poetry - the fire of the gypsies in the poems of Lider is connected to ideas of

²³. All the images mentioned here will be discussed in later chapters, with specific reference to poems in which they occur.

²⁴. Baudelaire, Poèmes (Paris, 1959), p.32.

music and dance. This creative fire is transformed into the hellish flames of the Nazi bonfire in 'Der tsirk', but reaches an apotheosis in the poems written in Israel. Fire and snow are often combined in ideas like 'flamenshney'; this fusion of the two concepts denotes harmony between past and present in the poems of In fayer-vogn, as for example in the last line of 'Der shney oyfn Khermon' (PV2, p.30): 'Onem shney vet kalt zayn in der flamiker medine'. Paradox and oxymoron are very important in Sutzkever's imagery, as one of the means of expressing the inter-relatedness of elements of experience.

Snow is often linked with another key concept, that of 'shtilkeyt'. In many metapoetic poems the two ideas of 'shtumkeyt' and 'shtilkeyt' occur, and it will be shown that the former concept denotes a state of muteness *before* the birth of the poetic word, whereas 'shtilkeyt' is a state of being which transcends words, but which the poet attempts to approach by means of the poetic word: this perfect stillness is the quintessence of poetry. In the seminal lines of 'Sibir',

Vays vi di levone iz der tate
Shtilkeyt funem shney oyf zayne hent,

the images of snow and *shtilkeyt* are linked for the first time, and they remain so throughout Sutzkever's work.

Two further key images which are frequently linked are the sun, often at the moments of change ('baginen' or 'zunfargang'), and often combined with adjectives denoting fire, and the rain, which in the early 'Regns fun farbn un blumen' (PV1, p.102) is established as *the* primal element, through which everything has life and growth. Sun and rain fuse in the image of the rainbow which occurs frequently in the metapoetic poems, where the poetic is often denoted by the adjective 'regnbogyik', one of the many neologisms with which Sutzkever enriches the Yiddish language.

Much of Sutzkever's imagery is inspired either by nature, or the Jewish tradition. Key images of nature, from which many other images proceed, are on the one hand things which grow: grasses, corn, the cherry, the plum, and, most important, the forest, and the tree, which in Sutzkever's poetry almost always is closely connected to the symbol of the Tree of Life. On the other hand, already important in his earliest poetry, but increasing in significance from the Israel period onwards, are images of rocks and minerals: granite cliffs, the volcano, the chasm, pearls and buried treasure, amber and other minerals, and, proceeding from the latter, the image of the forge, and the figures of the blacksmith and the goldsmith, both of whom appear frequently in the later poetry.

All these images of nature establish and develop Sutzkever's belief in permanence and renewal, and all express ideas about the poetic word. They represent various aspects of the great cycle of imagery connected with metamorphosis, burial and regrowth, swallowing and bursting forth, which are unifying ideas underlying all Sutzkever's poetry. The roots of the tree, from which it is nourished, lie buried under the earth, inside the plum and the cherry there is the kernel which creates regrowth, the grasses grow from under the snow, the lava surges upwards from the volcano, the seeds of corn, buried in an Egyptian grave, can grow again after a thousand years. All these interrelated images could be seen as imagery of the *kernel*, or the *essence*, which in Sutzkever's poetry signifies the poetic word, hidden at the centre of things, waiting to be released, often to burst forth with great energy.

The extremely physical motif of 'aynshlingn', for example in the wartime poems 'Tsum khaver' (PV1, p.252) and 'Tsum kind'

(PV1, p.278), is also related to this cycle of imagery: Sutzkever is fascinated by the idea of preserving the essence, through absorption into the self, and imagery of devouring or swallowing, sometimes of self-devouring, expresses the savage aspect of the poetic process and of the struggle for integration into the chain of life, death and regeneration.

A further category of key nature imagery, which circles round the search for the essence of poetry, is that of living creatures; these include, among many others, the lion, the tiger, the elephant, the deer, the eagle, the swallow, and, most important, the dove, which from the time of the second version of the Siberian *poeme* is established as a symbol of the poet's muse. Characteristically, Sutzkever does not use animals in the manner of the fable-writer, taking conventional qualities, (the lion for courage, the fox for cunning etc.), but invests them with different symbolic colourings which are entirely his own. Few of the other animals share the clear symbolic identity of the dove, but one other type of creature becomes firmly established as a permanent metaphor, denoting the poetic word which lives in the mind of the poet: that is, the very tiny creatures, of which the most important are the ants in their anthill, and the bees in the hive.

Imagery of music and dance occurs throughout Sutzkever's poetry, and tends to evoke the Dionysian, sensual aspect of artistic creativity. In the early poems many of these images - the dance of the gypsies, the synaesthetic description of poetry as 'klang...bild...hele eksaltatsiye' (in the poem 'Cyprian Norwid'), and the lonely wanderer playing his flute - suffer from a hint of Romantic *Epigonentum*, but the musical theme evolves into a network of original metapoetic imagery.

One of the key musical images is the fiddle, and its development can be taken as an example of the evolution of Sutzkever's imagery in general. In the poem 'Sibir', his father's fiddle music is one of the earliest inspirations of the child:

[...] A shotn nemt arop
S'fidele fun vant. Un din-din-dine
Shneyenklangen faln oyf mayn kop.

The fiddle recurs in the poem 'Der geto-fidler', where the victory of art over death is symbolised by the fiddler's venturing outside the ghetto-wall to dig up his buried fiddle, and bring it into the ghetto, where it has power to resurrect the dead. In the first poem, a real fiddle is the starting point, and the symbolic reverberations arise from emotional associations with the father, his childhood, the snow, the delight of the music, and the fact that, as Sutzkever has said elsewhere²⁵, the starting point for his awareness of being a poet was Siberia. In the second poem the fiddle is still a real musical instrument, but its symbolic significance has intensified, and it has magic resurrective power. The next stage of the image is the esoteric 'fiddle-rose', reification of the essence of poetry, containing within it the inspirational and resurrective power which were part of the earlier images:

Fun tkhiyes-hameysimdik varemen regn
Pavolinke nemt zikh tsebliyen, bavegn
(Banand mit der kindheyt in altn zikorn)
Di fidlroyz inem shvartserdikn orn. (F. p.7)

The fiddle combines here with the rose, which in an earlier poem symbolises his mother's blood, and is always linked thereafter with the grief and guilt which the poet felt at the death of his mother. The fusion of rose and fiddle in this image of

²⁵. See chapter 3.

poetry thus signifies that *integration* of the past into his poetic consciousness of which Litvine spoke.

The motifs of rebirth, (announced by the adjective 'tkhiyes-hameysimdik'), and 'kindheyt' link this new image to the earlier occurrences of the fiddle, but in the context of the poem the image stands alone, with an absolute identity, and divorced from any 'real' associations.

Central images like the fiddle also fan out in a network of related concepts which can only be fully understood in relation to the parent image: thus the *strune*, the violin string, is used in a variety of contexts, often fused with other images of poetry, ('a volkn mit strunes', 'strunes in himl') and one of Sutzkever's almost untranslatable neologisms is 'strunik', created from this word. The fiddle gives birth to an independent adjective in the 'fidlne penimer lange' (the 'long violin-like faces') of the stags by the Red Sea.

The fiddle image finds a final, unusual variation in a poem from 1983, 'A foygl hot geshpilt in ovnt oyf a Stradivarius' (Tsb, p.148). This poem is an almost playful statement about the fragility of artistic inspiration, and its destruction if the artist becomes self-conscious. It stands on its own as a delightful fantasy, but gains extra resonance when the previous evolution of the violin imagery is taken into account. The little bird's Stradivarius contains within it the father's violin, the magic fiddle of the ghetto-fiddler, the mystery of the fiddle-rose, and the imagery of the powerful poem 'Oysderveylter boym', from 1959 (PV2, p.370), about the transformation of the dying Stradivarius into his own 'letste fidl'.

The progress of the fiddle motif illustrates Sutzkever's tendency to imbue objects which have emotional significance for

him with a very particular, specific meaning, built up gradually over the years, so that individual images like the fiddle, the bee, or abstract terms like 'shtilkeyt' become many layered concepts embodying a 'meaning' which may be very far from normal associations of the term. They are hermetic images, which can often be understood intuitively from the context of the whole poem, but their full breadth and depth can only be appreciated by peeling away the layers of their evolution.

The second main strand of Sutzkever's imagery derives from the *Tanakh*, from Jewish history, folklore and mysticism. These Jewish images are particularly significant in the poetry of Sutzkever's early period in Israel. They are already imbued with their own historical symbolism, and are therefore pre-formed and more static than Sutzkever's other imagery; they do not grow and change like the other categories of image, nor does Sutzkever invest them to the same extent with his own personal symbolism. He does, however, use them in the development of his own themes, and in this way they attain a double texture: the cultural/religious symbolism gives a more historical, universal dimension to the personal quest - a further example of the fusion of the aesthetic and the ethical. A particularly striking example of this is the Elijah/Elisha imagery in 'Erev mayn farbrenung' (PV2, p.103), which is discussed in chapter 6.

This brief consideration of the Jewish themes gives rise to the immensely complex question which is inseparable from any consideration of a Jewish writer, that is, whether it is possible to define wherein the inherent 'Jewishness' of the writer lies. Beyond the simple definition based on the writer's background, interesting questions arise about the writer's *Weltanschauung* and the work itself. In Sutzkever's early poems, influenced as

they were by Polish Romantic poetry, there are few explicitly Jewish motifs, but even there, allusions to the divine and frequent use of words for the Creator, which persist throughout his work, would seem to point to a fundamentally religious experience of the world. Furthermore it is tempting to apply the word 'mystical' to Sutzkever's imbuing of inanimate matter with quasi-magical or spiritual qualities, and his poetic search for realities beyond the realm of human experience, but care must be taken in making these assumptions. It will emerge from this study that Sutzkever's use of Jewish images and religious concepts is not in itself evidence of belief in a separate deity. His search is a poetic one, and while the word 'mysticism' will be used from time to time in the study, it should not be equated with the transcendental visions of Jewish mystics, or even with the work of Sutzkever's great friend Aaron Zeitlin, whose work - for example his great apocalyptic *poeme* 'Metatren'- is characterised by 'une adhésion constante à la vision mystique du monde'.²⁶ Zeitlin's is a transcendental mysticism, whereas Sutzkever's, at least in the earlier period, is essentially a private, immanent mysticism, through which he expresses the 'vunder fun heln geshen' and searches for the essence of poetry.

In two very important respects, however, the essential Jewishness of his world-view emerges in his poetry. The first is his unwavering commitment to the Jewish people and the continuity of the 'goldene keyt' of the generations; from the beginning of the war onwards, he sees his poetic vocation as the recording of the past, the uniting of the past, present and future of the

²⁶. I. Niborski, 'Aaron Zeitlin', (unpublished dissertation, Université de Paris VII, 1988), p. 64.

Jewish people, and the preservation of the Yiddish language, through his poetic word.

It is in his relationship to the *word* that the second significant aspect of the Jewish tradition can be seen in Sutzkever's poetry. It has been noted that the poetic word is not only the vehicle, but also the unifying theme of all his work. It is undeniable that the written word plays a particular role in the Jewish consciousness: the reverence with which the *Torah* scroll is handled, and the fact that if one word or letter of the text is incorrect, the whole scroll is considered to be invalid; the fact that written material in Hebrew and on religious themes may not be destroyed; the enclosing and touching of sacred words in the phylacteries and the *mezuzah* - all these are evidence of the central, corporeal significance of the word in everyday Jewish life. The word has a tendency to be more than just a sign; instead the written marks themselves are infused with the holiness of the meaning. Indeed in the mysticism of the Kabbalah the written sign can have a significance far beyond comprehensible 'meaning', as Gershom Scholem has pointed out:

Letters and names are not only conventional means of communication. They are far more. Each of them represents a wealth of meaning which cannot be translated.²⁷

While it would be wholly inappropriate to ascribe Kabbalistic mysticism to Sutzkever, it seems justifiable to assert that the awe in which the written word is held in the tradition of Jewish mysticism reaches into all Jewish religious and secular life, and it is this tradition which gives the concept of the *word* in Sutzkever's poetry its particular resonance. Right from the ghetto years, when, as we have seen, Sutzkever ascribed pro-

²⁷. Gershom Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism (New York, 1965), p.36.

tective power to his poetic word, until the lines written in 1978:

Un s'vet zayn baym oysloz fun di teg,
Demolt vet geshen: der Ben-Odem
Vet nit mer dernentern tsu zayn hungerik moyl
Nit keyn broyt, nit keyn rindfleysh
Nit keyn fayg, nit keyn honik;
Farzukhn vet er bloyz a vort oder tsvey
Un vern gezetikt.

which Sutzkever sets as a motto for the book Fun alte un yunge ksav-yadn, the word has a particular corporeal quality as a living entity which stems from the Jewish tradition in which his poetry is firmly rooted. The origin of the concept of the word as food is surely Ezekiel's eating the 'roll of a book' which God gave him, which was 'written within and without' (Ezekiel 2.8-3.3); by absorbing the words the reluctant prophet would be enabled to speak to the people. Sutzkever's motif of swallowing, and the physicality of his conception of the word, derive from this seminal vision. The word, and further, the ultimate meaning *beyond* mere human words remain throughout his work the central object of Sutzkever's poetic searching.²⁸

This introduction has outlined the main themes and images of Sutzkever's poetry which will form the basis of the study. Mordkhe Litvine characterises the two principal underlying features of Sutzkever's work as permanence and renewal:

Di lider fun 1938 un fun 1978 shpiglen zikh eyne in di andere un balaykhtn zikh kegnanandik in zeyere ineveynikste protsesn fun bashaf un iberbashaf. Un azoy kumen oykh boylet aroys beyde polusn in Sutskever's poetik: di bashtendikayt

²⁸. Significantly, Gershom Scholem's words about the mystic's view of the ultimate 'wealth of meaning which cannot be translated' have a striking parallel in Sutzkever's attempt to evoke this inexpressible essence of meaning, for example in a poem from 1983:

'Ikh leyn tekstn vos a mentshnhant iz nit kapabl
Tsu shraybn.' (Ts-b. p.172)

un di banayung. Me zet daytlekh di permanents fun bashtimte simboln un zeyere gebitene funktsiyes. Un der iker: dem konstantn yesoydesdikn kegnanandikn durkhdring fun der gashmiesdiker realitet mit der gaystiker in zeyer tsuzamendikn ibervandl in der realitet der poetisher fun eyn zayt; un fun der anderer - vi s'kumen derfun oyf keseyder naye originele kristalizatsiyes un organishe farbindungen.²⁹

The development of themes and imagery in the light of these two concepts of 'bashtendikayt' and 'banayung' is the subject of this study. A broadly chronological approach suggests itself as the most fitting method of approaching such a topic. Boundaries, however, have had to be set on the scope of the material used, in view of the size of Sutzkever's *oeuvre*. In terms of *genre*, therefore, although the prose pieces (for example Griner akvariyum), and the longer *poemes* like 'Geheymshtot' and 'Gaystike erd' also afford fascinating insights into the development of Sutzkever's poetic consciousness, the study is limited to the shorter lyric poetry which constitutes the major part of his work; the two exceptions are the *poemes* 'Sibir' and 'Ode tsu der toyb', which I consider to be of seminal importance for an understanding of his development.

The time span of the works considered has also a logical limitation. This study will concentrate mainly on the first period of the poet's development, which culminates with the great ode, and will show that these years from the mid-thirties until 1954 were the crucial formative period: during this time the poet worked out his poetic *credo*, the key themes and images became established, the tension between the aesthetic and the ethical was resolved, and the poetry moved from the phase which Litvine has called *ayndruk*, where the poet draws from the world outside his *ikh*, towards a new autonomy, where the images become a sym-

²⁹. M. Litvine, Yikhes, pp.123-124.

bolic language expressing the poet's inner vision - Litvine's *oysdruk*. A study of the earlier poetry thus provides a foundation for understanding the complex hermetic imagery of the later work.

One methodological problem is whether to adopt a strictly chronological approach or one based on themes and cycles of images. Here Sutzkever himself has indicated the logical approach. He has been meticulous in dating his work, but within collections, poems which had often been first published as they were written, in journals or newspapers, have often been reorganised by him into cycles. Following Sutzkever's own practice, I have adopted a broadly chronological approach, discussing each collection in the order in which it was published, but within this general scheme, considering individual poems in terms of the development of certain seminal themes and images. The three exceptions to the general chronological approach are dictated by important thematic factors. The early Siberian *poeme* 'Shtern in shney', and the final version, 'Sibir', which Sutzkever worked on for many years, but did not publish until 1953, are considered together after the chapters dealing with the early pre-war poetry, because a comparison of the two versions affords very important insights into developments in his imagery and conception of poetry during the thirties and early forties. Another poem 'Der tsirk', written in 1941, is compared with 'Erev mayn farbrenung' (1949) in chapter 6, on similar thematic and poetic grounds. The third apparent deviation from chronological order concerns the poetry of the volume Ode tsu der toyb: although the *poeme* 'Ode tsu der toyb' is placed at the beginning of the volume, before 'Helfandn bay nakt' the latter cycle is discussed first, in the penultimate chapter of the study. This does not violate the chronology of the two works: Sutzkever was

working on both between 1950 and 1954, and the ode represents the climax of the first period in Sutzkever's work.

One further problem is the question of variants. In his earlier poetry, Sutzkever often made alterations to poems when they were republished in later collections (this happens very seldom after 1950). Sutzkever has always been adamant that his final word is the true expression of his vision, and in the main the definitive texts of the poems will be considered. Where the variation illustrates a particular important point, comparison will be made between the two versions.

CHAPTER 1

The early poems: 1934-1937

Sutzkever's first collection, Lider, containing poems written between 1934 and 1937, was published in 1937. Many of the poems had appeared already, most notably in the periodical In zikh, published by Aaron Glants-Leyeles and the Introspectivists in New York. In what was to be, for the most part, his later practice, Sutzkever grouped these poems thematically rather than chronologically¹. In 1963 Sutzkever republished the poems of Lider in his Poetishe verk, under the title 'Blonder baginen'. Revisions, in some cases of poetic significance, were made on a number of individual poems, and several were omitted, possibly on criteria of quality, or because - thus Novershtern² - their subject matter, Lithuanian peasant life, was unpalatable after the events of the war years. There are however twelve poems written between 1934 and 1937, but not included in the Lider collection, which Sutzkever brought in for this section of the Poetishe verk. Furthermore, eight poems from this period were published for the first time in the 1982 collection Fun alte un yunge ksav-yadn. Together all these poems furnish a picture of Sutzkever's early work.

Contemporary critical reception of the volume Lider was mixed; those writers whose view of poetry was in harmony with the prevailing *Yung Vilne* ideals of social realism and political commitment, criticised the rhetorical style and vague Romantic

 1. The two notable exceptions to this practice are the poems of the war years, discussed in chapter 4, and the Lider fun togbukh, 1974-1985, where for specific reasons Sutzkever published the poems in chronological order.

2. Novershtern, Catalogue, p.111.

visions which lacked, in their eyes, true idealism. A different perspective led to a more positive evaluation from critics from the *Inzikh* group:

Di epokhe fun shrayen in der velt arayn iber sotsiale temas iz vi mir dukhkt zikh ariber [...] Der yunger dikhter vos kamt haynt hot far zikh tsum alem ershtn di problemen fun shprakh, poetishn materiyal un gezang. [...] Sutzkever zingt - aza zilberdik gezang iz shoyt vi mir dukht lang nit geven bay yunge yidishe poetn.³

This comment suggests that the essence of Sutzkever's poetry is the poem itself and the nature of poetic language and 'gezang'. The writer is positing a fundamentally aesthetic rather than an ethical poetic impulse, which is consonant with the ideas of the *Inzikh* movement, and also with the underlying inspiration of Romantic poetry.

Sutzkever's early poetry is usually regarded as Romantic. Novershtern, for example, says of the poem 'Nokturn' (PV1, p.24):

Di romantische hashpoe ligt azoy oybn oyf, az es kon zikh dakhtn: der yinyen fodert nit keyn lange khkire. Me zet zi say in dem banits fun imazhn, spetsyel in dem farglaykh fun der halber levone tsu a harf, say in dem bild funem poet vos shraybt fun yesurim aroys 'mit eygenem blut', beshas er iz elnt in der nakht.⁴

He then quotes Wordsworth's definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. Novershtern has not given a definition of Romanticism here, but the aspects he singles out with respect to this poem centre on the aesthetic, *ikh*-centred vision, the subjective, atmospheric nature imagery, and the pathos of the poet's self image; his use of Wordsworth's words emphasises the emotional side of poetic creativity rather than the reflective aspect. In order to determine whether the

³. Y.A.Vaysman, *In zikh*, (August 1937), quoted in Novershtern, *Catalogue*, p.113. For a detailed review of contemporary criticism of the volume *Lider*, see Novershtern, *Catalogue*, pp.110-113.

⁴. Novershtern, *Yikhes*, p.192.

application of the term Romanticism to Sutzkever's early poetry in general is justified, it is necessary to define briefly the way in which the concept is used in this study.

Lilian Furst has commented on the difficulty of defining Romanticism⁵, perhaps the most protean of literary terms - she quotes 26 definitions, all of which have some validity. Of the greatest relevance for a study of the interaction between the world and the self in Sutzkever's poetry, is the distinction which Fichte made between the *ich* and the *nicht-ich*: external reality is shaped by the imagination, and reflects the moods and needs of the individual self. From this central idea proceeds the emphasis on the subjective perception of nature, the primacy of the poetic imagination, the surging of individual emotions and the tendency to introspection in Romantic poetry. Art is seen as the highest manifestation of reality.

These aspects of Romanticism can be perceived in Sutzkever's early poetry. The point of departure is the self, while the non-self is revealed in an intensely subjective, anthropomorphic vision of nature, a *Seelenlandschaft* created through images which express the poet's inner mood. As with many of the German Romantics, nature is the mirror of the *Gemüt*, which Alan Menhennet sees as the subject of Romantic art and literature:

The real subject of romantic literature or art is often not the ostensible 'external' one, but the *Gemüt* itself and its both individual and infinite experience.⁶

In German Romanticism, in addition to the primacy of the self and the subjective *Seelenlandschaft*, there is also the impulse of the *ich* to dissolve and obliterate itself in nature,

⁵. L.R. Furst, Romanticism, (London, 1969).

⁶. Alan Menhennet, The Romantic Movement (London, 1981), p.28.

that darker side of Romanticism expressed in Wilhelm Müller's
'Der Lindenbaum':

Und seine Zweige rauschten,
Als riefen sie mir zu:
Komm her zu mir, Geselle,
Hier findest du deine Ruh!
[...]
Nun bin ich manche Stunde
Entfernt von jenem Ort,
Und immer hör ich's rauschen:
Du fändest Ruhe dort!⁷

It is illuminating to consider these broad aspects of Romanticism with respect to the relationship between the *ikh* and the world in Sutzkever's early poetry.

The long poem 'Cyprian Norwid' (PV1, pp.68-74)⁸ deals with the life and personality of the Polish Romantic poet whom Sutzkever greatly admired. It is significant that he takes a Polish poet as his model: Sutzkever was, as we have seen, more versed in Polish than in Yiddish literature at this time. There is also an almost complete absence of specifically Jewish themes and symbols in his early poetry: the figures in these poems, apart from his family, are gypsies, Lithuanian peasants, and the typically Romantic figure of the wanderer. Sutzkever's deep attachment at this period to the Slavonic is exemplified in the all-important Siberian motif which is analysed in chapter 3. From Sutzkever's treatment of the figure of Cyprian Norwid, his Romantic conception of poetry emerges.

7. Echtermeyer, Deutsche Gedichte. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart. Neugestaltet von Benno von Wiese. (Düsseldorf, 1973), p.392.

⁸Sutzkever made a fairly large number of changes, mainly stylistic and orthographical, to the original 1936 text published in the volume Lider. All quotations here are taken from the revised version.

Isolated during his lifetime, wandering in exile, and dying in extreme poverty in Paris, Cyprian Norwid (1820-1863) could be seen as the personification of the Romantic view of the artist. In the first stanza worldly glory, symbolised by the 'kroyn fun rum', and the 'kroyn fun zind', is contrasted with Norwid's 'dernerkrants, dayn gildene bakroynung', which represents his glory through suffering and martyrdom. Norwid is pictured among beggars and outcasts; their appreciation of him - '[...] du tust zey a barir, /Un ale kniyen zey far dayne trern - untertenik' - is contrasted with the incomprehension of the philistines:

Vos veysn zey, di bidne layt, vos loyern arum
Mit bloferey un narishkeyt - in dayne daled ames
Fun oysderveylter sheynkeyt?

The key idea of beauty as the poet's realm and goal permeates Sutzkever's earlier poetry in this rather vague form, but later acquires a deeper and more personal interpretation. Later in the poem this idea is taken up again in the wish that mankind should understand the poet:

S'darf zayn a likht vos ale mentshn zoln filn, zen,
A libshaft vos iz sheynkeyt un a sheynkeyt vos iz libe.

The striking affinity with the final lines of Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' ('Beauty is truth, truth beauty - that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know') is underlined by MacLeish's interpretation of Keats' words, namely, 'that the woe can be confronted by the man who is able to accept the beauty of the whole of truth and the wholeness of the truth of beauty'.⁹ Increasingly Sutzkever's concept of beauty encompasses the whole of experience, including the painful and the ugly.

The attributes of the poet Norwid throughout this poem reflect the Romantic vision of the poet: isolated and spurned,

⁹. MacLeish, Poetry and Experience, p.183.

('Du bringst a vays libshaft, un men entfert dir mit shteyner')
 infused with deep love for his homeland and his people, and
 despite adversity never losing faith in his poetic mission:

Nor neenter fun yedn elnt iz dos lid, s'gemel,
 Vos nemt arum mit granitove orems tsaytn, roymen.

The significance of the poem for this study is that within
 this fairly conventional Romantic conception, Sutzkever focusses
 on those aspects of the poetic identity which were to remain
 central themes throughout his work.

The first of these themes, that poetry is the deepest
 reality, is expressed in the second section of the poem by a
 metaphor of building:

Mit dayne hent di eygene fun blut un fleysh un beyn,
 Farvilt zikh dir tsu koven di geshtalt fun a yorhunderl;
 Un oysknetn a shtot aza fun veysn feldznshteyn,
 Vu erdishkeyt iz ongeton in oreol fun vunder.

The idea of poetry as creative intervention in the real
 world, ('oysknetn a shtot'), though here still expressed as a
 rather conventional Romantic ideal, will take on an immediacy and
 reality during the ghetto period which will make of this concep-
 tion of poetry one of the key elements of Sutzkever's poetic con-
 sciousness. Later, in 'Ode tsu der toyb' the climax of poetic
 creation is evoked by a metaphor of building: 'Boyen un boyen dem
 templ, mit zunikn seykhil im boyen!'

In order to reach this later assurance, however, the poet
 must engage in a fierce inner battle; this is the second element
 which remains one of the chief concerns of Sutzkever's metapoetic
 poetry. In the third section of 'Cyprian Norwid', Sutzkever
 depicts the poet's creative life as a Faustian struggle:

Un du - vi Faust mit Mefiston, ranglst zikh mit lid
 Un veyst nit ver der ziger iz, der mayster.
 The use of the Faustian motif reveals to a certain extent

the immaturity of the poet, for the image is not well chosen, in

that the equation of the 'lid' with Mephisto seems inappropriate: the poet is struggling to create the yearned for object, the perfect poem, whereas Mephisto represents the darker powers within the human being, which Faust must strive to *vanguish*. The emphasis which Sutzkever seeks to achieve, however, is the intensity of the struggle and the unpredictability of the outcome. This theme will be seen to recur throughout Sutzkever's poetry.

The third feature of this poem which points both to aspects of other poems of the thirties, and to his later development, is the stress on the ethical nature of the poet's task. Although the main emphasis in this early poetry is on the aesthetic, it is clear that in 'Cyprian Norwid' the ethical imperative is already an important focus of attention. After an evocation of Norwid's loneliness on returning to Warsaw, culminating in an image which has distinct overtones of Poe - 'A gildene kukave troyert oys: geven, geven...' - the seventh section opens with a triumphant affirmation of the poet's role in society:

A toes, vest dayn lebn do nit endikn, zheni,
 Dikh darfn betlers, kalikes, du zolst far zey antplekn
 Di sheynkeyt dayne, vi a feld mit zangen in gebli¹⁰,
 Un zey zoln tsu dir di hent vi blanke serpn shtrekn.

and later in the section:

Vi vayn vet trinken dayn gezang ayeder oreman
 Un blinde veln shpiln zikh mit dayne verter - shtraln.

Here two separate elements are fused: the elevated aesthetic concepts of 'sheynkeyt' and 'gezang' are linked with beings who epitomise the deepest human misery: the poet's task is to nourish them. The struggle to reconcile the aesthetic with the ethical does not, it is true, find its most urgent expression until the

¹⁰. The association of 'zangen' with poetic beauty, which is a key motif throughout Sutzkever's work, occurs here for the first time.

poetry of the ghetto years, but it is far from absent in the poetry of the thirties.

The final main area of interest in 'Cyprian Norwid' is the imagery of poetic creation. Poetry is depicted in terms of music and painting:

Faran aza tsuzamenhang fun klang un loyter bild,
Ven s'vert a kritsndike pen - a fayerdiker pendzl,
Un molt oys an *ideye*, vos ariber doyres gilt
Afile do in shenk. O, eybik di-o kraft geshen zol!

Un zol zikh oysvebn in gold a tsoybertroym aza
Avu di vor iz klang, iz bild, iz hele ekzaltatsiye.

Sutzkever is striving towards a kind of synaesthesia which later expresses not only the equivalence of all artistic forms, but also the interrelatedness of all experiences, entities and times in human existence. Here the ideas and images are fairly conventional, but they point to a key area of Sutzkever's metapoetic themes and imagery.

In the poem 'Cyprian Norwid', Sutzkever has followed a Romantic tradition by taking an historical and literary figure as the personification of his poetic vision; in most of the other poems of the collection the vehicle of expression is the *ikh*. A further difference from the other poems of this period is that here the identity of the poet is examined in relation to a city environment, and nature is almost completely absent, until the final, ambiguous line of the poem, ('Farsamt ligt bay dayn kop di krankn-shvester - di levone'), whereas in all the other poems of 'Blonder baginen' the interaction between the self, the world and poetry is seen in terms of the poet's relationship to nature. In these nature poems three main impulses are discernible: in some poems the *ikh* and the realm of nature are separate entities, but the harmony between them inspires the creative impulse in the *ikh*. This feeling of harmony develops in some poems into the urge

for complete fusion with the forces of nature, but there is a struggle to reject this annihilation of the self. The third facet of the relationship between the *ikh* and the natural world is the conception of the poet-creator as the centre of the universe, and master over nature. No chronological development is evident among these three strands; there is constant conflict and variation between them, but the third aspect emerges as Sutzkever's predominant view of the poet vis à vis the universe, which develops further in the poems of 'Valdiks'.

The Romantic influence emerges most clearly in poems where a subjective poetic landscape is created, as in the poem 'Blonder baginen' (PV1, p.28). By giving the whole group of poems from the volume Lider this title when they were republished in the Poetishe verk, Sutzkever showed the importance he ascribed to the poem; the titles of cycles or groups of poems, and also the first and last poems of cycles, are never without thematic significance. With very few exceptions, cycles begin and end with poems which make important metapoetic statements. Poems chosen by Sutzkever as titles of cycles also have metapoetic significance, for example 'Valdiks', 'Helfandn bay nakht', 'Oazis', or as here, 'Blonder baginen'. The image of dawn is the symbol of creation throughout the cycle.

The first half of the poem evokes a landscape infused with tenderness and peace, and addresses a 'du' whom the poet urges to watch and listen: 'Kuk zikh ayn in dem geburt fun veltn!'. Daybreak signifies the birth of *worlds*: the plural form takes the idea beyond the visible world to encompass the whole universe, raising the nature experience onto a mystical plane. With the 'du' the poet is addressing himself; this becomes clear in the

second half of the poem, when the 'du' becomes the 'ikh' who participates in the wonder of nature. Through the 'du', however, the reader is drawn in to share the poet's vision.

All the attributes of nature in the first two stanzas are anthropomorphic images: in the first stanza the morning star 'vakht'; the branches are 'vayse fingerdike tsvaygn', and night burns 'in veynendike fayern'. In the second stanza certain images emerge which will develop throughout Sutzkever's work:

Grozn plaplen. Vortslen lakhn. Himlen heln.
 Beymer zenen shtume violontsheln.
 Un di toyznt shtilkaytn bazunder
 Reydn oyf der blonder shprakh
 Fun zangen.
 Di zangen zenen nokh mit erd fardekt
 Nor es shmekt
 Fun zey mit blondn yontev.
 Shtil. Di toyen kushn zikh. Es patshn
 Zilberdike fligl. Bleter veynen.
 A pastekh zingt a foyglishe melodiye
 Durkhn tol -
 Un zayn lid hot ale zibn kheynen.

The anthropomorphism of the nature imagery is evident in the verbs 'plaplen', 'lakhn', 'reydn', 'kushn zikh' and 'veynen'. The elements which the poet singles out, 'grozn', 'vortslen', 'beymer', and 'zangen', later become key images of creativity throughout the whole span of his work. Their symbolic significance is heralded in this early poem by the anthropomorphic qualities with which he invests them. The lines 'Beymer zenen shtume violontsheln./ Un di toyzent shtilkeytn bazunder/ Reydn oyf der blonder shprakh/ Fun zangen' exemplify one of the occurrences of the paradox which constantly expresses Sutzkever's awareness of the mystery of the universe: as well as the cellos being mute, and the stillness speaking, there is the pairing and contrasting of the concepts of 'shtumkayt' and 'shtilkayt'. These two words become key concepts for Sutzkever, 'shtumkayt' denoting the state of being *before* the 'birth' of the poetic word, and

'shtilkeyt' a state transcending even the poetic word, to attain which the poet is constantly striving¹¹. Here the two concepts do not yet have this metapoetic significance, but it is illuminating that they are already paired and contrasted in a paradoxical image denoting the poet's perception of nature.

The images of the tree and the ears of corn also contain here *in nuce* the metapoetic significance which develops fully later in Sutzkever's work. Trees are here linked with the stringed instrument which - usually in the form of a fiddle - is one of Sutzkever's most important metapoetic images. The tree-cellos here are still 'shtum', however, and have not yet achieved their potential powers of expression.

The ears of corn in this poem, together with the related 'grozn', are an image of new growth. Both images recur frequently in these early poems, for example in 'A nakht mit Shpinozen' (L, p.14), 'Arum di fayern' (PV1, p.37) and 'A skirde hey' (PV1, p.49). The 'zangen' here are still 'mit erd fardekt' - they are the seeds which have the potential for growth, and their essence is already perceptible to the senses of the poet: 'nor es shmekt/ Fun zey mit blondn yontev'. The term 'yontev', a holiday or festival, is one of many everyday terms which Sutzkever invests with symbolic colouring. The poem 'Tsum kind', from 1943 (PV1, p.278), which is discussed in chapter 4, links the term with buried grasses and with snow, and marks the transition of all three motifs into metapoetic symbols. 'Yontev' in the poem 'Blonder baginen' links together the 'zangen' and the dawn: at the end of the poem the 'yontev/ Fun baginen' has an almost sacramental quality. This image of buried ears of corn is an early manifesta-

¹¹. This imagery is more fully discussed in chapter 7.

tion of the whole cycle of imagery of burial and renewal, which intensifies in the ghetto period. Here the anthropomorphic vision of nature is evoked through images which later become laden with metapoetic significance.

The contemplation of nature in the first half of the poem leads to harmony between the self and the natural world; the distance between *ikh* and landscape then disappears and there is union between the self and the forces of nature, evoked by images of physical contact with the earth:

Ikh heyb zikh oyf fun shtekhlke-geleger
Un shprayz avek a borveser oyf demerdike shtegn.

The imagery from the first half of the poem is now intensified and personalised: 'Di grozn trakhtn¹² vegn mir', 'Di shtilkeytn tseredn zikh *alts hekher*' (my italics), and the breeze, envious of the human being's yearning, tries to rob him of it:

A vintl hengt zikh oyf mayn haldz -
Un vil mayn benkshaft roybn.

The positive interaction between *ikh* and nature is emphasised in this stanza by the verbs of action which replace the contemplative vision of the first half: 'heyb zikh oyf', 'shpreyz', 'flater', 'hengt zikh oyf mayn haldz', 'roybn'. The *ikh* has taken a central role in nature - it is not without significance that when Sutzkever revised the poem for the Poetishe verk, he removed the rather superfluous song of the shepherd and the word 'ikh' appears almost exactly in the centre of the poem.

In the last three stanzas the harmony between poet and nature is reinforced by the mysterious figure of the wanderer lo

12. The earlier version of the poem (L, p.36) at this point repeated the phrase 'Di grozn plaplen vegn mir'. The change to 'trakhtn' represents a significant internalising of this anthropomorphic idea.

whom the poet, in a sacramental act, gives his last piece of bread in return for 'gloybn', and by the description of dawn in terms of 'klang' and 'farbn'. These two words appear as symbols of poetry in the slightly later 'Cyprian Norwid'¹³; by using these words here, Sutzkever is implicitly associating the dawn with attributes of poetry. The poem ends with the *ikh* cleansing himself in order to make him worthy of the purity of dawn:

Ikh vash arop in sazhlike
 Fun zikh di bloye nakht
 Un greyt zikh tsu dem yontev
 Fun baginen.

The poem 'Erd un aker', also written in 1936 (PV1, p.40), takes the impulse to fuse the self with nature even further. As in 'Blonder baginen', the new life is underground, waiting to be released, but, in the central metaphor of the poem, the poet is the earth in which the seed (of poetry) is to be sown; this metaphor unites the *ikh*, nature and the origins of poetry.

The poem is addressed to a 'du' whom in the first version of the poem (L, p.30), the poet calls 'mayn shvester'; this figure combines three different levels of meaning. In the context of the central image of the *ikh* as the earth, she appears to be the spring which awakens and transforms it:

Ikh vil, du zolst mikh zen in yeder forem
 Un shtendik - in farvandlung oyf dos nay,
 Zolst oysshtrekn tsu mir dayn vaysn orem
 Un funem mindstn shtoyb mikh makhn fray.

Dayn trot, vos iz fun mayn dervakh der blipunkt -
 Oyf mayn gebeyn dem vildn tretzn zol
 Vi iber vortslen, zol mit blut-farknipung
 Araynfleytsn in mir dayn loyter kol.

¹³. 'Cyprian Norwid' is dated 'Harbst 1936'. 'Blonder baginen' was first published in the periodical In zikh, 5, no.1 (June 1936).

At the same time the *du* is the lover, and the *ikh*, - as earth, as the roots under the earth, - takes the passive, female role. The sensual power of the imagery in these two stanzas conveys vividly the poet's urge for fusion with nature.

The third level of meaning is that of poetic creation: in the last stanza the *du* who is the spring, and the beloved, takes on the identity of the poet's muse, and the idea of poetic inspiration is conveyed by the final image of the *du* ploughing and sowing the seed in the poet, the fertile earth:

Mit goyrlidiker oyflebung - dayn aker,
O, grob adurkh mayn gayst - a friling-beyt.
Farze in mir dem sheferishn flaker,
Vos ikh bin lang shoy'n oyftsunemen greyt.¹⁴

Two significant changes were made to the original version when the poem was republished in the Poetische verk. In the penultimate stanza, which originally read:

Der kol vos kh'hob farnumen zeltn, zeltn
Un nisht gekent farshteyn fun vanen, vu -
Itst her ikh im durkh ale vayte veltn
Un kh'veys: der shtam fun dem bistu, bistu',

the final line has become: 'Un veys - di lipn funem kol bist du.'

Stylistically a great improvement, in its avoidance of the clumsy repetition of 'bistu', the change also introduces the image of 'lipn', which is used in often astonishing ways

14. The plough persists as an important metapoetic image, and it is interesting to note that one of Sutzkever's earliest poems associated the ideas of ploughing and poetic creativity: 'Mayn lid - an akerayzn', written in 1934 (L, p.61). Here the poem is the plough, and the poet the active force: through the power of poetry he is enabled to produce new life and to hover over the earth: 'Un in tsvit fun klorn/ Likhtikn baginen/ Vel ikh likhtik shvebn,/ Vel ikh zikh gefinen.' Despite the poetic inadequacies which doubtless were the reason for the poem's non-inclusion in later collections, the essential ideas of the powerful poet-creator, of self-fulfilment through poetry, and the idea of 'likhtik shvebn', which recurs most significantly in 'Sibir', are all present in this early poem.

throughout Sutzkever's poetry: disembodied lips often evoke the birth of the word or the unleashing of the poetic impulse in the *ikh*. This is the origin of the later metapoetic use of the image.

Even more interesting is the omission from the second version of the complete first stanza, which read:

O frilingdik un faykht vi frische royerd
Ligt oysgeshtrekt mayn frilingdiker guf.
Durkh toyznt kleyne zemdelekh - er loyert
Nokh dayne trit, mayn shvester, dayn baruf.

The omission of this stanza is also a stylistic improvement: the repetition of 'frilingdik' is unsatisfactory and the image of the poet's body stretched out awaiting the plough is somewhat ludicrous; the final stanza internalises the image: 'Tsegrob mayn *gayst* - a frilingdike beyt' (my italics). Most significant, however, is that the deletion of the stanza makes the whole conception at once more vivid and more mysterious, the 'shvester' of the first version has become the more ambiguous, nameless 'du', and the omission of the rather blunt simile of the first two lines gives much greater force to the *metaphor* of the final stanza.

The fundamental and enduring tendency in Sutzkever's relationship with the universe is the impulse to absorb nature into the self, rather than to allow the self to dissolve into the universe, - the *Selbstaflösung* prevalent in some strands of German Romanticism. This movement from world to self is evident in 'Erd un aker', where the voice of the spring/muse flows into the *ikh*, and in the poem from the same year, 'A skirde hey' (PV1, p.49):

Un ikh, mir dakht, ikh lig lem zikh aleyn,
Un otem ayn in frishn hey dem reyekh

Fun griner tsayt¹⁵. Ikh shpir durkh zikh dem gang
Fun blum un kose.

The poet's feeling of oneness with the hay is so intense that he feels the rhythm of its flourishing and death ('dem gang fun blum un kose'). The intensity of this experience is conveyed by the physicality of the imagery, which reaches a climax in: 'Dos mindste bliml, grezl tut mir vey...'.
'

Absolute identity with nature is presented in the last line: 'Bizvanen kh'ver aleyn a skirde hey.' Identity has been achieved, however, by absorption of the elements of nature into the self, rather than by the self disappearing into the immensity of the universe. It is when fusion postulates a threat to the integrity of the self that the darker forces of nature appear in the early poetry. This ambivalence is present in the interaction of *ikh* and the universe in the poem 'A hoyfn erd', written in 1936, but not published until 1982 (Ksy, p.20) Here the imagery of plough and earth is internalised: it is the poet's 'blikn' which are the plough:

Kh'breng a hoyfn erd. Un mayne blikn
Akern adurkh dem hoyfn erd
Okersht i bahoglt i baregnt,
Tsu gefinen far mayn ikh a tikn.

The term 'tikn' can mean 'improvement' or 'correction', but it has also an almost indefinable dimension of purification or apotheosis. It is often, as here, used by Sutzkever in this latter sense. The poet's penetration of the secrets of the earth opens up 'a naye gegnt' full of mystery; his relationship with the earth is at once more uncertain and more intimate - on the

¹⁵. The idea of absorption was even sharper and more physical in the original version (L, p.60), where these two lines read: 'Un zap arayn fun frishn hey dem reyekh/ Fun sharfn med'.

one hand he *questions* his role and identity on the strange and threatening earth:

Vemes hartsklap un geveyn un tsar
 Dortn vu der opgrunt iz a shtumer?
 Erdeniyu, tsi bin ikh knekht, tsi har:
 Oysgeloshn iz in dir mayn zumer
 Mitn lebedikn roysh un rash.

Here again the adjective 'shtum' has the sense of the primordial state of being before the existence of the word; it is coupled with the sinister 'opgrunt' which recurs throughout Sutzkever's poetry as a motif of fear. The threat of the 'opgrunt' and the extinction of summer, are images of dread, and the poet feels his position to be uncertain, but at the same time he addresses the earth by the familiar diminutive 'erdeniyu', usually used in Yiddish as a term of endearment (eg. 'tateniyu', 'mameniyu').

The final image, which for emphasis is separated from the rest of the poem, is one of fusion: 'Kh'bin dayn griner boym - dayn griner ash'. In the poems already analysed, the *ikh* is either presented as separate from but in harmony with nature (as in 'Blonder baginen'), or striving to become one with nature, as in 'Erd un aker' or 'A skirde hey', where the possibility of fusion is there but the *ikh* and the elements of nature still have separate identities, whereas here the transformation is complete: the *ikh* has become the tree. He has struggled through the doubts of the second stanza to achieve union with the forces of growth and renewal, embodied in the symbolic colour green and the concept of the tree.

On the way to the harmonious outcome, however, the poem 'A hoyfn erd' departs from the vision of warm, fruitful nature in the poems previously discussed, and introduces elements of doubt and fear in relation to the natural world. These elements, and

the ensuing danger of losing the self are even more vividly represented in the poem 'Geshrey' from 1937 (PV1, p.83), whose Expressionist title epitomises its ultimate rejection of the Romantic impulse towards fusion.

The poem begins with an image signifying union with nature, as the poet presses his body to the earth, screaming his demand for metamorphosis into the elements of nature - 'luft', 'roym' or 'foygl'-, confident that he can be heard:

Mit der naketer Brust tsu der erd,
Mitn ponem in grozn fargrobn -
Azoy lig ikh un shray biz es vert
Mayn braytbrustiker shrayen derhert
Fun beriyozes, fun shtern un robn.'

It is part of the hubris of the poet that, Prometheus-like, he feels himself to be the potential *equal* of the elemental forces: when he is freed from the confines of the body he will be able to reward the mysterious 'geshtalt on a nomen',- a spirit, akin, perhaps to the 'du' of 'Erd un aker'-, with the gift of his poetry:

Bafray mikh fun mayn guf,
Vos iz tsebrokhn, mid,
Un ikh vel dikh bagleytn
Mit mayn shenstn lid.

Until this central point, the impulse of the *ikh* is towards metamorphosis into the elements of nature, which will free the creative spirit of the poet. The irony which has become an increasingly important element of Sutzkever's poetic personality in later years, shapes the outcome of the poem: when the mysterious, sensuous figure grants his wish, the *ikh* recoils from the ultimate fulfilment of his desire to flow into the universe. His final words, (described, with a hint of irony, as 'geshreyen-raketh'), demand the return of the separate, flesh-and-blood self:

Bashaf mikh oyf dos nay
 Mit oygn harts und tseydn,
 Farvandl mikh tsurik,
 Fun alts in mir aleyn.

The self-irony here is worthy of Heine: the presumptuous poet is brought down to earth, and there is deliberate bathos in his demand for the return of his physical attributes. At the same time, the poem is a victory for the idea of the self: nature and the *ikh* remain separate and independent.

In 'Bashafung' (PV1, p.25),¹⁶ written in 1935, which pre-dates the poems so far discussed, the seminal image of the poet-creator emerges for the first time. Here the creative urge of the poet and the fertile beauty of the earth are in harmony. The *ikh* however is separate from nature; he is standing *contemplating* the wonders:

O dort, vu der tog zayne farbn
 Tsindt on iber toln un berg -
 Ikh shtey mit farkasherte arbl
 Un shaf mir mayn zingevdik verk.

He is confident in his creativity, but in stanzas two to five, he suddenly becomes intensely conscious of the miracle of the universe:

Es heybt mikh on plutsling bafaln
 Der vunder fun hejn geshen.

Witnessing the process of Creation - here too, new life is evoked by the image of dawn breaking - the *ikh* experiences union

¹⁶. This poem features in an interesting way in Sutzkever's biography. The Austrian writer Joseph Roth visited Vilna in 1937, and the young Sutzkever read this poem to him. Roth expressed his admiration so enthusiastically to the Yiddish writers in Warsaw that the result was the publication by the Yiddish Pen Club of the collection Lider. This anecdote is narrated by Sutzkever in a letter to Aaron Glants-Leyeles, 26 May 1937 (Novershtern, Catalogue, p.110), and also by Mikhl Astor (Yoyvl, p.40).

with the forces of nature, conveyed by the image of the tree rooted in the earth:

Un kh'vortsl zikh ayn in der sheynkeyt
Azoy vi a boym in gebli.¹⁷

It was the two lines forming the climax of the first part of the poem which so impressed Joseph Roth:

In morgnroyt nemen zikh onton -
A vald. A medine. A velt.

This evocation of dawn symbolises the awakening of poetic consciousness: from the immediate ('vald'), the vision opens out to encompass a whole land, and then the world. This expansion of consciousness is later echoed in the movement of the poem

17. The tree image here is used in the form of a simile: there is not yet total identity between signifier and signified, nor has the full significance of the image emerged. Later the tree becomes a central symbol in Sutzkever's work. The tree whose roots go deep underground to the lower world, whose trunk is in this world, and whose branches reach the heavens, is a symbol in many mystical traditions, including the Jewish - the Menorah has a tree form, as does the Kabbalistic system of the Sephirot. Roger Cook, in The Tree of Life (London, 1974), discusses the many functions of the tree-symbol. He shows that according to Jung, the tree symbolises 'the self depicted as a process of growth', exemplifying what Jung called 'the process of individuation'. In this context it is perhaps significant that in these early poems Sutzkever concentrates in the roots of the tree and later uses the whole tree as symbol. Mircea Eliade's interpretation of the tree symbol, quoted by Roger Cook, is also relevant to Sutzkever's use of the tree image: 'The image of the Cosmic Tree or Tree of Life belongs to a coherent body of myths, rites, images and symbols which together make up what the historian of religion Mircea Eliade has called the 'symbolism of the Centre'. [...] The centre is first and foremost, the point of 'absolute beginning'. [...] Ultimately all creation takes place at this point, which represents the ultimate source of reality. In the symbolic language of myth and religion it is often referred to as the 'navel of the world', 'Divine Egg', 'Hidden Seed', or 'Root of Roots'; and it is also imagined as a vertical axis, the 'cosmic axis' or 'axis of the world' [...] which stands at the centre of the Universe and passes through the middle of the three cosmic zones, sky, earth and underworld. It is fixed at the heavenly end to either the Pole Star or the sun. [...] From here it descends through the disc of the earth into the world below.' (Cook, Tree, p.9) It is remarkable that in Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry, which searches for the 'ultimate source of reality', the tree, the root, the North Star and the sun, and seeds or kernels hidden within the fruit, are constant symbols which evoke the search for this 'absolute beginning'.

'Sibir', which begins in the closed-in environment of the child ('In khuter'), and ends with the poet soaring above the earth, and walking with the North Star.

Until the final stanza the poet has immersed himself in the wonder of the moment of creation, symbolised by daybreak; he is at once part of it ('Un kh'vortsl zikh ayn in der sheynkeyt [...]'), and separate, viewing and describing the spectacle. The final stanza represents a change in perspective:

Brilyantene shtilkeyt. Es gafn
 Di oygn in vaytkeyt gevendt:
 - Hob ikh es aleyn itst bashafn,-
 Aleyn, mit di eygene hent?

The poet has suddenly become conscious that in writing the poem he has *created* this dawn; this is the first clear statement in Sutzkever's poetry about the creative power of the poetic word. The idea has certain links with later German Romanticism: the artist, creator of his own universe, stands apart from, and is superior to his work of art. Such ideas are often given ironic, even grotesque expression in the poetry of Heine and in the stories of E.T.A.Hoffmann, but this is absent in 'Bashafung', where the poet rejoices in his creative power.

In 'Bashafung', there is no tension between self and nature as in 'Geshrey'; the *ikh* is conscious of the individuality of the self, and of his power to create a new reality through the poetic word. This gives the poet a quasi-divine status, and in two other poems of this period the poetic *ikh* is seen as a God-like figure who imposes his will on nature: in 'Vayter fun di daled ames', (PV1, p.23), and 'Tsvishn zun un shturem', a poem from 1937 which was first published in a periodical¹⁸, and then in Fun alte un yunge ksav-yadn.

¹⁸. Os, 2 (February 1938), 1.

Sutzkever emphasises the importance he ascribes to 'Vayter fun di daled ames'¹⁹ by making it the first poem of the cycle 'Blonder baginen' in the Poetishe verk. The main image is that of granite, which becomes for Sutzkever a symbol of the eternal. Granite can also crack open, letting out treasures buried under the surface of the earth. It thus becomes a component of the imagery of the poetic word waiting to burst forth. The metapoetic significance of the image is seen in its frequent use as an adjective, in surprising contexts; in 'Cyprian Norwid', for example, art has 'granitove orems' which can enfold all space and time in their embrace, and 'Granitene fligl', from 1972 (F, p.22), is a poem about resurrection and eternal life. Even in this early poem 'Vayter fun di daled ames' Sutzkever uses granite in a metapoetic context.

Also significant is the linking of two other permanent images - fire and the chasm - with granite. The 'fayerdike feldzn' in stanza two suggest the red granite glowing in the sun, and images of fire and heat pervade the whole poem:

Vayter fun di daled ames,
Vu es *brent* der shpur fun mayne trit,

Fun *tseshmoltsn* gold a nign flist.

In ekstaz fun mayn barir *zikh shmeltzn*
Di kolirn [...]

In a *vaysn flam* di berg zikh hiln.
(my italics)

The second image, that of the 'thom'²⁰ occurs in the second

19. 'Daled ames', four ells or cubits, is traditionally each individual's own inviolable space which surrounds him on all sides.

20. The synonyms 'thom' and 'opgrunt' recur frequently in Sutzkever's poetry. In general 'opgrunt' denotes the sinister, threatening element of nature (as in 'A hoyfn erd') while 'thom' usually occurs in imagery of poetry, as here.

stanza:

Fayerdike feldzn. Tife thomen.
Vi tseshmoltsn gold a nign flist:
- Liber, zol dayn umbakanter nomen
Zayn bagrist.

Here the imagery of fire, the chasm and the poetic word (or 'nign') conveys the moment of poetic awareness. In the first stanza the poet had been looking beyond the 'daled ames' which represents his own immediate private sphere, and contemplating the 'panorames fun granit' spread out before him. The poem begins therefore in the same contemplative mode as 'Bashafung', with the poet as spectator: this changes in the second stanza, when the poet is called by a melody flowing out of the depths beneath the granite cliffs. The meeting with the 'nign' which appears to represent his muse produces in the poet a state of ecstasy, and he climbs,

Biz ikh greykh
Tsu di bloe breyshesdike geter
In der heykh.

As in 'Bashafung', the poet's experience of nature and poetry is that of the moment of Creation, symbolised by the adjective 'breyshesdik'. The 'breyshesdike geter', give him power over nature: the colours melt at his touch and he is able to engrave his portrait upon the granite. There is fusion between *ikh* and granite, and in this way he has achieved eternity: 'Mikh baveltikht fun granit mayn blik'.

In the final triumphant stanza nature metamorphoses into flame, and takes on his imprint:

In a vaysn flam di berg zikh hiln.
Zilberdike ekhos - mayne trit.
-Kh'hob arayngelobzn haynt mayn viln
In granit.

The hubris of this poem is surpassed by the vision of 'Tsvishn zun un shturem' (Ksy, p.21), where the poet sees himself

as an angel-like figure who protects the sun, and to whom the sun (source of heat and fire) has entrusted her secrets:

Mit hent, mit rizm-fliglen tsvey, bashits ich un bapantser
Di zun, vos hot ir alef-beyz farzeyt in mayne tifn.

The term 'farzeyt' links this image of poetic inspiration with the imagery of ploughing, sowing and growth already discussed. The concept of the *alef-beyz* prefigures later metapoetic poems, where the letters of the alphabet signify the essential poetic word, for example the 'alef-beyz on verter' from 'Oysdresirte khayes (PV2, p.356).

The poem depicts an apocalyptic battle between storm and sun, which reaches a dramatic climax in the final stanza; the *ikh* is able to withstand the power of the storm and hold the elements apart:

Di zun kumt nenter. Shlaydert inem shturem letste zriye.
Gerangl. Shtoyb. Un tsvishn zun un shturmisher stikhiye -
Bin *ikh*. Der shturem ligt bay mayne royte fis tseshmetert.

The final 'tseshmetert' rings out triumphantly; the poet is a conqueror whose 'royte fis' suggest the warrior's feet drenched in the blood of his victim, but also the red of the sun's fire.

This is a poem of extraordinary power: the intensity of the vision and the majestic final stanza could lead the critic to place it in the same period as 'Ode tsu der toyb' or the poems of the seventies and eighties, were it not for Sutzkever's meticulously accurate dating of his work. But the ecstatic tone in which the theme of the poet's power over nature is explored does place it alongside 'Bashafung' and 'Vayter fun di daled ames.'

These three poems form a counterpoint to 'Geshrey' and 'A hoyfn erd', in both of which the impulse of the *ikh* is to merge with the forces of nature. In 'Bashafung', 'Vayter fun di daled

ames', and 'Tsvishn zun un shturem', by contrast, the *ikh* retains his separate identity, but draws the forces of nature into himself, thereby gaining strength and the power to impose his will on nature.

The theme of the poet-creator and his relationship to nature is given a more contemplative treatment in 'Arum ozyeres', (Ksy, p18) which, like 'Tshvishn zun un shturem' was written in 1937 but not published in a collection until 1982.²¹ The poem is set at night, (when in Romantic poetry the soul is most deeply in communion with nature), and in the ancient forest ('tsvishn faylike yodles uralte'), a motif which is basic both to Romantic lyric poetry and to Sutzkever's metapoetic imagery. The relationship between *ikh* and nature depicted here is one of reciprocal enrichment. The poet leaves an impression on nature:

Krits ikh oys mayne borvese shpurn
Arum ozyeres fosfor-bashtralte,

and his presence ennobles the earth: in a most interesting image he speaks of the relationship between nature and poetry:

Yo, ikh bin do gekumen kedey ikh
Zol mit libshaft di gegnt balorbn.
Yeder erd iz far mir a mizbeyekh
Vu ikh breng mayn gezang far a korbn.

The *ikh* believes that through his poem he will confer honour upon inanimate nature: 'balorbn'- a neologism²², the root idea being the Roman 'lorber'- conveys the idea that his love for the landscape bestows honour upon it. At the same time the act of

²¹. 'Arum ozyeres' was first published in In zikh, 7, No.5, (December 1937), 149-150.

²². Neologisms abound in Sutzkever's work, particularly in the later poetry. They are an expression of his belief in his supreme power over the word. When asked by the present writer about his creation of new words, he replied 'For experiences such as mine, existing words are not sufficient.'

poetic creation is the death of the poem. As the dead body enriches the earth in which it is buried, so the poem, a corpse as soon as it is created, enriches and glorifies 'di gegnt' which has inspired it. This idea is surprising at this period, where all the other imagery suggests the equation of poetic activity with life and growth. It foreshadows, however, the later idea that the quintessence of poetry is silence, and that the words are but the dead husks²³.

Thus the beginning of the poem shows the impression the *ikh* makes on nature; in the second stanza there is the opposite movement: the flowing of nature, the active partner, into the *ikh*, the receptive one:

Vi der vintroysh in ayer
 Roysht in ingevoyd maynem dos lebn
 Fun dem alts vos ikh ze; un afile
 Fun di bilder derbay vos farshvebn.
 Tsu mayn eygenem guf tu ikh tfile
 Vi tsu fremde fantastishe geter:
 - Makh mikh gants, ikh zol kenen basheydn
 Mayne proste und erdishe freydn
 Iber shtaplen fun nakht vu ikh kleter.

Everything flows into him and is preserved there; this is why his body is sacred, like a divine being. His own body thus becomes the God to whom he can pray for complete mastery over the natural world, symbolised here as 'shtaplen fun nakht, vu ikh kleter' - again, as in 'Vayter fun di daled ames', the idea of poetic creation as *action* within nature is symbolised by the motif of climbing.

The tension between the impression made by the *ikh* on nature, and the flowing of nature into the *ikh* is finally resolved in the third stanza, when the poet sees his reflection

²³. This idea is developed in the poem 'Verter', written in the Vilna ghetto in 1943 (PV1, p.292). Here the poet demands: 'Aropshindn, aropshabn fun mir - tu mayne verter. S'iz foylndike fleysh, ikh darf zey nit.'

in a pool - his real self, whom he has not been able to understand till now because of his self-preoccupation:

Mayn geshtalt, vos ikh hob nit dergruntn
Zi gekent in mayn ikhikn plonter.

The pool in which the sky is reflected represents the fusion of heaven and earth: the poet's 'geshtalt' which emerges from its depths is framed by the reflected stars, which are always linked with poetry in Sutzkever's work. The two selves, - the physical figure which the world sees, and his true self which is reflected in nature - fuse into one:

Kh'ze vi ir kontur
Treft mit maynem zikh oyf un mir vern
Beyde eyns, in a gufiker eynkeyt.

This fusion of the self and its reflection foreshadows many other poems which employ the motif of the reflection in the mirror or pond; after this image of the pond as the mirror of the true self, the distress and guilt of the war-time experiences are later reflected in the disturbing mirror imagery of 'Erev mayn farbreung' (PV2, p.103) and 'Oytoportret' (PV2, p.95)²⁴, but harmony between the *ikh* and his mirror image is restored in the cycle 'Tsviling-bruder' (Ts-b, pp.196-202).²⁵

Surprisingly, after this serene statement, the poem ends on a sudden note of questioning:

²⁴. These poems are fully discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

²⁵. Though it is tempting to characterise this pool/mirror imagery as a manifestation of the Narcissus theme, the essential difference is that Sutzkever's image denotes true recognition, whereas Narcissus misinterprets what he sees. Sutzkever never uses the image of Narcissus in this context: when it occurs, in the poem 'Mit koyl fartseykhnt' (PV2, p.365), it appears to be the flower to which he is referring, and this is imbued with the same ambiguity as the image of Narcissus reflected in the water: 'Ganve nit mayn troyer. Zayn farmegn
Toyg nor far an eyntsikn. Er iz
Ongetrunkn mit a shvartsn regn
Inevaynik. Droysn - a nartsis.'

O du harts mayns, tsi hostu dervorbn
 Shoyn a heym, oder kh'breng dikh a korbn
 Far a rege fun eybiker sheynkeyt?

The poet's 'harts' which he is addressing can be seen as his true, poetic self. The question is about the legitimacy of the pursuit of beauty. The juxtaposition of the two contrary ideas of a 'rege' and 'eybik' in the final phrase typify Sutzkever's use of paradox to evoke the ambivalent nature of experience. This ambiguity is fitting to the idea of 'sheynkeyt', for throughout his work, Sutzkever constantly seeks to discover the nature of beauty, later asking how or whether the pursuit of beauty can be reconciled ethically with the fact of the Holocaust. Here the ethical as well as the aesthetic question is hinted at: is the fusion of the self with nature (the 'geshtalt' immersed in the pool) not perhaps the death of the self, and if so, can the sacrifice of self for a moment of eternal beauty (the poem) be justified?

This poem is the most complex examination of the relationship between the poetic *ikh*, poetry and nature during these early years: it shows the movement of nature flowing into the *ikh*, the *ikh* exerting his will on nature through poetry, and the balance between these two movements in the union between the *ikh* and his reflected self in the pool; in the end, however, poetry itself is called into question - a process which is still continuing in Sutzkever's work.

All the poems so far considered, apart from 'Cyprian Norwid', are self-centred visions of the world, in which nothing exists except the *ikh* and nature. A further category of poems focusses on other figures which serve as extensions of the *ikh* or reflections of the poet's exploration of the relationship between

the self, the world, and the act of poetic creation. In this way these poems reinforce the impression of aesthetic *ikh-*centredness. The three principal figures in this category are the gypsy, the wanderer, and the poet's father.

Gypsies, like the Kirghiz people who are an important element in 'Sibir', represent for Sutzkever a people who live in harmony with the natural world; the elements symbolising their way of life are the fire, their music and their dance. Thus in the melancholy poem 'Tsigaynersher harbst' (PV1, p.48), the gypsy who foretells the demise of their tribe uses the image of the extinguished fire, and exhorts the people to break up their mandolins and abandon their dances:

- Hey, briderlekh mayne, ikh ze vi es kumt shoy'n der sof
Tsu undzer tsigaynershn shtam. Un mir vern farzunken
In thom un farloshn tsuglaykh mit di shaytershe funken.

Tsezetst di bandures! Tseshlaydert far vintn di tents!

The imagery of fire, dance and music, as symbols of creativity, already present in other poems of this period, notably 'Cyprian Norwid', is developed throughout Sutzkever's work. Thus the gypsies here are a symbol of the poetic self. They reflect the Romanticism of these poems, and are linked to the theme of the poet's Siberian childhood, for they inhabit the steppes, which will be empty without them:

Vayl demolt nit zayn vet shoy'n mer keyn tsigaynersher
Un bloyz der tsevoyeter step un di beymer in tol ^{sheyvet²⁶}
Zey veln in zeyere troymen derzen undz amol.

The elegaic tone of 'Tsigaynersher harbst' is unusual among the poems of this period; the poet's mourning for his Siberian

²⁶. This line has been altered in the version published in 1963. The original line (L, p.64) was more tentative: 'Vayl dan vet shoy'n efsher nisht zayn der tsigaynersher sheyvet'. With the passing of time the poet has become more certain of the demise of the gypsies with all they signified to him.

childhood home is perhaps reflected in the passing of the gypsies.

A melancholy quality also characterises 'In torbe funem vint' (PV1, p.31), earlier entitled 'Oyf mayn vander-fayfl' in the volume Lider (L, p.63). Here the figure of the wanderer represents the poetic *ikh*²⁷, and shares the dual quality of harmony with nature coupled with isolation and loneliness which characterises many of the *Wanderer* of German Romanticism. The ambivalence and self doubt of the poem make it an interesting contrast to the exuberance of 'Bashafung' and 'Vayter fun di daled ames'.

Many of the images are conventional Romantic motifs: the barefoot vagabond communing with nature, the gold of the evening sunset, the imagery of wood and field, but there are slightly bizarre notes: throughout the imagery there runs the idea of capturing or consuming: the bird snatching the last particle of sunlight, the almost sinister personification of the clouds - 'Geheyne trit/ Fun hungerike volkns'- and the paradoxical idea in the third stanza of 'Tsunoyfklaybn in torbe funem vint/ Di royte sheynkeyt/ Un brengen zi aheym oyf ovntbroyt'. This image epitomises the paradoxical nature of this pursuit: the red beauty of the sunset is fleeting, and, ironically, the 'container' in which the *ikh* attempts to capture it is itself the epitome of

27. The identification of poet and wanderer is also made clear through the history of the poem 'A dikhter bay nakht' (PV1, p.83), which was first published with the title 'Nakht un der vanderer' in In zikh, 7, No.1, (1937). In the first version the opening line read: 'Nakht. Un der vanderer ligt oyfn kreyts fun di shlyakhn'. When the poem was published as 'A dikhter bay nakht' in Yidishe gas (1948), the wanderer had become the poet, and the conception had been internalised: whereas the wanderer in the first version *lies* on the pathways, the poet in the second version *breathes* in their spirit: 'Nakht. Un es otemt a dikhter di vegn un shlyakhn' (YG, p.80).

transitoriness: the wind is never still, and the 'knapsack of the wind' is an early example of Sutzkever's lasting delight in images which unite irreconcilable elements in a bizarre and often playful fashion. Here the epitome of the physical, the knapsack in which the wanderer carries his belongings, is fused with the epitome of the incorporeal, the wind. The paradox of the whole conception is heightened by the idea of eating the captured sunset for supper. By physically absorbing the beauty, it is possible to keep it alive within the self, the poet seems to be saying. This is not just an amusing literary conceit, but is an early example of the very *physical* imagery of swallowing, which becomes a central metapoetic image.

There is, however, a final sombre line ('An elnt vi a barg iz oykh faran') which acts as a counterpoise to the exhilaration of the third stanza. This image of loneliness calls into question the harmony of the first two stanzas, and the ecstasy of the 'velt mayne in toyznt farbn' in the third; it seems as though the impossibility of achieving perfection, which in the 'torbe funem vint' image is stated so obliquely, has brought to the poet's consciousness the existential loneliness which is 'oykh faran' - 'oykh' because this is another reality which exists side by side with poetic visions of harmony and perfection.

The father who died when Sutzkever was a young child becomes a very important symbol in 'Sibir' and in Sutzkever's later works, but also makes a significant appearance in this collection. The long poem in six sections 'Mayn tate un ikh', which was published in *Di tsukunft*, 42, No.8 (August 1937) and then in the *Poetische verk* (PV1, pp.77-82), is a further example of the way in which other figures in these early poems illuminate aspects of the poetic search of the *ikh*. The theme of the poem is the sym-

bolic value with which the poet invests the figure of his father as the voice of his conscience,

Zay visn,
 Zay visn
 Dayn nomen iz itster
 Mayn eygn gevisn.

The poet feels a sense of complete identity with his father:

- Kh'bin nit keyn fremder,
 Kuk zikh nor tsu.
 Her un farnem dir
 Alts vos ikh tu.
 Zest - ikh bin du.

Through his father's presence the poet is able to return again in imagination to his 'oysgebenktn land'.

These three poems, and the others already discussed, emphasise the predominantly Romantic, *ikh*-centred vision of the poet in his exploration of the relationship between self and universe. There is no doubt that the aesthetic self-realisation of the poetic *ikh* is the mainspring of this early poetry. Even at this period, however, the search also encompasses an enquiry into the ethical nature of the poet's task. This emerges, for example, in 'Cyprian Norwid'. In order to understand the later development of this world-centred aspect of his work, it is important to see to what extent this concern shapes Sutzkever's poetic consciousness during the 1930s, when political events in Europe were already causing deep unease among Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe, of which no Jewish writer could have been unaware.

The poem 'Tsu mayn geburtstog', first published in 1936 (*Vilner tog*, February 7) is placed at the beginning of the volume Lider, and the same poem with only minor orthographical changes, is renamed 'Tsu mayn geboyrn-tog' for inclusion in the Poetishe verk (PV1, p.51). Its significance lies in its affirmation of the

ethical as well as the aesthetic and spiritual role of the poet. The poem begins with the conventional Romantic figure of the lonely shepherd:

Der pastekh pashet alts nokh di beheymes farn Pan,
Zayns iz bloyz dos tsiterdike fayfl
Un der diner elnt, vos geyt nokh oyf yedn shpan.

The poet makes a conscious parallel between the life of the shepherd and his own situation: *his* sheep are his 'stade teg', *his* melody is his yearning, and the loneliness of the poet is represented by the 'step fun hoyle velf', and the 'geveyn fun kalte shtern'. This rather conventional metaphor leads to the most important aspect of the parallel: just as the shepherd has his 'baruf', so poetry is the vocation of the *ikh*:

Oykh du - vos in dayn tifenish geyt oyf
Di erhste likhtikeyt fun dayn baruf.

The idea of 'baruf' places poetry in the social context, and this leads logically to speculation about the nature of his public:

Nit keyn pave iz dayn dor, mayn bruder,
Nor zunftangang oyf sturems horizont.

The unease of the time is felt in the second line, where 'zunftangang' does not produce the positive resonance which it normally has in Sutzkever's nature imagery, but, together with the gathering storm, is a harbinger of destruction. The poet, addresses himself as 'bruder', as he does in many other poems. His concern is a social one - the nature of his generation and his relationship to it, as a poet. The term 'dor' has great importance and strong emotional colouring in Jewish thought. Through the chain of the generations Jewish identity is handed down, and each generation contributes to the whole. In the *Shema* the listing of the generations plays an important symbolic role in conveying the history of the Jewish people. The use of the

term 'dor,' solemn and laden with significance, heralds the significance which the idea of the chain of the generations, 'di goldene keyt' will have in Sutzkever's poetry from the ghetto years onward.

It is also significant that it is the traditional Jewish folklore motif of the peacock, often used by poets as an image of poetry²⁸, which he rejects as a description of his generation. Instead he gives voice to a vision of war and doom which he sees as their fate:

Kuk zikh ayn, di volkns rund arum -
 Dos zenen di iluziyes,
 Ful mit groyl,
 Vos sharn zikh vi zelner oyfn front.

He contrasts this threatening picture with his own poetic visions, and affirms the intrinsic value of his 'baruf', in an unequivocal statement:

Mit farb fun dayne troymen
 Molstu veltn,
 Un dos iz voyl.
 S'iz gut, vos du geyst ongeton in klangn,
 Ven dayn guf iz vi a flokn hoyl.

He depicts the artist's duty to share his creation with others, in an image which combines two important strands of Sutzkever's metapoetic imagery, the cherry trees and the birds flying from the poet's bosom²⁹:

Nor feygelekh in buzem pikn s'harts.

²⁸. For example, Itzik Manger's poems on this theme in Lid un balade (Tel-Aviv, 1976), pp.375 and 433. Moyshe Leyb Halpern's second collection of poetry was entitled Di goldene pave (New York, 1924), and Joseph Leftwich called his anthology of Yiddish poetry translated into English The Golden Peacock (London, 1939). Sutzkever's use of the term is often ironic, as in a much later poem, when he complains about his craft of poetry:

'Genug tsu kern veltelekh mit federn gold-pavene'

(Ts-b, p.149)

²⁹. The bird image recurs in 'Sibir' when the dove flying up out of his bosom calls the child back to life, overcoming his urge to climb into his father's grave.

Iz nit keday tsu khoven zey bazunder.
 Be. r zoln zey zikh fray tsefliyen,
 Dort, vu vayse karshnbeymer bliyen,
 Biz dos gold fun himloyg farshaynt.

The ethical imperative which forces the poet to share the miracle of poetry with others is then clearly stated: 'Zoln skhheynim oykh hanoe hobn funem vunder'. This affirmation of the social value of the aesthetic gives rise to a cascade of images evoking the poet's power over the world which he has created, as in 'Bashafung' and 'Vayter fun di daled ames' - but the difference in this poem is the social dimension; poetry receives its justification even against the 'shturems horizont', by the *sharing* of the vision of beauty; through this the poet achieves the 'kroyn fun lebn' (as did Cyprian Norwid in Sutzkever's poem), and is justified in claiming the reward of his 'baruf', as in the triumphant closing lines of the poem:

Dayn viln- a geniter bumerang
 Vet brengen dir a varemen dem fang
 Fun dayne shenste
 Mekhtikste
 Bagern.

'Arum di fayern', dated 1935 (PV1, p.37), also deals with the poet's vocation. Here the personal is generalised: the poem takes the form of a poetic dialogue between the speaker and a group of poets who dance round the fires of night- the *ikh* has become a collective *mir*. The underlying motif is the dance, which, as in 'Tantslid' (PV1, p.42), 'Tsigaynerisher harlesl' (PV1, p.48), the dance of the Kirghiz in 'Sibir', and the figure of the 'tentserin' in 'Ode tsu der toyb', usually evokes the sensual, Dionysian element in poetry. The dance is here characterised by frequent changes of metre and length of line, which creates a leaping, staccato rhythm. The poem also resounds with assonance and repeated lines, producing an effect reminiscent of

the chorus in Greek tragedy; the two most striking examples of this technique are the lines:

Un s'hot undz tsuzamen
 Farbridert,
 Farlidert,
 Di libe,
 Dos lebn, -
 Der flam un di flamen.

and the repetitive, chanting

- Broyt un gezang.
 Broyt vi gezang.
 Flater fun zang.
 Gezang fun gedank.
 Gedank fun gezang.

Through these strongly evocative rhythms and singing rhymes the poets express their credo. Many of the permanent images which Sutzkever was to develop later are already the vehicles of their poetic belief; the phrase in the first couplet: 'Shmidn mir undzer viln' recalls the motif in 'Vayter fun di daled,ames': 'Kh'hob arayngelozn haynt mayn viln/ In granit'. The verb 'shmidn' conveying strength and permanence, is echoed in the motif of bronze in the line 'Vi a geyzer fun unter der bronzener erd' and in the last line of the poem, where poetic words are described as 'lebedike geshtaltn/ Geshmidt fun blut un beyn'. These images of forging metal foreshadow the whole complex of 'vulcanic' imagery which develops in the later metapoetic poetry.³⁰

Three questions are asked of the poets: 'Ver zent ir?', 'Zent ir viziye tsi vor?', and 'Der farlang', (whose interrogative nature is clear in context though it is not signalled by a question mark). The answer to the first question shows the universality of poetry and its transcendental quality. The poets stress that they are 'fun alerley shvotim un lender', and, 'y a

³⁰. cf. Moyshe Yungman, 'Himen tsu feldzn', in Yikhes, pp.94-102.

typically Sutzkeverian neologism, ('Farbridert/ Farlidert'), that they are brothers through poetry. The transcendental quality of the poetic task is seen in the lines:

Mir trogn dem reyts fun planetn,
Dem fiber fun erd un legende.

The 'planetn' correspond to the 'veltn' of 'Blonder baginen' and 'Tsu mayn geboyrn-tog'; here is also the first occurrence of the word 'legende', which also appears during this period in 'Mayn tate un ikh', and in the poem with which Sutzkever ends the collection 'Blonder baginen' in the Poetische verk, 'Lomir vebn di legende' (PV 1, p.89). Just as 'planetn' and 'veltn' transcend the confines of this world and take poetry out into the universe, so the 'legende' transcends time and takes poetry symbolically back into the dawn of human consciousness, when myth and archetype emerged.

The second question, 'Zent ir viziye tsi vor?' elicits a response which again affirms the social aspect of the poet's vocation: 'Mir zenen dos royte geshpenst fun a dor'. The word 'royt' is suggested by the flames which illuminate the poets dancing round the fire, while 'geshpenst' can be interpreted in two ways; either that the poets are like ghosts, representing a dead or doomed generation, or that they are the spirit of their generation. In both interpretations the poets root their identity firmly in the significant concept of the 'dor'. A second image is used by the poets to describe their own nature:

Un khvaliyedik-hel vi fun fayer der flam,
Geyt oyf in der nakht undzer mekhtiker shtam...

This image is also ambiguous: the 'shtam' can either be a race or tribe, or the trunk of a tree. If the latter, the concept reflects the metamorphosis imagery of poet/tree, which we have seen in the poem 'Arum ozyeres', and which occurs in many

variants throughout Sutzkever's work. Again, both interpretations show the poets rooted in a collective living identity, not as isolated individuals. The linking of the ever-present motif of fire with the 'shtam' image reinforces the idea of the tree whose powerful growth suggests the upward movement of shooting flames.

This movement is paralleled in the image of the geyser: the yearning of the poets is described as a 'geyser fun unter der bronzener erd'. Bronze, like granite, often occurs in images of poetry bursting forth from its prison; the geyser here is the direct precursor of the almost identical volcano image in 'Ode tsu der toyb': 'Glit der vulkan fun poesiye farziglt in bronzene tifn' (PV2, p.167).

The last two stanzas of the poem describe the poets' 'farlang' which is set out in the chant which unites bread, song, the ear of corn and thought. From the demand for bread (symbolising nourishment) and song (poetry) comes the idea of bread as song. If bread is equated with poetry, then so is the 'zang', the origin of the bread, in the next line. In this poem can be seen the origin of the image of the 'zang' as poetry. (The other early poem 'Mayn lid- an akerayzn' had the related image of the poem as plough preparing for the growth of the seed, which will become the ear of corn).

The final stanza of 'Arum di fayern' is another triumphant affirmation of the moral justification and power of poetry:

Mir tantsn dem tants fun gerekhte.
Di velt iz in undzer reshus.

The word 'gerekhte' situates poetry in the realm of moral rightness; in the original version of the poem (L, p.32), Sutzkever wrote 'Di velt *vert* in undzer reshus' (my italics). The rather tentative idea of the world *coming* under the sway of the

poets, is changed by Sutzkever in Poetishe verk to the much more decisive 'Di velt iz in undzer reshus' (my italics). The poets equate their power over the *world* with their power over the *word*. This is the only poem of this early collection which explicitly investigates the nature of the word, in two important statements. First, the emergence of the word is facilitated through dance:

Ale verter in sine farshvekhte
Vakhn oyf unter ritem fun fus.

The implication here is that words exist as independent entities which have been corrupted by hatred; poetry (the dance of the poets) restores them to their perfect state. Second, words are eternal, but hidden from our perception by time:

Ale verter in tsayt farbahaltn
Vi feygl in regn geveyn,
Vern lebedike geshtaltn
Geshmidt fun blut un beyn.

The poet has the power to reveal these true words and to give them life. In these two images of the word are contained *in nuce* the most important components of Sutzkever's later ideas about the nature of the word: first, words exist in eternal timelessness, and are waiting to be revealed through poetry. This is the source of the whole range of imagery of treasure, the lava of volcanos, plants, the kernels of fruit and pearls,- all buried, hidden or incarcerated and waiting to burst forth, released by the power of the poet. Second, the poetic word has for Sutzkever a reality as independent and tangible as visible objects in the physical world or as the 'blut un beyn' of the living creature. This belief leads to the ever increasing independent reality and the autotelic nature of his imagery, particularly in his later poetry, where the signifier has an independent reality on the same level as and often independent of the signified. And third, increasingly the concept of the quintessential word, which is

hidden from view, becomes the ultimate object of his poetic search.

If 'Tsu mayn geboyrn-tog' sets the poet's own poetic *ikh* in the context of society, and 'Arum di fayern' broadens the theme to an exploration of the nature of the poetic word, and of the vocation of poets vis à vis the generations, the poem from these early years which most clearly reveals the ethical, world-centred aspect of Sutzkever's poetic consciousness, pointing in the direction in which his poetry was to go during the war years, is the powerful surrealist vision 'Di toyern fun geto', written in 1936 (PV1, p.60).³¹

This is a remarkable poem if one considers its date. The term 'ghetto' would at that time be used merely to describe the Jewish quarter of a town, and though it might have the negative historical connotations of the medieval ghetto, would not be infused with the horror of the Nazi period from which the term is now inseparable. Sutzkever's poem, however, is prophetic in its evocation of a claustrophobic prison which was to become reality five years later. Whereas in the Poetische verk the poem is placed among the poems of the same period in the section 'Blonder baginen', Sutzkever later stresses its prophetic nature by making it the introductory poem of the collection 'Di festung' in Lider fun Yam-hamoves (1968).

Novershtern makes two interesting statements about 'Di toyern fun geto'. Comparing it with the poetry of *Yung Vilne*, he

³¹. The poem, first printed in Vilner tog (May 26, 1936), underwent revisions before being reprinted in Zamlbikher, 2, (January 1937), and again before appearing in the Poetische verk. A comparison of the three versions would require a separate study; the text used here is that of the final version, and the discussion of earlier variants is confined to those elements which shed light on the present consideration of the ethical and the aesthetic in the poetry of the thirties.

calls it 'di boyletste barir-liniye tsvishn Sutskevers poeziye un di aktualistishe yesoydes in dem shafn fun andere dikhters in yene yorn.'³² He draws a distinction, however, between Sutzkever's handling of the social theme and the style of the *Yung Vilne* poets:

Ot di elementn vern ober geshtaltikt nit azoy zotsial-ongeshpitzt vi grotesk-viziyonerish.

These two statements pinpoint the fusion of the ethical aspects of the poem, and Sutzkever's essentially aesthetic motivation. The poem is an evocation of the misery of the ghetto, and the suffering of its inhabitants; all this is evoked by the figures of the beggar, the shabby organ-grinder, and the children, 'blo un naket', and the *reality* of the situation is stressed by the assertion, repeated twice in the first section: 'S'iz meserdike vor'. On the other hand, as Novershtern has suggested, the *atmosphere* of the poem, conveyed through its imagery, is of a surreal, visionary nature. The images are grotesque: the dawning day is envisaged as a blind beggar, but the metaphor takes on independent life, and the further image of Samson grows out of the image of day as a beggar:

A blinder betler shteyt der tog
Baym rog
Fun altn vant,
Mit veynendike groshns in die foystn.

Er vil atsind a shtoyt ton
Un tsevaklen alte toyern
Vi Shimshn der gefangener
Di mirmlne kolones
Un faln do tsuzamen mit der geto!

By the end of the image the figure of the beggar, the metonymic 'veynendike groshns', Samson and the columns of marble all supercede the idea of daybreak, for which they are metaphors,

³². Novershtern, Catalogue, p.109.

and the mood created by the imagery is of the poverty but also revolutionary fervour which exists within the walls of the ghetto. This is an interesting early example of extended imagery taking on independent life alongside, or superceding, the 'thing' which it signifies: a type of image which strongly characterises Sutzkever's later poetry. The second main figure, the organ-grinder, with his 'krankn instrument' and rather bathetic cross-eyed parrot, is a figure of fun ('vi a Purim-nar') but at the same time, the song he sings makes him an object of pity:

- 'Zibn brider hot men oysgekoylet in pogrom,
Der akhter iz gefaln bay a toyer'.

The grotesque juxtaposition of the two elements characterise the atmosphere of the whole poem.

Surreal images create an atmosphere of threat: the 'lange fayerdike hand' which opens the ghetto-gates, the description of these gates as 'tseyomerte levones/ Mit gedanken-finger itst baglete!', and the sinister personification of the unease:

Un di umru kletert vi a shlang
Iber
Shtiber,
Toyern
Un -
Hekher!

There is also the frenetic dance of the organ-grinder, the lame water-carrier, and the children; this is like a grotesque distortion of the positive dance-motif from other poems of the period, for example 'Tantslid' and 'Arum di fayern', but seems to prefigure the nightmare dance of 'Der tsirk'.

The mounting surrealism culminates in the vision of the third section:

Durkh gildenem shtoyb, vi a taykhl tseklungen,
Farfleytsn di geslekh blo-oygike yungen.

This is a communal vision which inspires in the ghetto-dwellers the hope of freedom. The poet leaves the question open,

for though the vision disappears, ('A blits un a blend. S'zenen yungen nito shoyh./ Es hot zikh di gildene zeung farloshn...') the final section of the poem contains motifs of hope: the appearance of the Vilna *gaon*, the dreams of the girl and the symbolic knife which the boy pulls out.

The crucial difference between this revised version of the poem and the version published in Lider lies in the final two stanzas. Until then the scene had been described in an impersonal vein, but in the earlier version the *ikh* appears in the penultimate stanza, changing the perspective with surprising suddenness:

Un ikh - a fareygnter, - vayter
 Durkh geslekh bahangen mit khmare;
 Ikh trog do arum a farshayter
 Mayn benkshaft - a shtume gitare.

At the end of the earlier version Sutzkever brings into the foreground the figure of the poet; the presentation of the poetic *ikh* again owes a great deal to the solitary Romantic poet/wanderer figure. The important aspect of his self image however, is the description of himself as 'farshayt' ('frivolous') because of his posture in carrying around with him his yearning, which is described as a 'shtume gitare'. This is clearly a questioning of the poetic vocation: in the light of this ghetto reality, poetry is frivolous, and the instrument is, significantly, mute.³³ The final part of the earlier poem is therefore *ikh*-centred, its emphasis on the ethical dilemma of the

³³. In the poem 'An alter ksav-yad' (L. p.21) the guitar complains that it is no longer being played by the young boy with the 'vilder tshuprine' - Mikhl Astor, in his essay 'Sutzkevers poetisher onheyb' speaks of the young Sutzkever's 'gedikhter tshuprine tunkl-blonde hor' (Yoyvl, p.23). The idle guitar, in 'An alter ksav-yad' described as 'krank' and in 'Di toyern fun geto' as 'shtum' (a key word in Sutzkever's metapoetic language), denotes therefore the *absence* of poetry.

ikh: the moral justification of his poetry in the light of the 'meserdike vor' of Jewish history. In the later version, the omission of the penultimate stanza, and in the final stanza the alteration of 'Nor s'dakht zikh mir oys: s'iz a fone' to 'Nor s'dakht: a tseshosene fone' removes the *ikh* from the stage and focusses all the attention on the social issues. The way in which Sutzkever treats the subject is, however, as Novershtern has said, through the visionary power of the imagery: the final lines of the poem, with the ambivalent flag image, which can be read as a symbol of hope or of despair, are a fine example of this:

Nor s'dakht: a tseshosene fone,
Vos heybt zikh fun hinter a toyer...

This analysis of the poems of the early years has shown the young poet to be strongly influenced by the ideas and imagery of European Romanticism; in this early period we see most clearly the impression made on him by the forces of nature - the aspect which Litvine has called *ayndruk*. The main inspiration of the *ikh* who is central to almost all the poems is that of nature, which the poet infuses with his own anthropomorphic vision. There is constant interplay between the self and the non-self: there is the strong impulse to fuse with or flow into the forces of nature, but this is always counteracted by the will to retain his otherness, and to master nature by absorbing it into the self. It is here that Sutzkever begins to part company with Romanticism, and in the poems of 'Valdiks' and later, nature increasingly assumes the character of a 'forêt de symboles' expressing his poetic search, and the *ikh* becomes more and more the centre of the universe.

At the same time a strong ethical and social strand is already evident, with the poet examining his role and task with

respect to his own and other generations. There is, it is true, a degree of rhetoric and literary convention about both these aspects, the aesthetic and the ethical, at this stage: the deep existential questioning, and the probing into the nature of the poetic word which increasingly becomes the central theme of his poetry are hardly evident yet. However, the analysis has shown that many of the images which later become the vehicles for this poetic search already occur in these poems: among these seminal images are the tree and its roots, the sun, fire, the dance, the musical instrument (the producer of the 'klang' or 'nign' which is always connected with poetry), granite and bronze, the cornstalk and grasses. At this early stage these things have not lost their 'real' identity; aspects of the outside world and their symbolic significance exist side by side. Later there is increasing identification of signifier and signified: the increasing use of nature as a symbolic language to express the poet's inner vision can be seen in the collection 'Valdiks'.

CHAPTER 2.

Valdiks

Valdiks,¹ published in 1940, consists of poems written between 1937 and 1939. These were included, without significant changes, in the first volume of the Poetishe verk. A further group of poems, entitled 'Fun antlofenem indzl', written between 1937 and 1941, and published in the book Yidishe gas in 1948, was also included in the Poetishe verk with the title 'Epilog tsu Valdiks'.

The poems written between 1937 and 1941 demonstrate a moving away from the emotional nature experience of 'Blonder baginen' towards a more metaphysical investigation of poetry and the poetic *ikh*. Sutzkever's application of the title 'Valdiks' to the whole collection is in a sense misleading, in that the nature inspiration theme which it suggests, really only applies to the first section (which in the Poetishe verk also bears the title 'Valdiks'), and even there the poet's *emotional* involvement with nature has been replaced to a considerable extent by his use of nature imagery as a vehicle for his philosophical quest, in which the key images which emerged in the earlier poems take on a more symbolic role. In general there is a continuation and development of the trend which was seen in the poem 'Bashafung', the withdrawal of the self from nature, so that the poet-creator stands independent of the universe, which he *recreates* through his

¹. The concept 'valdiks' is difficult to translate. An adjectival noun, it expresses that which is peculiar to or conveys the essence of the forest, the nearest English equivalent being the adjective 'sylvan'. A similar atmospheric term is Tieck's neologism 'Waldeinsamkeit'.

poetic word. These are the main trends which will emerge from the investigation in this chapter.

The first poem of the section 'Valdiks' (PV1, p.93) reveals Sutzkever's perception of nature at this time. Here the poet has complete sovereignty over the universe:

Alts iz verdik far mayn oygs gevogl,
 Alts iz khoshev, tayer far mayn shtrof:
 Grozn, beymer, erd, a kval, a logl
 Un di vayte farbikeyt fun shlof.
 Un in alts bagegn ikh a shpliter
 Fun eynsof.²

The poem develops as a self-centred evocation of the interaction between the *ikh*, the universe and the divine. It is the poet's self-perception which leads to his understanding of the universe:

Kh'ze mayn layb in vays fun der beryoze,
 Kh'fil mayn blut in bliung fun a royz,

The poet's perception of nature through himself enables him to sense the divine:

Un in alts antplekt zikh mayn gebiter
 Tif un groys.

In the third stanza each element of nature is imbued with human attributes ('Proste shtoybn reydn fun fargibshaft') and the whole universe with a sense of the divine ('Un s'iz yede rege on a himen -/ Mir a shod.')

The departure from the earlier vision of

 2. 'Eynsof', ('infinity'), is used in Hebrew and Yiddish as one of the names of God. André Neher connects it to the idea of silence which is also fundamental to Sutzkever's conception of the essence of poetry. Neher states that the Kabbalah, in speaking of the hidden God, proposes 'that the divine name no longer be invoked in a positive form but with regard to the negative self-withdrawal implied in the silent concept of the Infinite. Ein Sof, Without End - that is the name which God has in the Kabbalah, and it is the identification of this name with the silent and hidden God of the Bible which permitted one of the Jewish Kabbalists of the thirteenth century, Eleazar ben Judah of Worms, to say, once and for all [...]: God is Silence.' André Neher, Exile of the Word. From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz, translated by David Maisel (Philadelphia, 1981), pp.10-11.

nature is that whereas in 'Bashafung' and other poems of 'Blonder baginen', the overwhelming beauty and power of nature gave the *ikh* a sense of his own identity, here it is the self which is central, bestowing human and even divine qualities on the universe. The logical conclusion of these ideas comes in the final stanza:

Alts, vos vert fun mir derfilt, iz maynik.
 Vu nor s'greykht mayn vort, bin ikh faran.[...]
 Un in alts, in alts iz do der simen
 Fun mayn shpan.

The tentative question of 'Bashafung' ('Hob ikh es aleyn itst bashafn, / Aleyn, mit di eygene hent?') becomes the confident statement of this poem, written three years later. With this preeminence of the *ikh*, Sutzkever departs from the Romantic fusion of self and universe.³ Nature remains holy throughout Sutzkever's poetry, but from now on, as the self becomes increasingly the central point of the universe, nature becomes a source of symbols which are a vehicle for his quest for the nature of poetry.

Two poles of Sutzkever's poetic vision are the ideas of *bashtendikayt* and *banayung*. Renewal in nature is the ever changing fluidity of all things, which is the central theme of the poem 'Oyf a barg' (PV1, p.128). Here three groups of three four-line stanzas, in which an evening landscape is evoked, alternate with three impassioned monologues by the *ikh*, addressed to the spirit or muse whom he calls 'freyder un gebiter', 'goyrl mayner', and 'ovnt, mayn getrayer'. The monologues express the poet's emotional response to the landscape, whose pervasive fea-

³. Only in one poem-cycle, 'Helfandn bay nakht' does Sutzkever return to the longing for fusion of the self with nature. These poems are discussed in chapter 8.

tures are transience and change. The verbs all express movement:
there is the cascading waterfall, into which the sun's rays flow:

Yogt a vaserfal, un in zayn shtrom
Tut di zun ir letstn blik farshpinen,
Un zi fleytst in eynem mitn shtrom,

and there is the violent clashing of elemental forces, out
of which comes new life:

Oyfgeshtoyts fun luftike stikhiyes.
Fayer-ekhos. Un dos blo gebert
Kvaln ru un kusht aroys dos khiyes
Fun der erd.

The climax of the poem is the question 'Eybikeyt? Ver veys,
tsi zi iz eybik[...]?' The cause of this sudden moment of fear is
the transience of the evening. The poet finds an answer to this
dilemma in the mountain, apparently the epitome of permanence,
but in reality the most powerful image of change. The mountain
accepts its own impermanence:

Nor der barg iz gleybik. Zayn zikorn
Fargedenkt di doynes, ven er iz
Nokh geven a tol, un vi gevorn
Iz er shpeter ersht a barg, a riz.

Sutzkever then expresses the principle which underlies all
his nature imagery:

Altsding iz farvandlenish, banayung.
A sekund - un andersh zeyen oys
Di geberg. Di altkeyt vert oyf s'nay yung.
Kleyn vert groys.

The conclusion of the poem suggests that the 'eybikeyt'
which was the subject of the earlier question can be achieved by
acceptance of the permanence of change; by being rocked to sleep
by the evening, the *ikh* can become part of it, and find a
'heymort'.

The idea of eternal flux in nature is captured by image of
metamorphosis which abound in the poems of 'Valdiks'. 'Shtern

vern garbn' (PV1, p.117) tells of seven sheaves of corn becoming stars in the night sky, while the seven stars take their place, turning into sheaves. Through the medium of this delightful fantasy, which has echoes of Pharaoh's dream in the Joseph story, emerges Sutzkever's conviction of the interchangeability of all aspects of creation, which becomes very important in his later poetry. A similar transfer occurs in the poem 'Valdiks' (PV1, p.98). The significance of the concept 'valdiks'- which also has central importance in the long poem 'Griner heykhl' (PV1, p.131) - is emphasised by its use as the title of the whole collection, and is linked to the symbolic significance of trees in Sutzkever's imagery. In the poem 'Valdiks', which paints an atmospheric picture of the wood in the evening, when the divisions between the real and the unreal become blurred, ('In tropns toy tsefalt der khoymmer/ Fun groz un blum'), there occur the following lines:

Oyf dr'erd tseleygte, shlofn beymer,
Di shotns vaksn in der heykh.

Here the trees and their shadows exchange their identities; through the image Sutzkever evokes the idea, fundamental to his philosophy, that no boundaries exist between the material and the incorporeal, the world of the imagination and the world of external reality.

Trees play a significant role in a further image of metamorphosis: 'Griner heykhl', like 'Oyf a barg', evokes the poet's search for the spirit which seems to embody that fulfilment of longing which is seldom attainable. This spirit is referred to as 'a mentsh fun vunder', and in the final section as 'mayn har'. In the poet's search for union with this muse or spirit, he contrasts the limitations of the human being with the power which

tree roots possess: roots can penetrate the depths of the earth and arrive at a realm beyond the material, and beyond time:

Bloyz di beymer-vortslen, di gedakhtn
 Fun der erd, gefinen unter tunkl-tifn shikht
 Zeyer kvalnshlos, dem fest farmakhtn,
 Hinter velkhn s'hart an eybik likht
 Bloyz di grine, vortslidike finger
 Tapn on dos hoyle layb fun tsayt, -
 Shnaydn durkh di shteynershe batsvinger,
 Vern endlekh oysgeleyzt, bafrayt.

The human being cannot transcend the limitations of his own sphere, and so the poet asks to be transformed into a tree root; in this form, and with the two elements of 'loyfiks' (water) and 'valdiks' to sustain him he will be able to penetrate to the 'kval fun lid' and to the 'onheyb fun bashaf'.⁴ Sutzkever's use of the image of the tree and its roots as a vehicle for his ceaseless attempt to penetrate the essence of creation and poetry has an early manifestation here and in 'Landshaft' (PV1, p.101) where a surrealist landscape is evoked in images of metamorphosis (the sun is 'mgulgl in a heysn, fuln/ Un vildn royznbeyml oyfn feld. '), and of anthropomorphism :

A vortsl tsu a vortsl epes preplt.
 A volkn lakht
 Fun shlof. Es vinkt fun vald a blitsik eygl.

The tree, with its roots, is a symbol of penetration to spheres of deeper reality, and throughout his poetry Sutzkever explores through the different possibilities of the tree image,

 4. Reference will be made later in the chapter to Sutzkever's affinity with Rilke. In this regard it should be noted that the tree is also the primal element, preceding the song of Orpheus, in the first of the 'Sonette an Orpheus':

'Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!
 O Orpheus singt! O hoher Baum im Ohr!
 Und alles schwieg. Doch selbst in der Verschweigung
 ging neuer Anfang, Wink und Wandlung vor.'

Rilke, Gesammelte Gedichte (Munich, 1962), p.487.

In the 'Sonette an Orpheus' the tree, the concepts of silence and metamorphosis, and the dancer (ibid., p.519) are key metapoetic symbols, as they are throughout Sutzkever's work.

the mysterious shifting relationships between human beings and the natural world.

The idea of metamorphosis runs right through Sutzkever's work: from the 1950s on, his poetry moves ever inward, creating its own symbolic universe of images, and the boundaries between all aspects of reality, all concepts of time, between the living and the dead, and between ideas of 'reality' and the 'imagined', are non-existent; and in this poetic universe the *word*, as we shall see, exists on the same plane of reality as physical objects. These early images of metamorphosis, fluidity and change herald therefore the future development of Sutzkever's poetic consciousness.

The second significant aspect of the nature imagery in the poems of 'Valdiks' is the intensifying symbolism of certain motifs, several of which have already occurred in the poems of 1934-1937. In the section 'Valdiks' three main images can be singled out: rain, fire, and ears of corn.

Rain and fire as complementary primal elements achieve metapoetic significance in two poems, 'Regns fun farbn un blumen' (PV1, p.102), and 'Fayer' (PV1, p.106). The former poem is in two sections, the first of which is a vague impressionistic landscape, the motif of gusting rain evoked by the cascades of often neologistic adjectives, and the uneven lines:

Shlangendike, zangendike regns -
 Makhnes nase vintn galopirn oyf der erd
 Un kritsn ayn
 Un blitsn ayn
 Khaloymes nit keyn hiyike,
 Gedanken frish tsevaksene
 Grin-bliyike,
 Tseshlaksene,
 Dershrokene fun royshndiker gvure
 Der tsehimplter.

Out of this indistinct inner thought-landscape real features finally emerge:

Un hinter zey - an ovnt a geblimter.
 Un hinter im - a derfele
 Fun dr'erd aroysgeshvemt,
 A veg,
 A karshn-gortn
 Un
 A mentsh.

Rain is the primal cause of the 'khaloymes nit keyn hiyike' and of the thoughts which grow organically like plants ('Gedanken frish tsevaksene/ Grin bliyike'). The thoughts in turn give rise to the attributes of the material world: 'a derfele', 'a veg', 'a karshn-gortn', and 'a mentsh'. 'Karshn' are an image of particular significance, as we shall see when considering the poem 'A tsvaygl karshn'; they later become one of the recurring images of poetry. It is therefore significant that the final two elements created by the rain are 'karshngortn' and 'mentsh', the former symbolically connected with poetic creativity, and the climactic 'mentsh' heralding the poetic *ikh* who speaks in the second section. The first section ends with an affirmation of the creative force of the rain: 'Dos altsding hobn regns itst baflemlt.'

The word 'baflemlt' equates the rain with the other primal element, fire; this oxymoron, which occurs throughout Sutzkever's poetry (a further early example is the 'trukn vaser' of the poem 'Valdiks') furthers the idea of the interchangeability of elements in the universe which is conveyed by the metamorphosis motif. It is a striking early example of the petrarchist⁵ elements which are in evidence throughout Sutzkever's poetry.

 5. In using lower case letters for this term I am following the style of Leonard Forster who distinguishes between '*Petrarchan* (appertaining to Petrarch himself) with a capital, and *petrarchism*, *petrarchist*, etc, in lower case.' Leonard Forster, The Icy Fire, (Cambridge, 1969), p.viii.

Paradox, oxymoron, hyperbole, the fusing of opposite elements, and the creation of a poetic language of recurring images, were all elements of Petrarch's poetry, which was 'profoundly serious, despite its use of oxymoron and hyperbole'.⁶ Petrarch used these devices in the exploration of the theme which was for him the essential subject matter of poetry: the various emotions of love. The interesting aspect of Sutzkever's petrarchist imagery is that his use of these devices is also 'profoundly serious', serving what for him represented the essential theme, namely his exploration of the process of poetic creation and the nature of poetry.

The equivalence of rain and fire is developed in the second section of the poem. Here the idea of rain and creativity become personalised, and the rain takes on the function of the muse, endowed with the qualities of fire and sun:

Un du bist der zuniker melder,
Az alts vos ikh trakht iz derhert. [...]
O, fayerdik-fleytsike freyd,
O regn fun farbn un blumen.

In this ecstatic address the *ikh* states that it is the rain which inspires him to words: 'Dayn sheynkeyt bavortikt mayn gumen'. The idea that the function of the rain/muse is to *release* the poet's creativity is also seen in the third stanza of the second section of the poem:

Un du, vi a shtern-guf loyter,
Farnemstu di reyde fun mayn gayst,
Vos loyshpert tsu dir a fartroyter,
Un al mayne blutn bafrayst
Fun zeyer *farglivertn shtumen*. (my italics)

The last phrase has symbolic significance. 'Glivern' or 'farglivern' always has a negative connotation in Sutzkever's poetry, and occurs at several significant points in the poems of the ghetto period: in 'Vi azoy?' (PV1, p.284: 'Vu es glivern

⁶. *ibid.*, p.24.

sharbns fun teg/ In a thom on a grunt, on a dek'), and in 'Farfroyrene yidn' (PV1, p.362: 'Un s'glivert a foyst bay a naketn grayz'). In 'Ode tsu der toyb' the term comes to acquire the particular metapoetic significance of a frozen barren state which prevents creativity.⁷ The combination of the word 'farglivert' with 'shtumen' in 'Regns fun farbn un blumen' signals its metapoetic significance, for the concept 'shtum' has already been seen to denote the state of muteness before the poetic word is released.

The last stanza intensifies the symbolic quality of rain, for it is the rain/muse which enables the poet to become creative: an interpretation which is suggested by the use of that other seminal image, the forest:

Farhilst mikh in dayn pelerine
 Un layterst mayn layb mit dayn gnod.
 Ot finklen shoyv velder goldgrine
 Bahangen mit likht un mit sod.
 Ikh fil: host mayn tfile farnumen
 Un host zi in zeung farguft.
 Itst velder ikh oyf in der luft,
 Baregnt mit farbn un blumen.

The rain becomes quasi-divine in the first two lines; this is emphasised in the line '[...] host mayn tfile farnumen': the rain's purification of the *ikh*, leads to his being granted a vision of the woods, which have assumed a spiritual, mysterious quality ('sod'). The poet's triumph is conveyed by the verb 'velder ikh oyf'. This is an interesting neologism, evoking the

 7. In the fifth poem of the ode, the dove/muse is described as the 'bletl, vos lozt nit farglivern finger', and in the climactic ninth poem it is used in the context of the unfreezing of the poetic word. At the moment before the spirit of pure poetry reveals itself fully to the *ikh*, the following line occurs:

'S'glivern glider. Biz vanen mayn guf, der in libe far-
 brenter

Oysleshn vet zikh in gantsn -'

The 'extinguishing' of the petrified limbs in fire evokes the revelation of poetry which follows.

idea that after the muse has enabled the poet to perceive the essence of the forest, he grows organically like the forest - the idea from the beginning of the section, 'Ikh bin dos geboyer fun di velder', is fulfilled. Here is confirmation of the thesis that increasingly Sutzkever is using nature imagery in the service of his poetic ideas, for in this poem there is no desire to melt into the forest; the concept of 'oyfveldern' rather suggests the assumption for himself of the qualities of the forest.

In 'Regns fun farbn un blumen', then, rain is the force which allows all life, and the creativity of the *ikh* to flourish. The second elemental force which occurs in the nature imagery of 'Valdiks' is fire, which was already an important image in several poems of 'Blonder baginen'. It develops into one of the fundamental symbols denoting poetic inspiration in the poems of 'In fayer-vogn', and throughout Sutzkever's later poetry. Its increasing symbolic significance can be seen in the poem 'Fayer' (PV1, p.106), where it is the 'Neshome fun erdishn himl/ Un himlisher erd!' Through the chiasmus in these lines fire is symbolised as the origin of all aspects of creation. Paradoxically, it nourishes itself by consuming everything it has created:

Du, zeevdik-royte geshtalt,
 Vos lebn tsu kenen
 Muztu fartsukn di grine korbones
 Vos aleyn host bashafn
 In tol fun amol.

Sutzkever remains fascinated by the idea of preservation and renewal through consumption (as in the idea of 'aynshlingen' which develops particularly in poems of the ghetto period). The fact that renewal is an essential attribute of the fire in this poem is seen in the last lines:

In dir a gebundene shvaygike nakht
 Un der ershter baginen.

Though fire is here not seen in a specifically metapoetic context, the mysterious all-consuming and renewing power with which it is invested foreshadows its later symbolic significance.

The motif of sowing, the growth of seed, and the mature corn have already been seen as images of poetic creation in 'Blonder baginen', for example in the final stanza of 'Erd un aker', and in 'Arum di fayern'. The symbolic significance of the zang motif is fully established in the poem 'In opgrunt fun a zang' from the section 'Valdiks' (PV1, p.110). The cornstalk is personified in a kind of anthropomorphic surrealism, touched with whimsical humour, which was to become one of Sutzkever's characteristic modes of expression: the surreal element very often becomes nightmarish, especially during the ghetto period, or in later poems or prose pieces which explore experiences from that time, such as 'Griner akvariym', but often, as here, has a charming lightness and gaiety which half conceals the deeper metapoetic theme. The poet describes being waylaid by a cornstalk which bars his way and binds him 'mit blitsung fun zayn eygl'. At the beginning of the poem the *ikh* sees this as preventing him from reaching the goal of his journey, which is a metaphysical one: the path which the cornstalk has barred is 'der veg tsu ale sofn'. The poet finds, however, that through the imprisonment of his body, his spirit is liberated, and breathes in from the corn 'Di formen fun a himl, / Tsu velkhn s'hot genart mikh/ Der ovntiker veg'. The realm of experience to which the cornstalk has opened the poet's eyes is that of poetry:

Azoy hot mikh gefangen a zang fun tsvishn zangen
 Un oyfantplekt a velt fun kule freyd un klangen
 Vuhin ikh volt tsu fus
 Keynmol nit dergangen.

The poem contrasts the fallibility of the poet's own attempt to reach the infinite, with the revelation which comes through a spiritual encounter. The cornstalk is also imbued with mythic quality in 'Erdishe himlen' (PV1, p.95), a vision of Creation employing the mystical Jewish concept of seven heavens,⁸ of which the third is a 'blondik zangefeld'. These two poems, together with the earlier 'Arum di fayern' establish the important image of the *zang*, with its interlinked connotations of life and poetry, which will develop further in 'Ode tsu der toyb' and later poetry.⁹

The treatment of the motif of the 'zang' and of many of the other images so far discussed pinpoints a fundamental perception of the universe in Sutzkever's poetry which bears a striking inner affinity to that of Rainer Maria Rilke. The two poets share a private mysticism, based on the immanent mystery of the object: in Rilke's case, this can be seen most clearly in the so-called *Dinggedichte*, where objects and figures take on for the poet a mysterious other identity of their own, which the poet is privileged to perceive, and which can express the inexpressible in his soul. Rilke himself described this phenomenon in a letter to Clara Rilke, dated 8 March 1907:

⁸. cf Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, first paperback edition (New York, 1961), p.54: 'The idea of the seven heavens through which the soul ascends to its original home, either after death or in a state of ecstasy while the body is still alive, is certainly very old.' Here, as in the motif of the fiery chariot of Elijah, Sutzkever uses images from the Jewish mystical tradition to develop his own private mysticism.

⁹. The cornstalk imagery is related to the image of the Tree of Life, containing the same qualities of rootedness under the earth, (imagery of the centre) and the striving towards heaven. Corn is an image of growth and regeneration in many cultures, for example the classical corn imagery connected with Ceres, and the cornstalk imagery of the American Indians. Sutzkever's particular use of the imagery links these traditional connotations with his own specific theme of poetic inspiration.

Das Anschauen ist eine so wunderbare Sache, von der wir so wenig wissen; wir sind mit ihm ganz nach außen gekehrt, aber gerade wenn wir's am meisten sind, scheinen in uns Dinge vor sich zu gehen, die auf das Unbeobachtetsein sehnsüchtig gewartet haben, und während sie sich, intakt und anonym, in uns vollziehen, ohne uns, - wächst in dem Gegenstand draußen ihre Bedeutung heran, ein überzeugender, starker, - ihr einzig möglicher Name, in dem wir das Geschehnis in unserem Innern selig und ehrerbietig erkennen, ohne selbst daran heranzureichen.¹⁰

The idea of the *name* in Rilke's statement shares the significance with which Sutzkever invests the *word* in his metapoetic poetry, as the bearer of a specific meaning, but also possessing its own autonomous reality.

One poem from 'Valdiks' which clearly illustrates Sutzkever's affinity with Rilke in this almost mystical perception of the object, is 'A tsvaygl karshn' (PV1, p.118). The stalk of cherries seems to be a living thing, containing the mysterious essence, the whole secret of life:

Kh'hob gebrakht far dir a tsvaygl karshn,
Tsaytik, tsapldik, vi mayn gedakht.
Her, vi s'otemt nokh.

The poem is an invitation to the *du* to enter the life of the cherries. The movement is cyclical: the *du* is invited to penetrate the secret of the cherries with her gaze,¹¹ ('ekber ayn dem naygerikn blik'), by doing which, she is enabled to *experience* the whole life-cycle of the cherries. Her perception of this produces in the cherry-stalk a reciprocal longing to enter into her:

Kuk es on - un fil, vi zoyber, zunik
S'beygt zikh dos farvaynte tsvaygl. Shpir
Zayn getsiter - din, bahartst un strunik,
Veykh un shtil vi otem oysgebrenter, -
Un zayn glust arayntsugeyn in dir.

¹⁰. Rainer Maria Rilke, Briefe aus den Jahren 1906-1907 (Leipzig, 1930), p.214.

¹¹. Unlike most of the poems in which a *du* is addressed, the poem does not seem to be an address to the self, but to another person, perhaps a woman.

The steps by which the *du* approaches the inner reality and beauty of this object, (which embodies the whole cycle of birth, death and regeneration), represent a process of intensification: contemplation ('kuk es on'), feeling, ('-un fil, vi zoyber, zunik'), and finally, complete comprehension ('derkenen'):

Itster iz shoyn dayns dos tsvaygl karshn:
Host derkent dem vunder fun zayn shtam.

The climax of the poem is the moment of absorption of the cherries, through which it is possible to know the taste of eternity:

Host derkent - atsind zayn sheynkayt yarshn!
Beyg tsu im di tseyner dayne nenter
Un farzukh fun eybikayt dem tam!

Although this poem does not explicitly centre on the theme of poetry, but rather on that of transcendental experience, the two themes are inextricably linked in Sutzkever's *ars poetica*, and all the vocabulary of his metapoetic poetry is here: the cycle of birth, death and regeneration, the images of piercing and entering ('ekber-ayn dem naygerikn blik'), the contrast of the depths beneath the earth (exemplified here by the 'tifenishn' of stanza four, in other poems by tree roots) and the soaring into the air ('gvureshaft aroystsutantsn oybn'), as in the imagery of the Tree of Life. The trembling of the cherry stalk is described in the fifth stanza as 'strunik', an adjective which is inseparable from the metapoetic symbol of the violin,¹² and finally, the way in which the *du* experiences eternity is by eating the cherries: this extremely physical imagery intensifies in the poems of the war years, where images of devouring and

¹². In 1937 Sutzkever was also working on the second version of his Siberian poem, in which the father's violin becomes a key image connected with the child's awakening poetic consciousness. (chapter 3).

burial are connected with the idea of regeneration and the eternal life of the poetic word.

Through this early poem can be seen the process by which certain images and concepts gradually take on metapoetic significance: this holds true not only for the above-mentioned images but for the motif of cherries also. Here the cherry-stalk is the focal point of the attempt to capture the essence; in a poem from 1950, the taste of a cherry becomes a Proustian trigger to summon into the poet's consciousness suppressed experiences of the ghetto years;¹³ carrying the echoes of these former contexts, the cherry then develops, in 'Ode tsu der toyb' and elsewhere, into one of the permanent images of poetry.

The affinity of this poem to Rilke's work is demonstrated by a comparison of 'A tsvaygl karshn' and Rilke's 'Die Rosenschale'.¹⁴ Like the cherry stalk, the bowl of roses seems to encapsulate all that human beings can know and feel, which Rilke, like Sutzkever, tries to approach and capture through the poetic word. Both poets use neologisms, and the abstract verbal noun to express this inexpressible experience:

[...] die volle Rosenschale,
die unvergeßlich ist und angefüllt
mit jenem Äußersten von Sein und Neigen,
Hinhalten, Niemals-Gebenkönnen, Dastehn
das unser sein mag: Äußerstes auch uns.

Lautloses Leben, Aufgehn ohne Ende,
Raum-brauchen ohne Raum von jenem Raum
zu nehmen, den die Dinge rings verringern,
Fast nicht Umrissen-sein wie Ausgespartes
und lauter Inneres, viel seltsam Zartes
und Sich-bescheinendes - bis an den Rand:
ist irgend etwas uns bekannt wie dies?

¹³. 'Di karsh fun dermonung' (PV2, p.132.)

¹⁴. Gesammelte Gedichte, p.308.

For both poets these objects exist *as themselves* but that selfhood contains within it the whole cycle of the natural world, and also all the emotions of the human being – the stanzas which evoke these ideas in the two poems show striking parallelism:

Payn fun oyfshprots, bliyekhts un bableter,
Vortslidiker shtrom durkh teg un nekht;
Freyd fun zun in frilingdikn veter
Un dos glik baym zen a peyre hengen
In geblits un shturemdik gefekht.

S'iz faran in dem i mut, i gloybn,
Zun-farlibtkayt, impet un geyog
Gvureshaft aroystsutantsn oybn,
Fun di tifenishn, un zikh brengen
Tsu der luft, tsum regn un tsum tog.
(Sutzkever)

Und sind nicht alle so, nur sich enthaltend,
wenn Sich-enthalten heißt: die Welt da draußen
und Wind und Regen und Geduld des Frühlings
und Schuld und Unruh und vermummtes Schicksal
und Dunkelheit der abendlichen Erde
bis auf der Wolken Wandel, Flucht und Anflug,
bis auf den vagen Einfluß ferner Sterne
in eine Hand voll Innres zu verwandeln.

Nun liegt es sorglos in den offenen Rosen.
(Rilke)

This affinity with Rilke in perception and the use of imagery remains throughout Sutzkever's creation. There is one significant difference between these poems which could be pursued throughout: whereas, for example, in Rilke's 'Die Rosenschale', the bowl of roses stands, inviolable and separate from the human being, and the poet's perception of the essential secret is gained by pure contemplation ('Und die Bewegung in den Rosen, sieh' [...] 'Sieh jene weiße[...]'). in Sutzkever's poem the invitation is clear:

Beyg tsu im di tseyner dayne nenter
Un farzukh fun eybikayt dem tam!

For Sutzkever it is not through contemplation alone, but through absorption into the self, that the taste of eternity can be achieved.

The remaining sections of the collection 'Valdiks' show an ever deepening penetration into an inner world of symbols, in the search for understanding of the mysterious process of poetic creation. The three sections 'Farmirmlter otem', 'Fun onheyb tsu onheyb' and 'Di tsveyte heym' must be considered as poem-cycles, of which the first is largely metapoetic in character, the second raises metaphysical questions, and the third reflects both aspects. In 'Farmirmlter otem' the imagery of trees, corn, grass and other growing things is replaced by a new net of images, which was, however, heralded in the concept of the living, changing mountains of 'Oyf a barg' - namely the *apparently* inanimate world of stones and minerals, which in reality has its own inner vitality. In 'Eydlshtheyner' (PV1, p.141) the poet invests each jewel with its own personality or soul, and 'Di mirmlne shtot' (PV1, p.148) is a dream Utopia, its marble representing eternity. The inspiration which the poet derives from minerals and jewels seems to go back to the glittering ice of his Siberian childhood - indeed the first three poems of the cycle (PV1, pp.138-140) form a thematic unit which explores the theme of childhood and the birth of poetic inspiration.

In the first of these, the poet evokes an experience from his childhood: the *ikh* is asked to choose a boon, in the manner of the good child in the fairy tale.¹⁵ In the second stanza Sutzkever suggests that his poetic inspiration began during his

¹⁵. The fairytale granting of a wish is also the starting point for 'Ode tsu der toyb' (chapter 9).

Siberian childhood, an assertion later confirmed in the poet's conversation with Shmerke Katsberginski:¹⁶

Es hot dentsmol in mirml un diment
 Zikh mayn ershter baginen geklort -
 Un di zun iz gevezn mayn vort,
 Vos hot farbik di vaytn basiment.

The three inspirations of the childhood self are marble, diamond, and the sun; the first suggests the hard whiteness of the Siberian snow, and the latter two motifs recur as central images in 'Sibir'. The image of the sun is particularly interesting, for from this point on the sun and particularly sunset occur in many of Sutzkever's metapoetic poems, but this is the only occasion on which he explicitly equates the sun with the poetic word; as is so often the case, once the meaning of an image has been established, it then passes into his permanent net of images.

The child wishes 'Az dos dozike likht fun der velt/ Zol geveltikn in-mir mes-lesik', that the sun, his poetic word, should be permanently within him; the fulfilment of the wish is described in terms of the sun entering 'mayn blut un gedank'- a further example of Sutzkever's commanding nature and absorbing it into himself. The concept of the 'farmirmlter otem' of the cycle's title is created in the last two lines of the poem:

Kh'hob gemurmlt: a dank dir, a dank-
 Un mayn murml gevorn iz mirml!

Despite the rather precious word-play, the image does convey the idea of the eternity of the poet's word, achieved through his poetic inspiration, the sun, which is flowing through him.

The sun is also the central image of the third poem 'Hinter der zun', another surrealist fantasy which answers the question

¹⁶. This conversation is discussed in chapter 3.

'Hinter der zun ver ken greykhn?' with a vision which, as in the first of the three poems, confronts the present day *ikh* with himself as a child: the *ikh* sees a young boy rolling a wooden hoop ever onward and upward until he cuts through the heart of the sun:

Tseshnikert
 Dos harts fun der zun mit zayn reyf un farshikert
 Gekayklt im vayter,
 Gekayklt alts vayter.

The adjective 'farshikert' represents a recurring idea in Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry, the Dionysian element in poetic creation. In the first poem of 'Ode tsu der toyb', for example, the boy is 'begilufn' (intoxicated) by the dove's granting his wish, and in the second poem, the moment of creation of a poetic line is described as the intoxication of the fingers which wrote it: 'Ver hot farshikert di finger, zey zoln bashafn a shure [...]?'. In a late poem, the *ikh* exclaims: 'Un shiker bin *ikh* fun der zeyung, biz meshuge shiker' (Ts-b, p.167).

A further interesting element is the upward movement of the poem 'Hinter der zun': the boy rolls his hoop 'durkh gesl un gas, barg aroyf', and then mounts up to the sun and beyond, in an eternal movement. There is a striking similarity here to the movement outward and upward of the poem 'Sibir', which will be seen to symbolise the awakening and maturing poetic consciousness of the child. These two aspects, and the significance of the sun in the first poem, suggest that this poem too is a vision of poetic inspiration. A further element links this poem with the second poem of these three, that is, the idea that the child in his innocence is enabled to achieve the impossible. The second of the three poems, 'A kind - a poet', has echoes of Wordsworth's 'clouds of glory' in its idea of the child 'Oysgebrit fun himls

kerner', who through his perfect innocence is able to command the heavens and the earth, and who, in Sutzkever's striking hyperbole, is thus worshipped by God himself:

Er iz kindshaft. Un derfar
Ruft im zayn bashafer: har.

The poem is also deliberately ambiguous, for the balance in the title and the depiction of the 'kleynem zinger' allow the interpretation both that the innocent child is a poet, and that the poet is like an innocent child. In the final lines of the poem, Sutzkever sadly excludes the ordinary adult mortal from the mystery:

Nor kedey dem kleynem zinger
Tsu derzen un tsu derhern -
Darf men finklen vi a shtern.

The three poems express the holiness of childhood, linking it with revelation and poetic inspiration, ideas which are the basis of 'Sibir'.

As these three poems indicate, in the cycle 'Farmirmler Otem', the external world is increasingly used to create a language of symbols. The main theme of the cycle is the nature of the poetic act, and the influence of living nature on the poet gives way to imagery of hard minerals on which the poet imprints his mark. This idea was seen in 'Vayter fun di daled ames', and it is expanded to examine the poetic process more deeply.

In 'Cyprian Norwid', one metaphor of poetic creation is that of creation in marble ('oysknetn a shtot aza fun vaysn feldznshteyn'), and this marble image is developed in the third section of 'Fir matones' (PV1, p.143).¹⁷ The sculptor creates a

¹⁷. This poem was originally published as 'Finf matones', with an extra, poetically much weaker section, in the first edition of Valdiks. The title derives from Y.L. Perets's 'Dray matones', a powerful story affirming the courage and faith of the Jewish people. Sutzkever alludes to Perets's story in 'Di lererin Mire' (PV1, p.307).

marble statue. The image emphasises the tremendous energy and power of the creative process; first, the power of the creator, but also the almost terrifying force of the work of art itself, which, once created, takes on independent life. At first the artist is the master of the raw material:

In mirml knetstu ayn dayn otem,
 Biz dayn skulptur vert fleysh un viln,
 Un du bafelst bloyz eyn gebot im:
 Er zol dayn blankn fayer shtiln.

These lines link several images in an unexpected combination. As in 'Cyprian Norwid', Sutzkever uses the verb 'knetn', more normally connected with clay, for shaping marble: the hardness of marble suggests the resistance of the poetic word to its creator, while the idea of kneading it intensifies the impression of the sculptor's power, as does the word 'bafelst' in the third line. The concept of the creator with his breath transforming the inert material into 'fleysh un viln' links the artistic process with the Creator's work in Genesis. The artist, Pygmalion-like, sees his living work of art as the beloved who will assuage the fire burning in him. The paradox, however, emerges in the second stanza. The created work opens new horizons to the artist, so that he perceives his own insignificance:

Nor vos dayn velt vert greser, klerer, -
 Alts verstu eyner, eynaleyner.

and the perceptions gleaned through the work of art are potentially destructive of the artist:

A vayser yam-feldz iz dayn lerer,
 Es zidt dayn blut oyf kalte shteyner.

This powerful image of the very heat of the artist's passion leading to his shrivelling up, a victim of the coldness of his own marble creation, leads into the warning of the final stanza:

Tsoym-ayn di gvure fun dayn shafn,
 Vos tut dayn mirml-ritem knetn,
 Zi zol in hilkhikn gelafn
 Ir shtoltsn kinstler nit tsetretn.

The many layered imagery of this poem, calling up echoes not only of the Pygmalion myth but also of the Golem which threatens to destroy its creator, reveals development in Sutzkever's thinking about the process of creation since the confidence of 'Bashafung' and 'Vayter fun di daled ames'.

In the fourth poem of 'Fir matones' - which could be seen as a reply to the dangers of the third poem - the poet's new, strangely paradoxical relationship to the external world of nature emerges. In the first stanza nature has become internalised, the forest is now a symbol of poetry, through which life grows:

In shtiln vald fun griner lirik
 Geyt oyf der boym fun lebn.

This is the first time the Tree of Life is specifically mentioned; the motif recurs in the section 'Epilog tsu Valdiks', and in the collection 'In fayer-vogn', where images from Jewish mythology acquire great significance. It is true, however, that all Sutzkever's tree imagery has affinities with the tradition of the Tree of Life.

Although the Tree of Life grows in the 'vald fun griner lirik', the dangers inherent in poetic creation are again emphasised in lines which develop out of the imagery of stampeding horses from the previous poem:

Fargangener gedank vert shpirik
 Un rayst funand getsoym un geder.

In the face of the dangers of the symbolic forest of poetry, external nature acquires a new significance:

Der gey tsu veltisher ideye
 Iz durkh dem geyers blut un ttern.

Un di natur iz a kameye
 Vos hit dos lebn fun nit vern.

Nature now has a symbolic role as an amulet for the *ikh*;
 this is expanded in the final stanza:

Nito keyn fremdkeyt. Alts iz ikhish,
 Kol-zman di letste verter hipn,-
 Un di neshome, yung un stikhish
 Balebt dem toyt mit ire lipn.

Through the word the poet reigns over nature, drawing every-
 thing into the service of the self. These ideas are, however,
 paradoxical: the independent life of the poet's created word
 gives it potentially destructive power; nature is the protective
 amulet against that power. At the same time, it is the word which
 brings nature under the sway of the self: such paradoxes in the
 relationship between the word, the self and the external world
 continue to be re-examined throughout Sutzkever's work.

The concept 'ikhish' conveys the total self-centredness of
 this conception of the universe; the preeminence of the self is
 dependent on the existence of the word. Furthermore the soul of
 the poet has power over death. In this poem these beliefs are
 expressed on the aesthetic plane: during the ghetto years
 Sutzkever was to reaffirm them with a literalness which gives his
 ghetto poetry a particular force. The foundation for his ever
 deepening belief in the power of the poetic word is laid in this
 poem.

The last poem to be considered in the section 'Farmirmlter
 Otem' is 'Himen tsu feldzn' (PV1, p.146), written in 1938, the
 same year as 'Oyf a barg' in the section 'Valdiks'. Both poems
 take the mountain as the central symbol: in 'Oyf a barg', as we
 have seen, the solution to the problem of eternity and transience
 is seen in the mountains, which fuse the two principles, and the
 poet gains his identity through kinship to them. In 'Oyf a barg'

the tone of doubt and questioning is conveyed by the changing rhythms of the poem: smooth alternately rhyming four-line stanzas of trochaic pentameter alternating with sections of jagged trimeter with irregular rhyme in which the poet explores his existential questions. The totally different tone of the 'Himen tsu feldzn' is conveyed by its monumental rhythm: the flowing, dactylic metre gives a feeling of calm assurance to the poet's utterances. Here doubt is replaced by positive belief. The symbolic significance of the mountains as the embodiment of a divine principle is signalled by the 'himen' of the title; furthermore, by using here the general concept of 'feldzn' he gives the theme of the poem a wider, more philosophical relevance than the subjective, episodic character of the title 'Oyf a barg'. For these reasons Sutzkever's placing of the poem in the later section is entirely consonant with its theme, and illustrates the importance which the poet attaches to the arrangement of his poems in cycles which illustrate particular aspects and stages of his thought. This poem illuminates most clearly the advance in the symbolic function of nature which is taking place. In 'Oyf a barg' nature is essentially atmospheric, giving rise to various emotions in the *ikh*, and a symbolic significance does not emerge until the end of the poem, whereas here the full symbolism of the mountains is seen from the beginning of the poem. The increasing confidence of the poet in his own vocation is evident right from the first line of the poem where the *ikh* asserts with self-assurance: 'Ikh kleter tsu ayere heykhn, o, mirmlne feldzn'; throughout the poem his confidence that he is justified in aspiring to the divine heights which the mountains represent hardly wavers. Even when he hesitates - 'Vos iz mayn tsil do? - ikh shem zikh tsu zogn, gigantn' - it is only for a moment, before he goes on confidently

to assert that he has the same goal as the mountains had when they first pierced the clouds:

Ikh vil bloyz vi ir mit di hent
 Durkh di volkns a patsh ton
 Un tsvogn mayn erdishn kop in dem kosmishn fayer.

The fact that the mountains reach from earth to heaven gives them the same symbolic function as the tree whose roots dig deep into the earth and whose top reaches towards the sky. They are the principle of eternity:

Vayl heldish hot ir vidershpenikt der erdisher grokeyt,
 Vayl makhtik hot ir dort bahersht dem bahersher - dem loyt,
 Vayl s'lid fun der eybikeyt gaystert oyf ayere shpitsn.

The colour grey always has a negative resonance in Sutzkever's poetry,¹⁸ and here it represents the antithesis of the poetic, that is, of eternity, and is defeated by the mountains which embody that principle: 'dos lid fun der eybikeyt' is an evocation of the poetic word. For this reason the mountains symbolise what the poet aspires to be:

Atsind zent ir feldziker emes un shtoltser simbol,-
 Ikh horkh, vi es klapt ayer harts unter mirmlne hoytn.

As we shall see, the heart of the land beating underneath its rocky surface is a central image of the early poetry written in Israel. It is also part of the net of imagery which conveys the idea of the buried reality beneath the concealing exterior, a seminal idea in all Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry.

With 'Himen tsu feldzn' Sutzkever has freed the poetic *ikh* from the confines of external reality; comparing this poem with the climbing motif in 'Vayter fun di daled ames', one sees that despite the symbolism of the final lines of the earlier poem, ('Kh'hob arayngelozn haynt mayn viln/ In granit...'), its point

¹⁸. For example in 'Di groe tsayt' (PV1, p.231), 'Gro' (PV2, p.305), and 'Dos groe fayer' (PV2, p.213).

of departure is a *real* activity in a natural landscape, whereas here the climb and the mountains are symbolic, and nature has come fully into the service of the poet's exploration of his inner consciousness, which continues in the next two sections 'Fun onheyb tsu onheyb' and 'Di tsveyte heym.'

The striking aspect of the short cycle 'Fun onheyb tsu onheyb' is the turning to metaphysical questions. The four lines which stand as a motto for the cycle give a kind of philosophical prescription for the poetic life:

Dayn veg iz fun onheyb tsu onheyb
 Vayl sof iz mit sofek bashpint,-
 Iz hekher dayn gleybike fon heyb
 Un leb vi an odler in vint.

These lines, with their rather precious word-play and forced rhyme, are not among Sutzkever's great poetry, but it is noteworthy that the eagle occurs here for the first time as an image of courage and freedom. Along with the dove, the sparrowhawk and mythical birds such as the 'fayerfeygl', the eagle often recurs, sometimes fused with other significant images, in Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry.

The first three poems of the cycle focus on the question 'What is man?'. As a vehicle for this metaphysical search, Sutzkever uses mythical and biblical material: the figure of Adam, and a Mesopotamian creation myth. In the two Adam poems, 'Dos lid fun eybik ershtn' (PV1, p.154), and 'Odem zingt' (PV1, p.155), the *ikh* imagines himself as the first man. In the first of the two poems the self-centredness which has become evident in the changing relationship to nature emerges in the idea of the first man as the central pivot of the universe:

Es hobn zikh gedarft farbindn
 Di zun mit der levones ayz,

Kedey mayn lebn zol zikh tsindn,
Vi in der fri dem himls krayz.

The fusion of sun and ice prefigures the two elements which are a dominant thread in Sutzkever's poetry: the ice of Siberia and the fiery heat of Israel. Just as together ice and fire form the first man, so Siberia and Israel will be seen to be the formative inspiration of the mature poet. The *ikh*, in his imagined identity of Adam, is the determinant of all nature's moods:

Mayn nit-zayn volt di erd badoyert:
Es voltn krayter nit gekraytert
Es voltn taykhn nit getaykht,

but most important,

Dos vort volt nit in blut gehoyert,
Es volt zikh fun dem mentsh dervaytert,
Vi a vintl shtil un laykht.

The central idea of the poem therefore is that man's special role is to be the abode of the word which pre-exists even the first man: through the figure of Adam, Sutzkever expresses this seminal idea of the word which develops strongly in his later poetry.

'Odem zingt' is an address to the Creator, where the speaker tries to understand his relationship to God, the Fall, and God's punishment of him - God however, seems mute,¹⁹ and there is no answer to Adam's questioning. The third poem, 'Mentsh', (PV1, p.158), takes a sentence from an Old Babylonian Epic as its motto: 'In Umuza, dem farbund fun himl un erd,/ veln mir shekhtn di tsvey geter Lamga,/ fun zeyer blut veln mir bashafn dem

19. The silence of God at various crucial points in man's relationship with Him - for example in the *Akeyde*, and in the lives of Joseph and of Job - is a seminal theme of André Neher's investigation of Biblical silence (Neher, *Exile*, pp.23-33). Sutzkever returns to this problem in the war years, in poems such as 'Glust zikh mir tsu ton a tfile' (PV1, p.253), 'Nokhn toyt' (PV1, p.260), and 'Unter dayne vayse shtern' (PV1, p.285).

mentsh',²⁰ and the poem examines questions about the nature and destiny of mankind:

Vos iz mentsh, bloyz gedank oder khoymmer?
 Velkhn breg
 Tsu derkletern hoft er?
 Un tsi iz er an eybik bashtrofter,
 Az der goyrl zol zayn zayn fartsoymer?

The questions remain unanswered, until suddenly 'a shtim' gives a reply which shows the human being as a creature of ambiguities and paradoxes:

S'iz der mentsh a tseshterer
 Fun zayn oysleyzer un zayn geberer,
 Un mit blut iz farshribn zayn kleter,
 Un zayn harts iz a breniker dorn,
 Vayl der mentsh iz geborn
 Oys dem blut fun gekoylete geter.

Man is fated always to destroy his own divine potential, because it was through the destruction of the divine that he was created.

The question of evil is also considered in two poems of 'Fun onheyb tsu onheyb', which were first published together in 1939, in the journal In zikh.²¹ Both poems address the Creator of the universe. In the first, 'Fun vegn a royz' (PV1, p.160), the mighty angel begs God to allow him to destroy the wicked earth and all its inhabitants. The Creator - represented in the poem by 'a shtim'- agrees with the angel's condemnation of the earth ('Oykh ikh vil farlendn dos erdishe hoyz'), but demands that the angel wait:

²⁰. This seems to be a version of the myth of Atrahasis, where man is created to relieve the Gods of some of their irksome tasks; the blood of a slaughtered God is mixed with clay: 'Geshtu-e, a god who had intelligence, They slaughtered in their assembly. Nintu mixed clay With his flesh and blood'.
 Stephanie Dalley, Myths from Mesopotamia (Oxford, 1991), p.15.

²¹. In zikh, 10, nos. 1-5 (December 1939), 87.

Nor vart, ikh hob nekhtn farzeyt dort a royz -
Zi muz nokh aroysbliyen friyer.

The poem asserts the supremacy of beauty over evil, and closely linked to this idea is the theme of the companion poem, 'Dos fareybikte ponem' (PV1, p.163). The speaker in this poem is the poetic *ikh*, who addresses God as 'Foter, geboyrer'. The poem relates how the *ikh*, who feels himself still to be in the state of grace before the Fall, ('S'gortnt nokh alts oyf mayn ponem dayn kdushe'), is pursued by the Primal Serpent ('nakhsh kad-moyni'), who demands that he relinquish his face:

Shorkhik bafelt er:
Gib mir dayn ponem tsurik, du gan-eyndik yingl!

The poet's solution is to hide his face 'in vort, vi a dorn in flamen', and the poem has a surprising ending:

Itst bin ikh on im -
Vet mikh der kumer nokh kenen farsamen?

The theme has apparently been suggested to the poet by the quotation from the eighteenth-century Hassidic teacher Reb Nakhman Bratslaver, which Sutzkever has set as a motto to the poem: 'Yeder mentsh hot zayn gan-eydn oysgemoln oyf zayn ponem'. This quotation, like all Reb Nakhman's tales and sayings, is ambiguous and multi-layered, and Sutzkever's interpretation of it here is just as complex. He suggests that the holiness which is expressed on his face is the *original* state of man: in the line 'S'gortnt nokh alts oyf mayn ponem dayn kdushe' (my italics), the verb suggests the state of the Garden of Eden, as does the 'nokh alts'. By contrast, however, the Serpent's demand 'Gib mir dayn ponem tsurik[...]' (my italics) implies that the face of the youth had been his property before, implying a state of original sin as opposed to original innocence. With the image of the final stanza Sutzkever suggests that the poet hides his face in the

word, so that he is, to the outside world, faceless: his word contains, hides and protects his true self, so that he cannot be poisoned. Thus the word has power over evil, and, according to the title of the poem, confers eternity on the poet.

The image of 'a dorn in flamen' is interesting. The 'face' of the poet is the thorn, which is within the flames, that is, the word; the metaphor on one plane seems inapposite, in that a thorn would be destroyed by flames, but the image suggests also the burning bush which God showed Moses; the bush burned but was not consumed, and the word of truth spoke out of the protective fire (Exodus 3). Here for the first time, the fire-motif, until now a Romantic image of poetry, gains an ethical dimension - fire as an image of truth, protection and purification - which is of central importance in the seminal poem 'Erev mayn farbrenung', and from then on continues to fuse the ideas of poetic inspiration and purification throughout Sutzkever's *oeuvre*.

The two poems 'Fun vegn a royz' and 'Dos fareybikte ponem' supplement each other; together they assert that perfect beauty and the poetic word have precedence and hold sway over all forms of evil. This is the beginning of the deepening of the concept of beauty to encompass the ethical and metaphysical dimension which it increasingly gains from the ghetto period onward.

The question of Sutzkever's mysticism was raised in the introduction to this study, and the way in which Sutzkever uses themes from Jewish religion and mysticism in these and other metaphysical poems in the short cycle 'Fun onheyb tsu onheyb' corroborates my assertion that Sutzkever's is essentially a private, immanent, rather than a transcendental mysticism. In these poems, Sutzkever remodels biblical stories for his own poetic purposes: it is noteworthy that in his version of the Fall, the

poet-*ikh* is the potential victim of the Serpent, that he uses a pagan variation of the Creation myth (in 'Mentsh'), that in 'Dos lid fun eybik ershtn' he turns the six Days of Creation on their head, making the existence of rivers and plants dependent on the prior existence of Adam, who is the poet-*ikh*. Most important of all, perhaps, in 'Dos fareybikte ponem', though addressing God as 'Foter, geboyrer', he does not ask for God's help in vanquishing the serpent, but achieves this himself, through his word, and the addressee is purely a passive confidant. The poet-figure stands in the active centre, and through the religious and mythical imagery he externalises his experience. Though often addressed to a transcendental power, his poems are expressions of a private vision. Both in 'Blonder baginen' and 'Valdiks', the spirit of the woods, or 'geshtalt on a nomen' (as in 'Geshrey'), the sister/muse of 'Erd un aker', or the pantheistic idea of the 'gebiter' from the opening poem of 'Valdiks' ('Alts iz verdik far mayn oygs gevogl') have the same degree of reality as the 'Foter, geboyrer' of 'Dos fareybikte ponem', and all are expressions of Sutzkever's awareness of the immanent mystery in all things.

In the section 'Di tsveyte heym', the themes become ever more abstract, and the imagery withdraws further into the inner world of the poet's fantasy. Most of the poems of this section reduce the sphere of action to the *ikh* himself. It is noticeable that the most prevalent imagery is connected with his body: the poem 'Der funk fun lid un lebn' (PV1 p.170) begins with the image 'Mayn guf iz an opgebrent hoyz'. Several poems take place, in fact, inside the head of the *ikh*: in 'Es klapn di shleyfn' (PV1 p.166), two riders, one black, one white, gallop 'durkh sharbn un kop' in a breathless race with an uncertain outcome.. In

'Farkhasmete viyes' (PV1, p.169) the poet speaks of the 'ikhikn shoyresh'²² behind closed eyelids, which can lead the way to the 'fremd-umbavustzayn'. This and the poem 'Unterbavustzayn' (PV1, p.168), and indeed many of the poems of this section, show an affinity with Jungian ideas of the power of the unconscious;²³ for Sutzkever the unconscious leads to the essence of the self and of poetry. 'Unterbavustzayn' examines the chaotic interweaving of paradoxical opposites in the poet's brain - of light and darkness, heights and depths, the temporal and the eternal, feelings, colours, and magic:

In mayn moyekh flemlt-oyf a morgediker nekhtn.
 Vayte vorn vern vilder vunder,
 Vern bilder, klangen, gufn, zuniker bashaf.
 Tsayt vert lebn. Finsternish nemt flekhtn
 Ploytn likht, vi milkhvegn in kaltn firmament.

As in the Adam poems and 'Dos fareybikte ponem', the imagery is inspired by the Creation myth, but here the poet, rather than taking the role of God's creature, is the one who *causes* the creative process, summoning new worlds out of the *toyevoye* in his subconscious:

Kh'vil, ikh vil, mayn viln vil²⁴
 Oyfpraln di freyd-atomen,
 Vu es bliyen gantse veltn

22. The neologisms 'ikhish', 'ikhik' and 'maynik', already seen in 'Alts iz verdik far mayn oygs gevogl' (PV1, p.93), and the fourth poem of 'Fir matones', (PV1, p.143), attempt to go beyond the normal concepts of *ikh* and *mayn* to the quintessence of that which pertains to the self, the absolute centre of the *ikh*. Another Jewish poet who attempted to approach these inexpressible ideas through neologisms was Paul Celan with his untranslatable verb 'ichen'. Paul Celan, Poems. A Bilingual Edition, trans. by Michael Hamburger (Manchester, 1980), p.206.

23. Sutzkever seems to use the terms 'Umbavustzayn' and 'Unterbavustzayn' interchangeably; his ideas seem to have a greater affinity with Jung than with Freud.

24. The natural stress of this line - 'kh'vil, ikh vil, mayn viln vil' (my italics) - expresses the meaning with particular force: the climactic building up to the word 'viln' conveys the mounting intensity of the creative process.

Fun yung-breyshesdikn yo,
 Fun shpet-breyshesdikn neyn.

The confident hope at the end of the poem is that the *ikh* will reach the quintessence of thought. This enlightenment is seen as a progression:

Nokh dray trit -
 Un kh'vel farshteyn,
 Vos faran un vos nito.
 Nokh tsvey trit -
 Un kh'vel barirn
 Di getseltn
 Fun mayn benkshaft.
 Nokh eyn trot -
 Un kh'vel dershpirn
 S'layb fun naketn gedank.

The three stages of achievement represent a process of intensification. First the *ikh* is able to *perceive* objects in the external realm, and differentiate between the real and the non-existent. Then he can *touch* the 'getseltn' or habitation of his yearning. (He cannot yet conceive of contact with the 'benkshaft' itself- this will come later in Sutzkever's development). Finally, he is able to *feel* naked or pure thought. Since the first step had been to differentiate between the real and the unreal, it follows that what he perceives in the second and third phases - the 'benkshaft' and the 'gedank'- are the quintessence of the real. As the objects of his desire become more abstract, the verbs become more intense ('barirn', 'dershpirn',) and the final image fuses the essentially corporeal ('layb') with the totally abstract ('gedank'). Imagery which unites the abstract and the physical becomes more and more frequent, characterising Sutzkever's belief in the oneness of the corporeal and the spiritual realms of experience. It should be noted too that for Sutzkever the innermost realm of the poet's experience is not emotion but pure thought: this signifies a departure from the early phase which contained strong Romantic elements: the element

of 'seykhl' which reaches its zenith in 'Ode tsu der toyb' has become the underlying source of his poetry.

In 'Eynmoliker' (PV1, p.176), the *ikh* is the origin and centre of the universe. Suspended between heaven and earth, 'a kosmische vog', he is drawn to both:

Eyn hant - aropgetift tsu dem arkhaishn,
 Khayishn,
 Tsveyte - aroyfgeheykht tsu a nit erdishn tog,-
 Beyde farlokn mikh, lyaremen,
 Kh'veys nit tsu vemen zikh friyer tsu gebn a trog!

The poet's 'blut' (the physical) is pulling him down to the 'sherblekh fun velt', and his 'gedank' (the highest realm of poetic experience), pulls him towards the heavens. Thus the *ikh* becomes an image of the Tree of Life, his inner struggle a paradigm of Jung's process of individuation. In this conflict between the instinctual self and the spiritual self can be heard an echo of the question which inspired the poem 'Mentsh' in the previous cycle: 'Vos iz mentsh, bloyz gedank oder khoymmer?'

Both poems were written in 1938, but the idea of progress inward can be seen in Sutzkever's placing of them: 'Mentsh' examines the question from the perspective of mankind in general, whereas in 'Eynmoliker' it is focussed on the *ikh*; this makes of the former poem a speculative philosophical enquiry, and of the latter an intense inner questioning. The dilemma is not resolved here either, for the ambiguous final line - 'Ober ikh ken zikh oyf blut un gedank nit derbaremen' - suggests that the *ikh* does not follow the dictates of body or intellect, and that there may be some other dimension in the human being.

The same difference in perspective between 'Mentsh' and 'Eynmoliker' can also be perceived in the two poems 'Di tsveyte heym' (PV1, p.173) and 'Vayn' (PV1, p.177). Both poems pursue the idea of the human being achieving identity with his essential

self. The former poem, like 'Mentsh', speaks of 'a mentsh' in the third person, while 'Vayn' like 'Eynmoliker' employs the more intense *ikh*. Both poems pursue the absolute through metamorphosis, and in the expression of these abstract ideas, certain images become fixed in the metapoetic context in which they will remain throughout Sutzkever's work. 'Di tsveyte heym' is the story of a journey, in which the 'mentsh' cuts free from his home; he takes with him only a 'royte, brenendike royz',²⁵ and is searching for his childhood. His prayer, expressed 'tsu rundike arumen', is that his external husk be stripped away, to reveal the inner truth. This is expressed in two significant images:

'Nemt tsu fun mir ayede gob -
Ikh darf zi nit, - un shindt arop
Mayn sholekhts dem nit klorn,
Vos ruft zikh mentsh. Zol zayn, ikh bin
A kaykldike blat, a bin
Mit honik in zikorn.'

The image of stripping off the husk called 'mentsh' contains the seminal idea of the reality buried under the concealing exterior: allusion has already been made to this in the context of the 'Himen tsu feldzn' where the heart of the mountains is beating under 'mirmlne hoytn'. All the imagery of burial, devouring, and metamorphosis circles round this idea.

The alien covering of the *ikh* signifies the way in which a human being is seen by the world, in terms of his abilities and attributes ('ayede gob'). In evoking the emergence of the true self, Sutzkever uses an image of freedom, the 'kaykldike blat', but also the bee, which as early as 1935 denoted poetry:

²⁵. This must be seen as an image of poetry because of its fusion of fire, with its metapoetic connotations, and the rose, at this time a symbol of beauty (as in the poem 'Fun vegn a royz'). Later the rose is also an image signifying Sutzkever's mother, and her death at the hands of the Nazis, and retains this double layer of meaning throughout his work.

Ot bin ikh dokh, an oyfgebliter in mayn gantser greys,
Farshotkhn mit gezangen vi mit fayerdike binen (PVI,
p.27).

Out of this simile the bee emerges as a recurrent metapoetic image, developing many independent characteristics. Here the bee's memory of honey seems to suggest the poet's ineradicable consciousness of the primal state to which he aspires to return.

The goal of the journey inward is achieved in the final stanza, when the prayer of the *ikh* is granted, and he is transformed into 'lipn vi di shtern reyn,/on benkshaft, on fardrosn.' Lips, as in the earlier 'Erd un aker', are often invested with a particular poetic resonance in Sutzkever's work. It is clear therefore that the metamorphosis of the husk which is the external appearance of the human being into 'lipn' is an image of the emergence of the poetic self; furthermore, the lips are beyond normal human frailties: the purity of the stars signify this state, as does 'on benkshaft, on fardrosn': the concept of 'benkshaft' or yearning is constant in Sutzkever's poetry, (indeed perhaps it is the underlying impulse in all lyrical poetry), and the transcending of it represents the achievement of the pure state of being, which is evoked in the climax of the poem:

Un vi muzik hot er tsurik
In breyshes zikh tsegosn.

The poem then is an inner journey from external reality, symbolised by the 'heym' of the first line, representing the banal, everyday existence, and by the outer appearance of the human being, into the essence, symbolised by the 'lipn', by the motif of music, and by the concept of the moment of creation, or 'breyshes' which is 'Di tsveyte heym' (my italics).

The poem 'Vayn' evokes the same desire to return to the origins, and uses the same idea of pouring to achieve this.

Transformed into wine, the *ikh* will be able to pour into the 'shpalt fun feldz'. Essential truth lies buried under the surface of the mountains, and is accessible through cracks in the rock. Here the *ikh* as wine flowing into the realm beneath the rock has the same force as the flowing back into 'breyshe' of 'Di tsveyte heym.' The strange ending of this poem takes the idea even further:

Un emets trinkt mikh bizn dek
 Un shvebt avek
 Alts hekher.

The mysterious 'emets' who drinks the wine is undoubtedly some kind of spirit since it lives in the realm of truth: the *ikh* turned into wine, absorbed by this supernatural being, increases the spirit's power, enabling it to soar 'alts hekher': thus the *ikh* becomes spirit.

The climax of this aesthetic self-expression is seen in the cycle 'Ekstazn' (PV1, pp.183-197) which occupies the important position at the end of 'Valdiks'. This cycle of twenty-eight short poems is Sutzkever's most ambitious attempt yet to penetrate the nature of the word and the poetic impulse. The title is interesting: the poems are apparently ecstatic outpourings, but in reality, like all Sutzkever's poetry, are carefully honed and structured. It is certainly not without significance that Sutzkever, in one of his rare prose writings on the nature of poetry, takes the seventh poem of this cycle as a paradigm to illustrate certain essential aspects of his poetic vision²⁶.

The poems take the form of an address to a 'du' which at times seems to be the night (the first poem refers to 'dayn

²⁶. 'Togbukh-notitsn', Di goldene keyt, 42 (1962), 164-167.

levones milkh'), an earth spirit, or the muse, and sometimes is the self. The *ikh*, who has mastery over all the elements of the universe, allows himself to be stripped of all these, like the *ikh* in 'Di tsveyte heym', giving to the muse the spring, the sun, day and night, keeping only 'dos vintike gefleml fun gefil'; he also relinquishes his poetry to the muse:

Atsind nem tsu mayn vort un mayn metafer,
Un vu du vest bafeln - vel ikh geyn.

Like 'Di tsveyte heym', therefore, this cycle is a journey inward, to find the essence of poetry. During this search a cascade of images emerges. Some which are already part of Sutzkever's poetic vocabulary are invested here with the symbolic colouring which places them among the permanent metapoetic images; other new images are introduced which will later gain metapoetic significance. In the fourth poem, for example, the muse appears 'mit oysze fun a yungn regn-boygn', a linking of the rainbow with poetic inspiration which prepares the way for the symbolic use of the term, and for the expressive neologism 'regnbogyk' which often occurs in Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry from now on. In the ninth poem, addressing the 'du', the poet demands: 'Kuk aroys fun kalte, vayse perl.' The pearl, often in the sea - as in the 'perl in yamike shleser' of 'Ode tsu der toyb' or in the image of the sunken skull which is 'an akhsanye far perl' in 'Beakhris hayomim' (TsP, p.113) -, is later a frequent image of the poetic word. In the same poem he asks of the muse:

Layter dem zikorn fun fargangikayt
Mit dayn zaynikayt un mit dayn zangikayt.

The symbolic colouring which the concept of the 'zang' already possesses, enables the poet to employ the neologism 'zangikayt' to describe the essence of poetry.

In the twenty-sixth poem the nature of the poet is investigated through an image which conveys an idea fundamental to Sutzkever's depiction of the poetic process, namely, the poet as the vehicle for the poetic word, which exists within him, waiting to emerge. The 'du', or muse, is the brush, and the poet is the palette, 'balodn/ Mit lebike farbn', which are described as 'di vos viln bafrayt zayn,/ Vi altsding vos ligt in der fintster farmakht'. The brush, in painting the poet's portrait, gives him immortality, for the essential *ikh* is the portrait, which can evade death:

Un mol mayn portret oyfn fon fun der nakht,
Kedey, ven der toyt vet zayn nont, zol ikh vayt zayn.

This image of the poet as palette, on which the colours are imprisoned, gives expression to the conviction which will grow throughout Sutzkever's poetry of the word as a pre-existing, living entity, waiting to be released through poetic inspiration, with the poet as the servant of the word, dependent on the action of the muse to enable him to free the poetry within him.

Although the poems of the cycle are independent of each other, they are united by the theme of the search for the essence of poetry. The cycle reaches a majestic climax, preceded by a moment of metaphysical doubt. This occurs in the twenty-fifth poem, which describes a mystical experience: the poet, writing his poem, finds the word 'God' emerging from the paper. The poet's pen 'in forkht un vunder' changes this word for 'mentsh'. From this moment on he is haunted by the question 'Oyf vemen hostu mikh farbitn?'.

The poem seems to express doubt about the true sphere of poetry: the human or the divine. The poet's changing 'God' for 'man' does not denote hubris, however, for his motivation is

'forkht un vunder'. This detail suggests that he feels at this moment of revelation that he is not worthy to aspire to the divine, but must content himself with the human realm. The final stanza, with its reproach from God, suggests that his denying of the divine in poetry is a sin.

The doubt is gradually resolved in the last three poems. The twenty-sixth poem contains the already discussed brush and palette image, while the twenty-seventh poem continues the musing on the emergence of the eternal essence of the self, by means of imagery of the growing seed and the kernel:

Kh'vel bislekhvayz in gang tsum vern
 Funanderfaln oyf di shteglekh,
 Vi krishlekh fayer fun a shtern, -
 Azoy keseyderdik, tog-teglekh,
 Biz vanen fun mayn ikh vet vern
 Der velts a blaybndiker kheylek,
 A zemdl, vos iz umtseteylik, -
 Der vider-oyfshprots fun mayn kern.

Through these two poems the transcendental in poetry is approached anew, and the climax of this searching is achieved in the final poem, which stands out from the rest of the cycle. While the others are short, with varying stanza forms and often in blank verse, creating together a jagged impression which befits the darting, questioning theme, the final poem has a monumentality of form and theme which ends the cycle on a note of serene assurance. It consists of three stanzas of identical form, each of nine lines, with a complex rhyme scheme. The predominant metre is dactylic; the stressed syllables which open each line and close almost every second line create a forceful, strong rhythm. The power of the form is echoed in the content of the poem, for the poet has become the majestic personification of the sun:

Yo, ikh muz nidern, nidern
 Hinter di berg, di berg.

S'tunklt, es nakhtikt mayn blendikayt
 Hinter di berg, di berg.
 Kh'hob shoy'n gezogt: ikh hob lib,
 Kh'hob shoy'n gebet'n: fargib.
 Gey ikh zikh itster farbridern
 Mit der gegarter umendikayt
 Hinter di berg, di berg.

With this image of the *ikh* as the setting sun, the cycle returns to the motif of the first poem: 'Kh'bin zunfargey', but here the image is developed to express the poet's conviction of his own quasi-divinity: in his sun-identity, he is empowered to hover over the earth in glory, to bestow love and forgiveness, and to know infinity. In the poem 'Hinter der zun' the innocent child/poet had been able to venture beyond the sun; here he has *become* the sun itself.

However the sun's moment of doubt in itself in the second stanza mirrors the self doubt which has, at moments, crept into the cycle 'Ekstazn' and will lead to the re-emergence of the ethical dimension in the poems of 'Epilog tsu Valdiks'. The sun/poet wonders 'Vos hob ikh ober dort oyfgeton/ Oyf der shtoybiker erd?' and the answers, with their diffident 'efsher' and 'bloyz' are modest achievements which contrast with the almost bombastic tone of the first stanza:

Efsher a tropn kolirishkayt
 Bloyz farzeyt oyf der erd?
 Efsher dermutikt a blum,
 Efsher gevunen bloyz rum?
 Efsher di frayshaft a ruf geton
 Ful mit ekstatisher lirishkayt
 Oyf der shtoybiker erd?

But these achievements are all images of poetic creation, and mount to the climax of 'ekshtatisher lirishkayt' which annihilates the moment of self doubt and carries the poet over into the triumphant final stanza, where he celebrates his own majesty:

Nor, iber taykh dem gezegntn

Finklt mayn bloe kroyn.
 Oykh oyf di beymer bayvegike
 Finklt mayn bloe kroyn.

The blue of the crown is linked with the poet's Siberian childhood. The *poeme* 'Sibir' begins : 'Zunfargang oyf ayzik bloe vegn' and ends, in a climax akin to this final poem of 'Ekstazn', in the poet's walk with the North Star, which has a 'bloen shmeykhl'. The description of his crown as blue strengthens the symbolic connection between his poetic maturing and his childhood inspiration, which is the central theme of 'Sibir'.

The poem ends by affirming the poet's power over the universe:

Alts, vos mayn blut hot bashtralt,
 Trogt itst mayn eygn geshtalt,
 Un iber mentshn un gegntn
 Un iber volkns antkegike
 Finklt mayn bloe kroyn.

The collection 'Valdiks' ends with these lines which are the apotheosis of the poet's assertion of his mastery over nature in the first poem: 'Alts iz verdik far mayn oygs gevogl'. Here the poet has achieved the majesty of the sun, and illuminates the earth and the skies.

With the final three sections of 'Valdiks', Sutzkever's poetry has become highly solipsistic. We have seen that in 'Blonder baginen' the social dimension of poetry was an important aspect of Sutzkever's poetic *credo*, for example in 'Cyprian Norwid', but in 'Valdiks' the poet probes ever further into the innermost recesses of the *ikh*, and the search for meaning is overwhelmingly an aesthetic one.

It is difficult to see where Sutzkever's poetry would have gone after this point, had it not been for the traumatic events which intervened. The Germans did not occupy Vilna until June

1941, but the approaching catastrophe was perceived by Jewish writers much earlier.²⁷ The collection entitled 'Epilog tsu Valdiks' shows very clearly the transition between the aestheticism of the poems of the late thirties and the new direction which Sutzkever's poetry was to take in response to the external events.

The poems of the collection were written between 1938 and 1941. Most of them were published in two anthologies, Untervegns, (Vilna 1940), and Bleter 1940, (Kovno 1940), and were later gathered together in the volume Yidishe gas, published in 1948, under the title 'Fun antlofenem indzl'. Virtually the same group of poems was called 'Epilog tsu Valdiks' in the first volume of Poetische Verk, published in 1963.²⁸ The change of title is not without significance: the earlier title emphasises the threatening political situation at the time the poems were written, for the island metaphor conveys the idea of isolation, and the adjective 'antlofn' the concept of escape through poetry. Abraham Novershtern points out that as late as 1940 'hot Vilne [...] oysgezen vi an indzl fun a normal lebn - a matsev vos hot lang nit ongehaltn'.²⁹ The title of the group of poems in Yidishe gas lays the emphasis on the relevance of the poems to that *historical* situation. By renaming them 'Epilog tsu Valdiks' in 1963,

²⁷. Berish Vaynshteyn's poem 'Henkers', for example, prefiguring the slaughter which was to come, was written as early as 1933. Berish Vaynshteyn, Lider un poemas (New York, 1949), p.29.

²⁸. There are twenty-six poems common to both collections. 'Fun antlofenem indzl' contains three poems which in the Poetische verk were placed by Sutzkever in the section 'Blonder baginen' (PV1, pp.85, 87 and 89), and six poems were added to the collection entitled 'Epilog tsu Valdiks' (PV1, pp.207, 211, 212, 214, 216 and 219). Since all the poems in both collections were written between 1937 and 1941, they can all be considered as part of this transitional period.

²⁹. Novershtern, Catalogue, p.124.

Sutzkever shows that in retrospect he considers the poems as the end of a period in his work - the early period of 'Blonder baginen' and 'Valdiks' - , and as a turning point in his poetic development.

That turning point takes the form of the growing intrusion of historical events into his poetic consciousness, and the re-emergence through this of the ethical dimension. Novershtern comments on this: 'Oyf an umdirektn oyfn filt zikh in zey di ongetsoygnkeyt un umzikherkeyt fun yener tsayt'.³⁰ At the same time, as we shall see, there is a strengthening of the aesthetic aspect - the search for ways of expressing the essence of poetry in the threatening situation.

The response to the growing external crisis is manifested in various ways in these poems. First, it is significant that Sutzkever tends more and more to place the date of writing after each poem - a habit which is invariable in the poetry of 'Di festung', and continues thereafter. It denotes his feeling of obligation to document the times. Thematically, there is a continued interest in biblical motifs, as in the two poems 'Der boym fun visn' (PV1, p.212) and 'Der boym fun lebn' (PV1, p.214), in themes of death and transience, as in 'Fun di upanishadn' (PV1, p.218) and 'Oyf der griner brik' (PV1, p.207). The latter poem takes a Yiddish folk-song motif as its starting point; this, and the 'Fir lider in altyidishn loshn' which start the collection (PV1 pp.201-204), show a fascination with the history and culture of Yiddish-speaking Jews. All these poems give evidence of a desire to find assurance and continuity in historical tradition

³⁰. *ibid.*, p.124.

and an answer to metaphysical questions, as a bulwark against the threatened catastrophe.

Elsewhere, however, Sutzkever confronts the catastrophe directly. Two poems pursue themes which were to become important strands of Sutzkever's poetry of the Holocaust period. Both 'Badarfst far undz zayn a derleyzer' (PV1, p.206), written in 1938, and 'Morgnkind' (PV1, p.221), written in 1939, are stark visions of the impending destruction of the Jewish people. In both poems Sutzkever shows the impotence of the people, and indicts them for their weakness. In the former poem he expresses the problem with the fire of a prophet, but including himself in the guilt through the use of the communal 'mir':

Mir kenen aley n zikh nit oysleyzn mer shoyn
 Fun eybikn durkhfal un shtroykhl, fun zind
 Un farat, vos bafarbn oyf shvarts undzer fon
 Yeder tog,
 Yeder tog.

The betrayal consists in their having become spiritually deadened; this Sutzkever expresses in a series of vivid images which reach their climax in an evocation of the destruction of the poetic:

Vi kropeve brit un gedayet in undz dos gezang.
 Afile der morgnroyt loyert mit geln gebeyzer
 Un shpint di geshpinzn fun durkhfal un zind.

'Dos gezang' is often a synonym for poetry, as in 'Arum di fayern'. Here, the destruction of 'dos gezang' is symbolised by negative images of nature, in contrast to the positive nature images with which poetry is normally associated in the poems of 'Valdiks'. 'Gezang' is equated with the rank and stinging nettle, and the dawn, in earlier poetry a symbol of awakening poetic consciousness, is now an evil, threatening force. Thus Sutzkever, having established certain symbolic resonances in particular

images, transforms them into their negative to suggest the opposite meaning.

This poem can be seen as an indictment either of the contemporary Jewish community, or of humanity in general. The former interpretation is suggested by the proposed solution of the 'derleyzer' which is an integral part of Jewish tradition. Here the *Moshiakh*-figure is a child. This motif develops the idea of the holiness of the child which was seen in 'A kind- a poel' and 'Hinter der zun ver ken greykhn?', from the cycle 'Farmirmler otem', and also the idea of continuity: the child as the hope for the generations of the future. Thus this poem points forward to 'Un azoy zolstu reydn tsum yosem' from the dark days of 1943 (PV1, p.281).

In 'Morgnkind' the abject state into which the people have fallen is also evoked by the transformation of an already established image: that of granite, which is a symbol of eternity, for example in 'Vayter fun di daled ames'. The precursor of the image as used in 'Morgnkind' (1940) is surely the poem 'A kop' (1939, PV1, p.162) from the cycle 'Fun onheyb tsu onheyb', which begins:

Velkhe shtoltse hant hot fun granit
Oysgehakt dem kop fun ot dem yid [.]?

and goes on to depict the Jew as a monumental symbol of eternity, finishing with the lines

Un zayn velt-neshome iz farshmidt -
Elehey Meshiakh - tsu granit.

The poet is referring to these holy and eternal qualities when he uses the image of granite in 'Morgnkind', describing the Jewish people as

Shtoyb, vos hot shoyn lang fargesn
Az zayn opshtam iz granit.

Considered from the perspective of the poem 'A kop' this transformation of the granite image is a powerful evocation of

the *disintegration* of the true identity of the Jewish people: they should have the 'granite' qualities of the essential Jew, but their relationship to that idea is as granite dust to the material itself; as ignorant of their true noble origins as the granite dust is of the material from which it came, but, he implies, still containing the *essence* of granite.

He further describes them as bones, which the 'Morgnkind' can perhaps bring back to life:

Morgnkind, zing oys a himen
 Far di beyner undzere.
 Efsher vestu zey derfreyen
 Mit a heyldikn friling,
 Un zey veln dentsmol hern
 Dos geboyr fun nayem kern
 Un, ken zayn, baruikt vern.

The concept of breathing new life into dry bones has echoes of Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 37).³¹ The mysterious 'morgnkind' figure combines attributes of the child, already discussed in relation to the previous poem, and the positive symbolism connected with dawn. Here the figure is not explicitly connected with poetry, but the dawn/poetry and child/poetry links which have already been established suggest that the figure could represent the spirit of poetry, and indeed it comes to do so: in 'Geheymshtot' the 'morgnkind' is the muse figure whom the poet apostrophises in the prologue, and the concept gains its full metapoetic significance at the climax of 'Ode tsu der toyb' when all the symbols connected with poetic creativity are gathered together in the figure of the 'morgnkind', who represents the essence of poetry.

³¹. The reviving of bones later becomes a very important metapoetic image, notably in 'Ode tsu der toyb', in 'A meteor in Midber Kalahari' (PV2, p.181) and in the poem 'Fun beymer makht men vunderlekh papir' (Ts-b, p 67).

The endings of both poems 'Badarfst far undz zayn a der-leyzer' and 'Morgnkind' are tentative: the former ends with the reiteration of the need for the redeemer, and in the latter, the 'ken zayn' expresses a guarded hope of redemption, through the spirit which seems to embody poetry.

The power of poetry over war, and the vocation of the poet are however made explicit in several poems of the collection. In 'Milkhome' (PV1, p.223), the only being to survive the general annihilation will be the poet; Sutzkever visualises the poet as a fusion of Shakespeare and his creation Prospero, who can cause the destroyed cities to be recreated:

Un blaybn vet bloyz eyner, a poet, -
 A vilder Shekspir, vos vet ton a zung mit kraft un mutvil:
 - Mayn gayst Ariel, breng dem nayem goyrl vos mayn blut vil,
 Un shpay aroys tsurik di toyte shtet!

The *ikh* sees himself as that poet in 'Oysgeloshn' (PV1, p.227), for in an apocalyptic vision he calls on the fires which are hidden inside the tree-trunks to ignite the pitch which is between his lips:

Git a khap
 Dem greytn pekh fun mayne lipn.
 Un baveltikht mayne verter
 Mit a koyekh fun tseshterung.

The motif of the pitch between his lips recalls the vision of Isaiah, who was purified by having a live coal placed on his lips. Isaiah's task was then to go out and tell the people things which they would not understand. Isaiah's question to God is 'Lord, how long?', and God's answer may have corresponded to Sutzkever's prophetic feeling in 1940: 'Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.'³² Like Isaiah, the poet is here . . .

³². Isaiah 6.11.

as the scourge, bringing not comfort, but 'tseshterung' through the words which arise from the burning pitch between his lips. The vision of Isaiah, however, suggests an eventual time of redemption, and the pitch image as used by Sutzkever invites the reader to pursue the biblical parallel to its conclusion.

The ethical imperative under which the poet stands, and Sutzkever's consciousness of a turning point to a new direction is clearly seen in the poem 'Tsum oyg' (PV1, p.228), which immediately follows 'Oysgeloshn' and develops the theme further. The word 'sreyfes'- a central motif in 'Oysgeloshn'- recurs at the beginning of this poem:

Un teg nokh teg on oyfher dringen
Vi shtern-sreyfes in a brunem.

Although there is no direct thematic link between the uses of the word in the two poems, it is a new word in Sutzkever's poetic vocabulary, and stands out as a formal link between the poems. In 'Oysgeloshn' the extinguished passion of the poet was rekindled, and in 'Tsum oyg' he sees that his task at this particular historical moment is to use that new passion in the service of the collective.

The days are submerged as 'in a brunem'. The sparks of 'nigunim', which represent poetry, do, however, still exist, in the form of the broken reflections of the stars on the surface of the water; but all has become amorphous: 'Antformt vern ale formen'. After this symbolic description of the general situation, the sudden 'dikh' surprises - the reader may have been lulled into forgetting that this is an address 'tsum oyg':

Mit nayem inhalt kh'vel dikh kormen,
Mit nikhterkeyt vest vern shiker
Un visn: fort iz do an iker.

A full appreciation of the nuances of these lines demands cognisance of later poetry. The eye or more often the

'shvartsapl' comes to have a life of its own; in a much later poem, for example, the eyes are represented as doves sent out of the 'oygnshlak' to fetch a third 'shvartsapl' (Ts-b, p.178): here there is a foretaste of that imagery in the idea of the poet feeding his eye. The word 'kormen' is used of the feeding of the dove/muse with 'zilberne zilbn' in 'Ode tsu der toyb' and that dimension is present in the feeding of the eye 'mit nayem inhalt'. The metapoetic 'shiker' is important here too: the new demands of the time are expressed in the paradox 'Mit nikhterkeyt vest vern shiker'; absorption of the new, sober material will restore meaning to the poetic act. Here the word 'iker', (the essence) is introduced for the first time, and this too becomes a permanent Sutzkeverian term.

Despite the catastrophic situation it is possible to find that vital spark. This is achieved by the punctilious storing of the past history of the Jewish people, and by transforming it into poetry - such appears to be the meaning of the rather dense final stanza:

In dayne zilberne arkhivn
 Bahalt s'fargangene. Atsind
 Al dos morgndike tsind.
 Un breng dos bild dem kolektivn.

The complexity hinges on the interpretation of the verb 'tsind'; the poet could be demanding that the creative eye preserve the past, which is worth saving, but should not take the tragic future as its poetic material, but rather burn it like rubbish. More likely perhaps is that the future should be made into a picture by the creative fire of the poet, together with the past which has been preserved by the eye of the poet, and should be presented as an offering to the 'collective.' Here Sutzkever arrives at the conviction of his role as recorder and

preserver which permeates the poetry of the next six years and never leaves him.

The aesthetic search for the essence of the poetic word is however inseparable from these ethical questions - we have seen that the perception that the 'iker' still existed was only possible through the feeding of the inspiration with this new, sombre 'inhalt' - and it is significant that in the midst of this emotional and moral turmoil, Sutzkever produced several important metapoetic poems: 'Dos lid fun regn-boygn' (PV1, p.209), 'Oytsres' (PV1, p.219), 'Der binshtok' (PV1, p.224), 'Murashkenest' (PV1, p.225), 'Baym yam' (PV1, p.235), and 'Tsvey koyln' (PV1, p.239). In all these poems the extent of Sutzkever's progress into the inner aesthetic realm is evident, the extent, that is, to which the direct influence of outer reality ('ayndruk') is leading to the creation of a mystical language of symbols expressing the poet's inner needs ('oysdruk'). The bee-hive with its bees, which had first been introduced as a simile ('Farshtokhn mit gezangen vi mit fayerdike binen') is now the mysterious home for the poet's longing, into which his 'fargafte neshome' flies with the last bee; in 'Baym yam', the sea, the stork, the locust and, most important, the amber which contains the captured fly³³, are all vehicles for his striving to express the nature of the poetic consciousness; 'Oytsres' develops the image of treasures buried in the sea, which the human being, who can only see his and the sun's reflection, cannot perceive. In

³³. The fly is given eternal life by being captured in the ancient amber (which, being the 'farfeldzung fun beymer she blitn' has links with the Tree of Life). The suspended life of the fly trapped in amber has affinities with the grains of wheat in the later poem 'Kerndlekh veyts' (PV1, p.289), which can spring to life again after a thousand years, and also with all the images of the 'kernel' which represent the poetic word.

'Dos lid fun regn-boygn', the *ikh* speaks as the rainbow, which unites the primal forces of sun and rain, and embodies, here and in many other poems, the poet's creativity.

In all these poems the objects have become mysterious, internalised, divorced from any logical connection to their significance in reality. The emotions or meaning they express must be intuitively grasped by the reader. In one of them, 'Murashke-nest', however, the poet explicitly connects the symbol with the meaning, and it is in this poem that the unease about the craft of poetry, which was to grow during the war years, can be most clearly seen:

Murashke-nest, du valds unterbavustzayn,
Tsenishtert fun a naygerikn shtok, -
Mit labirintn dayne, shtok nokh shtok
Tsefalene in shtoyb, zol dir bavust zayn:
Vi du bin ikh. Mayn sharbn falt. Ot vert er
Tsetrogn fun murashkelekh - fun verter.

Un yeder vort - aroyf, arop, ariber,
Fun nerv tsu nerv, durkh roykh un koyl.
Un ale yogn fun di shtiber
Mit vaysn eyele in moyl.

There are two main images. The anthill is a labyrinth of passages, which, broken up by a stick, fall into dust, scattering the ants who carry away their precious eggs. The equivalent is the poet's skull, which also smashes to pieces, and the 'ants' carrying away the fragments of his skull (which in the last line of the poem are equated with the little white ant-eggs), are *words*. There are several facets to this anthill/skull image. The idea of violence and destruction pervades it: the skull/anthill is smashed and the pieces scattered (the three verbs with the prefix 'tse-' which always denotes pulling apart or destruction, should be noted); the ant/words, the second stanza suggests, are in disarray, and the environment of the devastated anthill, or skull, is that of 'roykh un koyl'. It is tempting to see this as

an allegory of the poetic impulse destroyed by war. Two factors, however, weigh against this as the exclusive interpretation. First, Sutzkever himself has written of the poem: 'a lid, geshribn mit 47 yor tsurik, un iz aktuel biz haynt...'.³⁴ This suggests that the poet regards it as a statement of general validity about the poetic process. Second, the ant/words escape with that which is essential for their survival, the eggs, which are the pieces of the poet's skull, his very identity. The analogy combines, therefore, the unease of the historical situation with a statement about the violence and pain of poetic creativity, seen in the dramatic image of the shattered skull.

A further interesting aspect of the poem should be noted. As in the poem 'Unterbavustzayn' (PV1, p.168), Sutzkever is suggesting that the innermost realm of the poetic is the unconscious: the anthill is the unconscious of the wood, which itself is seen as the primal environment, as in the later 'Himen tsum shvartsn vald' (PV2, p.218), which begins: 'Mame vald, bist elter fun der nakht.'

Since the carefully drawn analogy links the poetic *ikh* with the anthill in every respect, his innermost core must also be the 'unterbavustzayn'. Again, Jung's view of the unconscious as the realm of truth relates here to Sutzkever's ideas on the core of the poetic. Furthermore, it is justifiable to assert that Sutzkever's idea of the collective, and his use of the religious and mythical imagery which is deeply rooted in the history of the Jewish people— aspects of his poetry which develop most strongly after 1939,— bear a close relationship to Jung's concept of the

³⁴. In a note to the present writer, 1987.

collective unconscious, through which ideas and images are passed down through the generations.

The poems written between 1937 and 1941 represent on the one hand an ever-increasing inwardness, conveyed through the intensifying symbolism of the nature imagery; key images, such as water, fire, the cornstalk, granite, the beehive, the idea of absorption, and the imagery of the kernel, which were already present in 'Blonder baginen', have now an established metapoetic significance. At the same time there is evidence of the poet's awareness of the deteriorating political situation in the poems of the 'Epilog', and a sense of disquiet about the poetic vocation, notably in the disturbing imagery of 'Murashke-nest'. With the Holocaust, outer reality burst in upon the poet, and chapter 4 will analyse the effect of these events upon the themes and imagery of the poetry written during the war years.

Before this, however, it is important to examine the evolution of the seminal *poeme* 'Sibir', which has exerted a profound influence on Sutzkever's poetic development. Comparison of the two versions of the Siberian poem will confirm and further illuminate the movement which has been described in this chapter: the prevailing movement from *ayndruk* to *oysdruk*, from the perception of nature as an outer reality and a source of Romantic emotion, to the harnessing of nature as a symbolic language to explore the poet's inner vision. Comparison of the earlier version of the Siberian *poeme* with the later one will reveal also the extent to which Sutzkever's poetic craftsmanship matured during the late thirties and early forties.

CHAPTER 3.

Two longer poems: 'Shtern in shney' and 'Sibir'.

On two occasions Sutzkever commented on the immense importance of his childhood in Siberia for the development of his poetic consciousness. His friend the Vilna poet Shmerke Katsherginski related that during the years in the ghetto Sutzkever discussed Siberia with him in the following terms:

Yeder mentsh, un bifrat a shrayber, hot zikh in zayn lebn un shafn zayn benkshaft, zayn iluziye. Mayn iluziye iz Sibir. Ikh halt, batont der dikhter, az dort bin ikh shoyfn oykh gevorn a shrayber, khotsh keyn lider hob ikh nokh nit geshribn dan, ober in mayne demoltike iberlebungen bin ikh geven a fulshtendiker dikhter.¹

Sutzkever's definition of the term 'dikhter' denotes not merely the active producer of poems, but rather the inherently poetic personality, the individual who is endowed with a particular kind of consciousness; this concept is seminal to a study of the second version of the Siberian poem, for its true theme is the emergence of this consciousness in the child.

Yankev Pat reports a discussion in which Sutzkever described an incident from his childhood which had a particular symbolic significance for him:

Es iz geven a frostiker ovnt iber dem farfroyrenem Sibirer taykh. Der khuter, in velkhn zey hobn gevoynt, iz geven in gantsn ayngkovet in shney. Der tate, a harts-layndiker, iz geven krank. Er iz geshtanen bay di farfroyrene shayblekh un geshpilt oyf a fidl. [Sutzkever] hot gekukt durkhn durkhgehoykhtn shoyb. Dortn hot men gezen flatern toybn [...]. Dermont er zikh, az er iz demolt aroysgelofn fun shtub, ongeton in a peltsl, gelofn in vald [...]: 'Mit a mol, geyendik azoy mitn taykh, hob ikh derzen, vi a shifl shteyt ayngfroyrn in taykh, mit tsvey vesles vi mit funandergeshpreyte hent [...]. Vi groys iz geven mayn farvunderung oyf morgn, ven ikh hob derhert a geruder oyfn taykh. Dos ayz hot zikh gebrokhn, zikh gelozt. Dos shifl iz avek mitn vaser [...]. Dos bild fun der shif, vos lozt zikh

¹. Shmerke Katsherginski Ondenkbukh, (Buenos Aires, 1955), quoted by Novershtern, Catalogue, p.114.

in gang, geyt mir foroys. Ikh ze in dem bild di farkerperung fun mayn goyrl'.²

Although this boat incident does not occur in the same form in 'Sibir', one can see this little story as a microcosm of the *poeme*. The father with his violin, the frosty window-panes, the doves, and the forest, are all taken up as key-motifs in 'Sibir' and there, as here, the child has to leave the father, and venture into the outside world, in order to find his 'goyrl'. Early in the *poeme* the poet sees his life as a sledge moving off into the distance, like the little boat here, and significantly, the second half of 'Sibir' which evokes the realisation of his poetic consciousness, begins with the ice melting and the river rushing along.

The history of the two works is complex. 'Shtern in shney' appears as a whole, subtitled 'Sibirer poeme', for the first time in the volume Lider (L, pp.75-98), where it is dated 'Yanuar-Merts, 1936'. Eight of the poems had already appeared in 1936, in the journal In zikh (volume 4, nos.4, 5 and 6 and volume 5, nos. 2 and 4), and in Vilner tog (April 24). Even before the volume Lider had appeared in print, Sutzkever had started revising his Siberian *poeme*, and he worked on it throughout the ghetto years, during all the inner struggles which find expression in Di festung. His returning to this material in these particular circumstances seems significant, and this surmise is borne out, as we shall see, by the ways in which he uses and alters the original material. The new version, 'Sibir', was not, however, published until 1953, when Sutzkever had settled in Israel. It was placed at the beginning of the 1963 edition of Sutzkever's

². Yankev Pat, Shmuesn mit shrayber in Yisroel, (New York, 1960). Quoted by Novershtern, Catalogue, p.100.

collected works (PV1, pp.9-20), where Sutzkever gives it the date 1936³.

Critical comment on the two Siberian poems has been extensive, and there is some confusion both about the identity of the two works, which doubtless arises out of the date which appears after 'Sibir' in the Poetishe verk. Yitskhok Yanasovitsh speaks of 'Sibir' as having been written in 1936: he goes on to speak of the important poem 'Di farfroyrene shif' as having been 'geshribn in 1956, tsvantsik yor nokh "Sibir" ',⁴ whereas it was actually twenty years after 'Shtern in shney'. The same mistake is made by Dovid Volpe. In the chapter entitled 'Sibir' in his book Mit Avrom Sutskever iber zayn lidervelt, his quotations are all taken from the later *poeme*; however, his next chapter, entitled 'Sibir-ekho' begins 'Zibn yor shpeter (1943, in geto) hot Sutskever ongeschribn a lid 'Tsu draysik yor', vos iz gekumen vi dem dikhters ekho tsu "Sibir"'.⁵ It would have been more accurate, chronologically, to speak of 'Tsu draysik yor' as being an echo of 'Shtern in shney', but thematically incorrect: the metapoetic theme of 'Tsu draysik yor' does not emerge until the later *poeme* 'Sibir'.

Critics are almost unanimous that the theme of the Siberian *poeme* is 'gezegenish', the mood elegaic, expressing nostalgia for a lost childhood and a vanished world. Two critics use the same phrase to evoke this theme:

³. It is Sutzkever's common practice, especially in the Poetishe verk, to give even radically revised versions of poems the date of their initial appearance.

⁴. Yitskhok Yanasovitsh, Avrom Sutskever - zayn lid un zayn proze, (Tel-Aviv, 1981), p.82.

⁵. Dovid Volpe, Mit Avrom Sutskever iber zayn lidervelt, (Johannesburg, 1985), p.40.

Der sof fun zayn mayse-breyshes inem Sibirer poetishn kholel iz, vi mir gedenken, der 'shneymentsh' un bidmus fun a 'shneymentsh in a kleyd fun hoyt' farlozt der poet [...] zayn kindershn gan-eydn. *Vert dos gantse verk di poeme fun a 'farloyrenem gan-eydn' [...].*⁶ (my italics)

Yanasovitsh speaks of a 'gan eydn fun der kindheyt' and asserts: 'Avrom Sutskevers poeme 'Sibir' iz di poeme vegn dem farloyrenem gan-eydn'⁷.

Novershtern does not make the mistake of treating the two versions as one. He also sees the theme of 'gezegenish' as central in both poems:

Di poeme iz take a gezegenung mit a farshvundener velt oykh loytn material-opklayb: shoy'n in dem ershtn nusekh hot er bikhlal nit dermont keyn noente vos hobn nokh demolt gelebt (zayn mame, zayn bruder), nor bloyz azelkhe vos zenen geven far im bivkhines zikorn: der toyter tate un di shvester (vos iz in tsveytn nusekh nito), zayn khaverl Tshanguri.⁸

Novershtern does not, however, perceive nostalgia as the driving force of the *poeme*:

Hagam di muzikalishkeyt fun di shures kon shafn dem ayndruk fun nostalgiye un sentimentalkayt, iz 'Sibir' eygntlekh a gezang vegn kindershe fantazyes vos tserinen, vegn der ershter bagegenish tsvishn kind un der droysendiker velt.⁹

This emphasis on the theme of *new* experience, of 'bagegenish' rather than 'gezegenish' leads towards the interpretation of 'Sibir' which will be made in this chapter.

In an essay on the two versions, Jacob Glatshteyn centres his whole discussion of 'Sibir' on a comparison of the first ver-

⁶. Aaron Shteynberg, 'A tikn fun Yidish', in *Yoyvl*, pp. 55-62, (p.61).

⁷. Yanasovitsh, *Sutskever*, p.81.

⁸. Novershtern, *Catalogue*, p.116. The implications of the disappearance of 'noente' from the second version will be discussed later in the chapter.

⁹. *ibid.*, pp.116-117.

Figure 1 (Numbers in brackets refer to numbers of stanzas)

Shtern in shney

Sibir

Tsu di klangen dayne (1)

Ovntbroyt (3)

Derkentenish (2)

Shney (1)

In a sibirer vald (4)

Irtish (1)

Toybn (2+2lines)

Zey (3)

Tropns blut (3)

Der tate shtarbt (2+6 lines)

Sibirer friling (2)

Kirgizn (1)

Mayn vayse shvester (2)

Tshanguri (4)

Kindheytt (1)

A shayter (3)

Heym ikh loz dikh op fun
mayne orems (1)

In khuter (3)

Far tog (1)

Derkentenish (2)

Vi a shlitn in farbenktn
klingn (1)

Fayerdiker pelts (1)

In a sibirer vald (3)

Tsum tatn (1)

Irtish (1)

Shneymentsh (2)

Sibirer friling (2)

Kirgizn (1)

Mayn khaverl Tshanguri (3)

Baym shayter (2)

Tsofn-shtern (1)

sions of the two poems¹⁰ 'In a Sibirer vald' and 'Mayn khaverl Tshanguri', which appeared in In zikh, with their later versions in 'Sibir'. He adversely criticises the later versions, where, in his view, spontaneity and simplicity have been sacrificed for the sake of 'klingendike [...] melitse' and 'tsugetrakhte [...] psevdo-tmimesdike [...] bildlekhkeyt'.¹¹ Glatshteyn does not mention the whole *poeme* 'Shtern in shney' nor attempt to make an overall stylistic or thematic comparison of the two versions.

The general tenor of the criticism, and the failure of all the critics apart from Novershtern to appreciate the significance of 'Sibir' stems from their assumption that the later *poeme* is simply a stylistically revised version of the earlier one, and that from the point of view of thematic significance they are to all intents and purposes the same work. I shall demonstrate that, taking the same material, Sutzkever creates in 'Sibir' a radically different work, whose altered theme and imagery reflect the developments in his poetic vision between 1936 and the early forties.

'Shtern in shney' (see figure 1) consists of seventeen poems which vary in length from one to four twelve-line stanzas of trochaic pentameter; the stanza form is very regular, with consistent rhyme scheme throughout, each twelve-line stanza being made up of three quatrains, rhyming alternately, abab, cdcd, efef, and with hardly any deviation from the strict trochaic metre. There is no overall pattern, however, governing the length

10. In the following discussion, the word 'poem' denotes the individual poems or sections, while the Yiddish term *poeme* is used of the complete works 'Shtern in shney' and 'Sibir'.

11. J. Glatshteyn, 'A. Sutzkever', in In tokh genumen, essey'n 1948-1956, (New York, 1956), pp. 360-365, (pp.363 and 364).

of each individual poem, and two of the poems have incomplete stanzas, or extra lines: the seventh poem, 'Toybn' consists of two twelve line stanzas and two lines, and the tenth, 'Der tate shtarbt' has a final stanza consisting of five and a half lines. All the poems have titles, apart from the introductory and the final poems - both of these are one-stanza poems, which have, as we shall see, the important function of setting the rest of the *poeme* in the context of memory. More will be said later about the order of the poems in comparison to 'Sibir', but it should be remarked here that each poem can stand independently, and there seems to be no overall shape or development, in contrast to the second version. 'Shtern in shney' contains six poems which have been omitted from 'Sibir'. These are: 'Toybn', 'Zey', 'Tropns blut', 'Der tate shtarbt', 'Mayn vayse shvester', and 'Kindheyt'. 'Toybn' and 'Der tate shtarbt' deal with material which in 'Sibir' is central to the theme, and is integrated more significantly within the form of the work; 'Zey', 'Tropns blut' and 'Mayn vayse shvester' contain material which is extraneous to the much more clearly defined theme of 'Sibir'. The poem 'Kindheyt', like the introductory and final poems, sets the whole *poeme* 'Shtern in shney' in the realm of the remembered past, a perspective which is contrary to the objectives of 'Sibir'. Of the poems which are broadly similar in the two works, some have the same title, others slightly but significantly different ones, and poems which share the same title, i.e. 'Derkentenish', 'In a Sibirer vald' 'Irtish', 'Sibirer friling', 'Kirgizn', 'Tshanguri' ('Mayn khaverl Tshanguri' in the later work) and 'A shayter' ('Baym shayter' in the later work), all gain different nuances and emphasis either through changes in the poems themselves or through their position and role in the changed concept of the

poeme.

'Sibir' shares the stanza form of the earlier work, but the immediately obvious development is that the irregular form of 'Shtern in shney' has been replaced by what Novershtern has called 'a formeln tsunoyfshpil fun tsifern: 24 strofes fun 12 shures'.¹² Although these figures have no mystical or religious significance,¹³ their symmetry suggests a deliberate pattern, and this suggestion is also borne out by the changes Sutzkever has made to the poems he includes. We have already noted that certain poems which contain material extraneous to the central theme of the developing *ikh* have deliberately been omitted, and others have been added: 'Fayerdiker pelts', 'Shneymentsh', and 'Tsofnshtern': all three explore seminal poetic symbols which are central to the theme of awakening poetic consciousness. While 'Shtern in shney' is a somewhat random series of poems evoking emotions and incidents of a childhood, set in a framework of regret for their passing, 'Sibir' is carefully structured. Its form shows the developing poetic consciousness of the child mirrored in the sweeping movement outward and upward, from the protection of the childhood home, into the wider realm of nature, until at last the poet soars above the earth and walks with the North Star. Within this pattern, the change in the nature and position of the poem which deals with the death of the poet's father is of crucial importance, and the other poems which 'Sibir' shares with the earlier work gain different meaning and

¹². Novershtern, Catalogue, p.116.

¹³. By contrast, in the *poeme* 'Geheymshot', written between 1945 and 1947 (PV1, pp.443-537), the ten lines of each stanza reflect the significant number of Jews required for a *minyem*; and the inhabitants of the sewers are 'a folk zalbe tsent', the number always staying at this level - it is a number which gives hope of regeneration to the Jewish people.

emphasis by their position in the whole, by subtle changes, and by their relationship to the new poems which are part of the second *poeme*. The significance of all these formal differences can be more clearly illuminated by a closer analysis of the structure and content of the two *poemes*.

The introductory stanza of 'Shtern in shney' is addressed to a 'du', at first uncertain, who emerges in the penultimate line as 'Goyrl mayner, har fun ale harn'. The word 'goyrl' has already emerged as a symbol of Sutzkever's awareness of his identity as a poet,¹⁴ and here the linking of the term with the poet's remembrance of his childhood home in Siberia emphasises the profound significance which Siberia had for him.

The most important aspect of this first stanza is the narrative perspective. The poet is writing from the vantage point of the present, and consciously calling up his remembrance of the past:

Tsu der klorkayt dayner nem ikh raytn
Oyf mayn fliferd fun dermonung itst.
Eyder s'brenen oys di letste vaytn
Fun baginensheynekayt.

The metaphor 'fliferd fun dermonung' signals a journey from the here and now into the experience of the past, and the image of pursuing the dawn, which in the early poems always has a metapoetic connotation, signifies the attempt to recapture the fleeting inspiration embodied in the past. The image of flight into the past is continued in the lines

Sara fli durkh toyzenter gefarn!
Sara blend oyf krigerisher erd!

¹⁴. For example in 'A skirde hey', the metapoetic poem also written in 1936, ('Nor bloyz di skirde hey avu ikh lig, /Dermont mikh on mayn goyrl on an eygn'), and in the description of the boat incident, quoted above.

where the 'gefarn' and the 'krigerishe erd' represent the present, which in his imagination the *ikh* can leave to fly into the past and recreate the lost world. This recreated inner truth is denoted by the term 'legende', another key word connected with the poetic process.¹⁵ In this case the 'legende, vos ikh hob geshpunen' is the *poeme* 'Shtern in shney', which evokes different aspects of the environment of his childhood which have remained his 'goyrl', his 'benkshaft', his 'iluziye'. In 'Shtern in shney', therefore, he is putting the Siberian experience into the context of memory, and temporarily conjuring it up from the past; it is the origin of his poetic inspiration, as the first poem shows; the *poeme* which follows does not however recreate the *process* of awakening poetic inspiration, as 'Sibir' does, but tends rather to evoke the 'farloyrenem gan-eydn' which Yanasovitsh and Steynberg saw as being the subject matter of 'Sibir'.

This distinction in emphasis can be clearly seen in the poems 'Ovntbroyt'- (which corresponds thematically to 'In khuter', the first poem of 'Sibir'), - and 'Derkentenish', the third poem of both works. Ostensibly the poems 'Ovntbroyt' and 'In khuter' are very similar: they describe the winter sunset, and the frozen river, then moving into the hut, evoke the cosy atmosphere and focus on two main images connected with the father: his cutting and sharing out the bread for supper, and his violin music. There are many shared images: the 'oysgeshvigene

¹⁵. The term appears in 'Arum di fayern' (PV1, p.37), 'Mayn tate un ikh' (PV1, p.77), and, - in conjunction with the verb 'vebn' instead of 'shpinen'- in 'Lomir vebn di legende', the poem with which Sutzkever ends the collection 'Blonder baginen' in the Poetishe verk (PV1, p.89). The image is taken up again in Sibir, in the poem 'Fayerdiker pelts', where the frost writes 'shney-legendes' on the skull of the poet.

kupoln', the phrase 'Vays vi di levone iz der tate', and the image of the wolf which is part of the Siberian scene. Within this framework, however, the poems achieve radically different ends. The vehicle of this difference is the *ikh*-centredness of 'In khuter', and the symbolic weight of the imagery, which in 'Ovntbroyt' is largely naturalistic or atmospheric.

The first two lines of 'Ovntbroyt' create a slightly hackneyed impressionistic picture of the remembered winter scene:

Zunfargang bagist mit gold dem gegnt.
Vinter. Frost sibirisher. [...]

In the poem 'In khuter', these lines have become

Zunfargang oyf ayzik bloe vegn.
Zise dremlfarbn in gemit.

The colour blue is a recurring symbolic motif in 'Sibir' and throughout Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry: and in the poem 'In khuter' it is repeated in the second stanza - the blueness which suffuses the father's face - then later as an attribute of the North Star, so that the Siberian landscape, the father and the North Star are symbolically linked through the colour blue: they are all origins of his poetic inspiration in the later *poeme*. The second difference in the poems' opening lines is the subjective image of the second line of 'In khuter', which presents the impression filtered through the 'gemit' of the *ikh* from the beginning. This kind of variation in the imagery continues in the two other main images of the first stanzas. 'Ovntbroyt' has :

Letste shtraln-opfliyers - vi toybn,
Shnaydn durkh dem himl.

This is a fairly conventional nature-simile, used to create atmosphere. In 'In khuter' the doves of the earlier simile have become real doves, but with a subjective symbolic function:

Oyfn pitsl boydem vorkn toybn,
Vorkn oys mayn ponem.

Here is evidence of the mature Sutzkever: the almost prosaic description is suddenly transformed by a totally unexpected image: the doves creating, through their cooing, the face of the poet. In the dove-image here, and in the final line of the poem, can be seen the birth of the poet through the dove-muse.¹⁶

The subjectivity of 'In khuter' in contrast to the descriptiveness of 'Ovntbroyt' can be seen in the final image of their first stanzas:

Unter oysgeshvigene kupoln -
Ligt a velt in funkenshney farveyt. ('Ovntbroyt')

Unter oysgeshvigene kupoln
Blit a velt - a kind fun zibn yor. ('In khuter')

This change exemplifies the difference in perspective and intention. In the first version the poet evokes a memory of the real world which so moved him as a child. In the second version the *ikh* fills his vision, so that world and self are equated, the term 'velt' gaining the symbolic, *ikh*-centred meaning of the sphere of consciousness of the self, rather than simply the described natural environment. From now on in the second *poeme* the perspective is almost entirely that of the seven year-old; the process of self-discovery is seen from the point of view of the child who was; this is not memory, but recreation. This is why 'Sibir' does not have a framework of 'dermonung' like 'Shtern in shney'.

¹⁶. Further justification for giving this symbolic weight to the image can be found in the meaning of the face as the true self in Sutzkever's poetry. In 'Dos fareybikte ponem' (PV1, p.163), for example, it is the face of the poet which the serpent desires: 'Gib mir dayn ponem tsurik, du gan-eyndik yingl!' Later, in 'Oytoportret' (1951) through catching sight of his face in a mirror, the poet recognises his inner guilt. The face in the mirror later becomes the twin brother, or *alter ego*, as in the poem-cycle 'Tsviling-bruder' from 1984 (Ts-b, pp.196-202).

The second stanza of 'Ovntbroyt' evokes the family scene, with small naturalistic details adding to the warm protective atmosphere:

Zitst men itst farton baym ovntbroyt

[...] Baym ployt
Havket der getrayer hunt.

Esn mir geheym dem ovntbroyt...

In the second version, 'In khuter', all these external details are replaced by intensely subjective imagery which conveys the developing perception of the child. The frost on the window-panes, a feature of the adult poet's memory in 'Ovntbroyt', which was described by the simile 'Durkh di shayblekh, vi durkh bloye keytn, / Faln royte dimentn' becomes, in the poem 'In khuter', mysterious *reality*, because it is seen through the eyes of the child :

Bliyen fun di shotn-aplen - kveytn,
Kvekzilberne kveytn on a shier

Many of the similes of 'Shtern in shney' become metaphors in 'Sibir'. The simile is the tool of the adult who is able to see relationships, the metaphor conveys the perception of the child to whom his own perception of a thing and the reality of it are one.

The 'men' and the 'mir' which are part of the descriptive framework of 'Ovntbroyt' are omitted in the second version, because the only other human figure which is central to the theme of the child's developing poetic consciousness is the father. Thus the two incidents connected with him are imbued with a symbolism in the second version which is absent from the first. The two actions of the father in both versions are his cutting and serving the bread for the supper, and his violin playing. The first of these actions, which gives the earlier poem its title,

has an inherent symbolic colouring: bread is the essential element of life, and the provision of it by the father is a universal image of love and caring towards the child. The atmosphere of protectiveness which prepares for the central image of the bread in 'Ovntbroyt' is achieved by the evocation of the family sitting down together, the firelight reflected in the frost, (conveyed by the image of 'royte dimentn'), and the faithful dog outside. These images reflect the feelings of the child:

[...] Es tshatet
Mayn farbenkte oyg in yedn ort.

The same words are used in both versions to describe the father: 'Vays vi di levone iz der tate', but in 'Ovntbroyt' they are followed by a line which jars somewhat because of the inappropriateness of its overt symbolism in the context of the otherwise naturalistic scene: 'S'broyt, vos er tseshnaydt- dos iz zayn vort.'

There is no preparation for this symbolic insistence, and it is not developed any further, for the stanza returns to a nostalgic evocation of the family eating the bread in serene harmony:

Er tseteylt dos shvartse broyt mit libshaft
Yedern zayn kheylek. Shtum. Fartroyt.
Un in din-geloyterter farknipshaft
Esn mir geheym dem ovntbroyt...

Within this dreamy atmosphere of loving family life, the bald statement that the bread is the father's word seems to come from a different register: it is as if the poet is reaching towards a symbolic meaning which he has not totally realised in this first version.

We have seen that the differences in the first stanzas of the two *poemes* show the increased centrality of the *ikh* and the intensified symbolic colouring of the imagery in the second version. Within this framework, the incident with the father fulfils

quite naturally in the second version the symbolic function which was grafted onto it rather arbitrarily in the first version. Similarly, in the poem 'In khuter', the beautiful image of the father's whiteness emerges naturally from the moon-imagery of the lines preceding it:

'In di vinklen opgelosht mate
Blozt arayn levone ir geblend.
Vays vi di levone iz der tate,
Shtilkeyt funem shney - oyf zayne hent.'

Here can be perceived the origin of the whole network of metapoetic imagery of moon/snow/*shtilkeyt* which permeates Sutzkever's poetry from now on; the father is linked in the child's consciousness with the whiteness and stillness of the snow: later in the poem, as the poet explores the father's role in the development of his poetic consciousness, the moon, whiteness and stillness become independent images of the poetic consciousness, and remain so throughout his work, constantly changing and developing new dimensions.

The organic development of this network of images is echoed in the much subtler symbolism of the bread, which in the second version is implied rather than bluntly stated. On the one hand, the somewhat sentimental 'Er tseteylt dos shvartse broyt mit libshaft' of 'Ovntbroyt' has been replaced by the more concrete and vivid perception 'Er tseshnaydt dos shvartse broyt mit blankn/Rakhmimdikn meser', and at the same time the symbolism of bread is given a subtler and more personal implication:

Un mit nay tseshnitene gedanken
Tunk ikh inem zalts dem tatns broyt.

The conception is deepened by the addition of the salt imagery; through the proverbial bread and salt, essential elements of life, the child is nourished by the father. The transference from the physical to the spiritual realm is effected by

the equation of the freshly cut bread with the 'nay tseshnitene gedanken' which inspire the child at this moment. The father is now the source of physical and spiritual nourishment. It is clear that what in 'Ovntbroyt' was an atmospheric evocation of a childhood memory, punctuated by one arbitrary statement of its symbolic import, has become in the later poem the realisation of its inner meaning for the development of the *ikh*.

The significance of the figure of the father is further developed in 'In khuter' through the description of the fiddle playing. The child's perception of the mystery of the music is evoked by the line 'A shotn nemt arop/ S'fidele fun vant', in contrast to the factual 'Der tate nemt arop [...]' of the first version. The contrasts continue in the following lines of both versions:

[...] Er shpilt. Vi perlmutter
Zetst der frost zikh oyfn fentster op.
Un er shpilt...s'tsefliyen zikh di klangen
Punkt vi feygl, iber balkn, dil.
(Vorkn nokh in hartsn, vi gefangen
Volt ikh es oyf eybik) Nokhdem - shtil.
Bloyz in droysn veynen fayfioln. ('Ovntbroyt')

'[...] Un din-din-dine
Shneyenklangen faln oyf mayn kop.
Shtil. Dos shpilt der tate. Un di klangen -
Oysgravirt in luftn, vi in frost
Zilberlekh fun otem blo tsehangen
Iber shney levonedik baglozt. ('In khuter')

In the earlier poem the effect of the music on the natural world is evoked in two similes ('Vi perlmutter', 'Punkt vi feygl'), and in the Romantic conceit of the wind as weeping flutes: thereby the poet steps between the experience and his childhood self, interpreting for the reader, and again setting the experience firmly in the realm of memory, through the wistful aside: 'Vorkn nokh in hartsn, vi gefangen/ Volt ikh es oyf eybik'. In the poem 'In khuter' the sounds take on a mysterious

life of their own. This is achieved through the fusion of snow (linked in the previous stanza to the hands of the father) and the sounds; the whole image is more immediate, physical and imbued with greater evocative force, and unites the deep emotional-aesthetic influence of the father with the symbolism of snow. The sounds of the music have *become* patterns engraved on the air (linking his perception of the music with the experience of the frost on the windows in the first stanza), and their impenetrably mysterious quality is evoked by the extended image of the last three lines.

In both poems the image which follows is that of the wolf, but whereas in the first poem the wolf is out in the wild, and serves purely to provide atmospheric colouring (the contrast between the wild outside on the one hand, and the protective warmth of the house, with the harmony of the father's music, on the other), in the later poem it takes on a much richer symbolic function:

Durkh an ayzik ongepeltstn shaybl
Shmekt a volf tsum fleysh fun der muzik.

As in Chagall's illustration of this poem,¹⁷ the wolf, the embodiment of the wild forces of the world outside, is threatening to invade the warmth of the hut, which is dominated by the protective and inspirational figure of the father. The influence of the outside world on the poet is the theme which develops in the next two poems of 'Sibir' when the child emerges from the interior of his home, so that the penetration of the wolf into the hut is a significant image. Further, the wolf is drawn to the music, which is described as 'fleysh'; this exemplifies again the physicality of Sutzkever's imagery, which breaks down the bound-

17. In the 1953 Jerusalem edition of the *poeme*.

ary between the physical and the spiritual. As the sensitive organ of hearing in the human being enables him to perceive sounds, so the wolf, through its most sensitive organ, scent, can perceive the music, which for him, therefore, is meat. The physicality of this image surely links the music to the bread of the previous stanza, confirming the father's identity as a provider of nourishment.

The final stanza of 'Ovntbroyt' ends with a variation of the couplet which ended its first stanza:

Unter *oysgeshvigene* kupoln
Shlaykht der vint mit a kinzhal in moyl...

This is an atmospheric intensification of the first version of these lines, providing a vivid evocation of the wild Siberian landscape, from which the child is protected, but confirms the largely descriptive nature of the poem. The later poem returns instead to the dove image of the first stanza, which, taken in conjunction with the other imagery of father, bread and music, begins to be invested with the symbolic meaning which will culminate in 'Ode tsu der toyb':

Shtil. In undzer toybnshlak a taybl
Pikt zikh fun an eyele, pik-pik.

The repetition of the word 'shtil' links this couplet with the line 'Shtil. Dos shpilt der tate [...]'; the birth of the dove thus is linked by the poet with his father's music, and the symbolic significance of the dove becomes more pronounced in the central seventh poem of 'Sibir' - 'Tsum tatn'.

The poem 'Ovntbroyt', therefore, begins with a nostalgic evocation of family life in the poet's childhood environment, emphasising the emotional life of the child within the family, whereas the first poem of 'Sibir' is the beginning of a symbolic journey towards self discovery, in which the *ikh* stands in the

centre, and only those aspects of his environment which help him to explore this development are included; these are imbued with a symbolic function which intensifies throughout the *poeme*.

In 'Shtern in shney', the poem 'Ovntbroyt' is directly followed by 'Derkentenish'; in 'Sibir', the one-stanza 'Far tog' separates 'In khuter' from the revised 'Derkentenish'. 'Far tog' is an evocation of the moment of dawn, already a recurrent theme in the early poetry. The poet evokes the interplay of light and dark, of the visible and the invisible, and of presence and absence:

Di simonim-lapes, vos a khaye
 Hot farzeyt vi royzn inem shney,
 Ven di zun, an umbakante, naye,
 Hot derlangt ir shpizikn geshrey -
 Zenen koym bagildt fun oybn. Untn
 Fintstert nokh. Di vortslen funem vald
 Kritsn mit di tseyen in tife gruntn.
 Funem hund, geshpant in shlitn, pralt
 Lebediker damf. Der damf bagegnt
 Shtaygndik a koymenroykh vos helt
 Un a mentshn-otem fun der gegnt -
 Biz in luft blaybt hengen a getselt.

Sutzkever creates a landscape of absence - it is a moment in which objects are either not yet there, or no longer there: the animal whose footprints are in the snow has gone; the poet refers to the sun's fierce daytime 'geshrey' from the day before, when the animal made its footprints, but the sun has not yet reappeared to illuminate them. The roots are hidden underground. The final image of fusion of the human and the animal is also strangely unreal; though the dog 'geshpant in shlitn' is a real component of the scene, the two human manifestations are curiously abstract and anonymous: the smoke from the chimney and the disembodied 'mentshn-otem fun der gegnt'. The poem ends with this mysterious fusion of the three vapours caused by the human

being and the animal, suspended in the air, in the strange tent image.

As in other poems of this earlier period, elements of the landscape are invested with anthropomorphic qualities: while the animals and humans are absent or abstract, the sun has a 'shpizikn geshrey' and the roots gnash their teeth. The almost uncanny feeling of suspended animation reveals the boy's sensitive perception of the mystery of the universe, which leads into the opening question of the next poem.

This poem, 'Derkentenish', is an important landmark in the development of the child's consciousness. The same incident serves as a basis for the two versions of the poem, but there are significant differences in the meaning attached to the incident, and in its presentation. In the earlier version, a prosaic and rational explanation is given for the child's question:

O, vu endikt zikh di velt? - Farplontert
Bin ikh inem shney und zukh basheyd.

The mode of questioning is casual, stemming from the child's being lost in the snow, whereas in the second version it is given much greater urgency, and the 'filosofish', though slightly self-ironical, frees the question from the circumstantial and denotes it as proceeding purely from the child's need to know:

'Zog, vu endikt zikh di velt, o, tate?!'
Filosofish mon ikh a basheyd.

The answer in both cases is that of the parent absent-mindedly inventing an answer to appease an importunate child, but in the second version, the precise nature of the answer makes it more easily verifiable, thus giving the child's search a greater dramatic tension:

Zogt der tate: vu der horizont dort
Hinter barg granitenem fargeyt... ('Shtern in shney')

Kumt an entfere: 'Hinter yener khate
Oyfn bargshpits, vu di zun fargeyt.' ('Sibir')

In the second version of the poem the child is *conscious* of the significance of the question; his quest is to 'onyogn di shkie' and the powerful emotion which the moment occasions is conveyed by the phrase 'Oybn, durkh a zilbernets fun trern'. In contrast the reaction to the father's information in the first version is the laconic 'Oyb azoy badarf men/ Es aleyn a kuk ton'. The child's consciousness of the significance of his quest is astonishingly clear at the end of the first stanza of the second version; he is searching for revelation, and sees himself as part of a long chain of seekers:

Baym Sibirer got di oygn monen,
S'zol nit zayn mayn benkenish umzist.
Ale yorn biz mir, yor-milyonen,
Tsaplen fun di shneyen: zay bagrist.

It should be remembered that this *poeme* was being revised in the traumatic ghetto-situation, and the motif of snow is of great symbolic importance in such poems of the ghetto period as 'Tsum kind' (PV1, p.278), 'Farfroyrene yidn' (PV1, p.362), and 'Zing nit keyn troyeriks' (PV1, p.352). At this time too, the poet was struggling towards a new definition of his role as a poet, in which the idea of the great 'golden chain' of the generations was to play an important part. In this vision of the millennia greeting him and welcoming his poetic quest, we see a manifestation of the same existential struggles and their solution which are at the core of the collection 'Di festung'. Furthermore the concept of the 'Sibirer got' underlines his vision of his poetic quest as being touched by the divine, a position which Sutzkever had already arrived at in poems of 'Valdiks', but which achieves maturity and greater inner conviction in the poems of 'Di festung', and 'In fayer-vogn'. The inspiration of his poetry is

here seen as the 'Sibirer got' and later in 'Sibir' as the snowman, and the North Star.

The closing lines of the first stanza of the earlier version of 'Derkentenish', by contrast, reveal that what has become in the second version a moment of decisive existential significance began as simply the memory of a child's wonder:

Kh'hob tsum ershtn mol gepruvt derkonen
Dem arum - tseloykhtener bashaf.

In their second stanzas the fundamental differences between the two poems become even more distinct. The first version is a description of a painful childhood experience, as the child, reaching the summit of the hill, realises that his father's information is incorrect, and that his desire to see the end of the world cannot be fulfilled. His reaction is one of rage and disappointment, both at the father's deception of him and at the foiling of his desire:

[...] Es tsit di velt zikh vayter...
Kalter shoyder. Foystndike hent.
Himlrand - a tsankendiker shayter -
Maylnvayt iz. *S'iz nito keyn end.*
Fal ikh oyf der erd an opgenarter.

Comfort comes from the snow, which affords him a kind of revelation ('oyfshtralong'), but in the final line of the poem, the child remains passively lying on the ground:

S'vert mayn tsar fun yedn shney derhert.
Un in oyfshtralong in nisht dervarter
Blayb ikh azoy lign oyf der erd.- - -

The formative moments in both poems are similar: namely the decisive moment - surely a universal childhood experience - when a child discovers that the parent is not infallible. The emphasis of the first version, however, contrasts strongly with the quasi-mystical transfiguration which is the climax of a totally different interpretation of the incident in the second version. In

the latter, the first two lines of the second stanza show the *ikh* distancing himself from the father, and turning his face towards the sun:

Hinter mir - a pintele a tate.
S'harts, der zun antkegn, in galop.

The father who had filled the cabin with his presence as physical and emotional provider, has receded to a dot *behind* him as the *ikh* climbs towards the infinite, so that the symbolic significance of the incident is already present in the first lines of the stanza. Thus, the discovery of the world's infinity produces, not disappointment as in the earlier version, but ecstasy in the face of the awesomeness of the universe, which emerges much more strongly here:

Mayne lipn tsiyen zikh tsum shayter,
Vos bashaynt dem voyendikn dno.

Here lips, again a metapoetic symbol, are drawn to the fire which is the sun. Throughout 'Sibir' fire and the sun are images of his poetic experience in the Siberian landscape.

This journey of discovery has led him away from his father and into the realm of the infinite, and everything is irrevocably changed through this experience:

Tatinke! Es tsit di velt zikh vayter,
Un keyn sof - nito, nito, nito.
Tate hert nit. Shtern faln grine.
Tate zet nit, az fun heler hoyt
Ver ikh fun a yingl - a lavine,
Vemen likht un vunder hot geboyt.

Here the *ikh* realises with loving wistfulness that he has left his father behind and reached realms which the father cannot attain. This is conveyed by the affectionate diminutive 'Tatinke!' through which the father, in a significant reversal, becomes the inexperienced child. The father is unable to see and comprehend the child's transfiguration ('Tate hert nit [...]/'

Tate zet nit [...]'). The image of the 'lavine' is taken up later at the climactic point in 'Ode tsu der toyb' where the *ikh* comes face to face with the spirit of poetry: in both instances it seems to denote the elemental power and energy of the poetic impulse.

Thus Sutzkever has transformed the incident from 'Shtern in shney' into an experience of multi-layered symbolism. While taking as its root, like the earlier version, that moment in childhood when the child takes its first adventurous steps away from the protective presence of the parent and becomes aware of the parent's fallibility, the second version uses this to explore symbolically the child-poet's moment of awareness that he has transcended the confined reality of the father's world, has spritually outgrown his father, and has entered an independent existence as a poet, face to face with the infinite. This is not to diminish the influence of the father-figure, whose fiddle, the symbol of the child's earliest inspiration, pervades Sutzkever's poetry, and the relationship with his father is evoked in two further poems from the first half of 'Sibir', and throughout his work.¹⁸ This poem represents, however, a decisive moment of spiritual independence and poetic awareness.

'Derkentenish' is followed in both versions by poems which explore the sensations of the *ikh* in the Siberian countryside. 'Shtern in shney' has two, and 'Sibir' three of these nature poems, which are all set in the frozen winter landscape. 'Shney'

¹⁸. Sutzkever's recent poem, 'Tsum tatns yortsayt', published in Di goldene keyt, 130, (1990), 5, takes up again the motifs of the Siberian snow, 'shtilkeyt' and the father's fiddle; the seventy-seven year-old poet speculates about meeting his father again after death.

from the first version, and 'Vi a shlitn in farbenktn klingen' from the second, are essentially the same poem, which opens with an image denoting for the first time the activity of the writer:

Oyfn shney dem dimentn, bloen,
Shrayb ikh mitn vint vi mit a pen.

His poetic activity is still figurative,- his pen is the wind, which leaves no trace in the snow - and the central idea of the poems is the theme of life as a journey: the boat which Sutzkever used to evoke the birth of his poetic inspiration in Siberia has become the sledge, travelling across the frozen landscape:

Vi a shlitn in farbenktn klingen
Glekt do mayn lebn din un lang
Durkhn ovntstep [...].

The importance of the journey motif is emphasised in the second version by the change of title.

Two other interesting changes reinforce the increasing inwardness of theme and imagery in 'Sibir'. After the initial idea of writing with the wind on the snow, the first version of the poem has

Durkhgeloykhtn bin ikh mit di toyen
Fun zayn troym. Ikh hob nokh nisht gezen
Aza likhtikeyt, vos ken batsvingen
Ale elnt-shotns fun gedank.

In two important respects the second version differs. Still speaking of the snow, the poet says:

Blondzhe oyf di glimerdike dnoen
Fun zayn kindhayt. Hob nokh nit gezen
Aza loyterkeyt, vos kon batsvingen
Ale elnt-shotns fun gedank.

The earlier vague and sentimental image has been given greater immediacy, together with that element of the unexpected which characterises Sutzkever's images: the *ikh* is wandering in the depths, not of his own, but of the *snow's* childhood. Further,

the quality of the snow which vanquishes the 'elnt-shotns' is not its brightness, but its purity. The third alteration is in the description of the moon:

Ayngefroyrn mit der noz arop -
 Di levone ligt - a goldn fligl
 Un a shternband arum dem kop. ('Shney')

Tsugetuliyet mit der noz arop
 Loyert di levone, un tsvey fligl
 Shlogn op. ('Vi a shlitn in farbenktn klingen')

This is the only deviation in the normal metrical pattern of 'Sibir'; the abrupt 'shlogn op', the verb 'loyern' and the mysterious wings, together create the atmosphere of the uncanny which is a frequent feature of Sutzkever's nature imagery. In the second poem, therefore, the poet's life is watched over by the slightly sinister force represented by this image of the moon rather than the bland conventional moon of the first version.

'Fayerdiker pelts' is the first of four poems which occur in 'Sibir' but not in 'Shtern in shney', and like the other three it develops the theme of the child's awakening poetic consciousness through the influence of significant experiences. The evocation of the frozen landscape in this poem introduces elements which were already present in 'Valdiks', and will remain a permanent part of Sutzkever's metapoetic imagery, - metals, rock, diamonds. As in the previous poem, the idea of writing is introduced, in one of Sutzkever's intensely physical images:

Mit zayn diment-pendzl oyf mayn sharbn
 Molt der kinstler frost vi oyf a shoyb
 Zayne shney-legendes ful mit farbn,
 'Shraybt zikh unter' mit gefli fun toyb.

Here is a configuration of significant motifs, which will recur in various forms throughout Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry. The poet sees himself as the passive recipient of impressions, the surface on which the artist draws. But the artist frost is

engraving on his skull like a diamond on a window. This image develops the motif of the works of art made by the frost on the window pane of the hut in the first poem; the child-poet has internalised this motif and now uses it as a conscious image of poetic inspiration. It is at this time that Sutzkever begins to use the skull in the context of poetic creativity, notably in the poem 'Murashke nest' discussed in the previous chapter¹⁹.

The dove is also a direct development of the dove image from the first poem. There the impression made on the child by his environment was felt by him in terms of the dove tracing out his face ('vorket oys mayn ponem'). Here the dove's flight creates the artist's signature to his work of art: the image of the dove has here become more intimately connected with the concept of artistic creativity, which will lead to the identification of dove and muse in the poem 'Tsum tatn' and in Sutzkever's future work. The final significant component of the image is the concept of the frost's creation as 'shney-legendes' which unites the inspirational quality of the snow with the word 'legende' which as early as 1937 had a metapoetic connotation.

In 'Fayerdiker pelts', the *ikh*, having experienced the decisive revelation in 'Derkentenish', now sees himself as a recipient of artistic inspiration. This consciousness is expressed in the child's feeling of kinship with the forces of nature: here this kinship is expressed through his union with the sun:

Zun fargeyt in mir. Nito di zun mer.
Bloyz me zet ir fayerpelts aleyn

19. The skull image is developed in many later poems, notably 'Beakhris hayomim', 1969, (TsP, p.113), and the poem from 1983, 'Dertseyl, vos hostu zen gevolt baym oyfshnaydn a sharbn', (Ts-b, p.167) where the poet perceives the 'finklendikn iker' in the opened skull.

Oyf a langer tsvayg. Un ikh - a shtumer -
 Onton vil im erev zayn fargeyn.

He absorbs the sun into himself, and covers himself with the sun's outer garment, the fiery fur suggested by the frost on the tree illuminated by the setting sun - an image in which the two inspirational poles of fire and ice are fused.

It is significant that the *ikh* sees himself as a 'shtumer', waiting to assume the mantle of the sun. The interplay of 'shtumkeyt' and 'shtilkeyt' is a thread throughout Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry, seen for example in the poem 'Di neshome fun yam', which will be discussed later. The child-poet is 'a shtumer' in that he is still the passive recipient of impressions; his 'writing', as in the previous poem, is as yet 'mitn vint'.

After these two densely textured one-stanza poems, 'In a Sibirer vald' opens out in a more anecdotal, leisurely mode. Very similar in both versions, the poem describes an expedition by the child and his father to the forest to gather wood, the child's feelings and impressions while playing in the wood, and the return journey in the sledge. This is one of the poems of the second version which Glatshteyn specifically criticises. His criticism centres on the tendency to over-refinement and preciousness which he sees in the second version, in contrast to the spontaneity of the imagery in the earlier work. Though there may be some justification for the criticism he makes, at certain places in the work, nevertheless in general his complaint is based on a failure to consider the changed central theme of the second version of the *poeme*. In the poem 'In a Sibirer vald', as in 'Vi a shlitn in farbenktn klingen', the alterations all have significance for the theme of developing poetic consciousness,

and render the events more personal and symbolic. The opening lines of the earlier poem:

Morgnzun iz eybik nay geborn.
Bl ndikt do mit iberlikht dem kant,

become, in the second version:

Yunge zun, vos eybikt nay geborn'
Kaykit zikh in shney mit mir banand.

Here, the intimate relationship of child and sun, the central theme of the previous poem, 'Fayerdiker pelts', is stressed in a playful manner. In the same stanza of the first version, lines six and seven read as follows:

Oykh a hak iz do. S'vibrirt der tog.
Ot vert alts in vayskeyt ayngeshnitn.

In 'Sibir' these lines have been altered to give a much more vivid image:

S'blankt di hak. In flamenshney der tog
Fun geshlayfte zunmesers tsheshnitn.

Here the fusion of fire and snow links the poem with the imagery of 'Fayerdiker pelts'. The image of 'flamenshney' is an example of the fusion of the two poles of snow and fire throughout Sutzkever's work, which is the most strongly petrarchist element in his imagery.

The axe is not just a descriptive adjunct, but is connected in the child's mind with the sharp, shining 'zunmesers', an idea which recurs in the final line of the second stanza: 'Biz I' un fargeyt in tatns hak.' In this way the axe symbolically links the father and the sun, two influences on the child's poetic consciousness.

Stanzas two and three of the first poem have been amalgamated in the revised version, omitting some of the rather indistinct, superfluous imagery, and concentrating on images which link this poem with others in the *poeme*: the howling of the

wolf echoes the wolf in the first poem, 'In khuter', and the ringing of the snow 'vi a farfroyr~~n~~ glekl', reminds one of the bells in the earlier image: 'Vi a shlitn in farbenktn klingen/
Glekl~~t~~ do mayn lebn din un lang'.

The third stanza in the second version (the fourth stanza in the first version) contains several important changes. In the first version, the poet describes the journey home, where the beauty of the scene so moves the child that he wants to cry:

[...] An oysgeshr~~e~~y
Rayst mayn halz oyf. S'vilt zikh gor tseveynen...

Similar emotions are expressed in the second version, but conveyed in images which evoke much more consciously the fusion between self and nature which has been seen as one of the impulses of the early poems. The soul of the poet is separated from his body and remains in the wood:

Blondzhet mayn neshome nokh in vald.
Un der vald~~t~~ a guter, a baruter,
Varemt zi in buzem un bashtralt.

The personification of nature, and its relationship with the *ikh* are also present in the first version:

Boygn zikh di shtayfe zilberkroynen
Mit gezang tsu mir.

This idea is transformed in the later version of the poem:

Nemen shtern mit gezang mikh kreynen,
Shtern oyfgeblozene in vint!
Un lekoved shtern vilt zikh v~~e~~ynen...

This is an intensified version of the earlier anthropomorphic idea of the trees bending towards the *ikh* - in the second version he sees the stars crowning him with song, that is, granting him the gift of poetry. It is this vision which causes him to weep, rather than the rather vague romantic feelings of the first version.

The final interesting change of emphasis is in the role of the father in the two poems. In the first version there are two vivid and touching moments of interaction between child and father. In the third stanza, the child, alone in the wood, is on the brink of being absorbed into the forces of nature and understanding their mystery, when he suddenly sees his father:

Kh'zap in zikh arayn mayn eygn ekho
 Fun der shvaygenish...Nor kh'ze shoy'n geyn
 Durkhn vald mayn tatn, in shtivales,
 Mit dem holts farbundn oyf a shtrik.
 Loyf ikh tsu. Er lakht. Di tsvaygn-khval'yes
 Shitn op undz beydn mit muzik.

This natural incident rings more true than the somewhat artificial encounter with the fox which replaces it in the second version; this difference is perhaps an example of what Glatshteyn was criticising in the second version. In the earlier poem the father emerges as a real man, and the love between father and son is strongly conveyed, as it is in the final lines of the first version, which ends with the father's affectionate words as he wakes the sleeping child:

'Kind mayns, itster shpring arop fun shlitn,
 Vayl mir zenen inderheym - in tol.'

In the second version the child also hears 'dem tatns kol', but the father does not come into view; he is replaced by the child's imaginative vision of the moon accompanying them home in the sledge. The father as a person is vividly depicted in the first version, but apart from the short sentence at the beginning, in the second version he is indicated only by his axe, and his voice. These changes spring from the symbolic separation in the poem 'Derkentenish': so that in the second version of 'In a Sibirer vald', as in the two preceding poems, the poet is recreating his gradual independence and awareness of his poetic relationship with nature, and the father is taking on ever more

figurative significance in relation to the *ikh* as a poet, rather than as a real father to a real son. The incident from the first version, where the *ikh*, about to be absorbed into the wood, returns to the protection of his father, is reversed in the second version, when although physically the child is being taken home under the protection of the father, in fact the most real part of him, his soul, is still in the wood, which is described with the attributes of a father, ('Un der vald a guter, a baruter,/ Varent zi in buzem un bashtralt'), so that, symbolically, the wood has taken over the role of his flesh-and-blood father.

The foregoing analysis reveals that even where small alterations are made to poems, they serve to intensify the theme of awakening poetic consciousness. While in 'Shtern in shney' the two poems of winter landscape evoke the sensitivity of the child to nature, the three poems which occupy the same position in 'Sibir' investigate, in the light of the altered significance of the poem 'Derkentenish', the developing independence of the *ikh* and his increasing awareness of his special poetic identity. This interpretation highlights the special importance of the poem 'Tsum tatn' which is in a central position in 'Sibir'.

The single stanza of 'Tsum tatn' is in a sense the culmination of 'Derkentenish':

Tate, nokhn shlitn mit dayn oren
 Nokhgelofn bin ikh dir, kedey
 Ontsuyogn ergets dayn zikorn
 Mit a toyb in buzem vays vi shney.
 Ven es hot a khuter dir a nayem
 Oysgehakt a hartsklapiker lom,
 Un farshlungen hot dikh bald a thom,
 Vu du finklst unter ayz adayem -
 Hob ikh dort araynfaln gevolt!
 Nor mayn toyb iz demolt grod farfloygn,
 Ovntzun bakreynt mit vaysn gold,

Un aroyf tsum lebn mikh getsoygn...

Again, Chagall's illustration perfectly captures the symbolism: father and son are fused in a 'playing-card' figure, with the father pointing downward, and the son, his face alight with surprised joy, upright, the rays of the sun touching his face, and the dove black against its gleam, while in the background the 'shliten' which represents his life floats through the air. In this poem the dove has attained its full symbolic significance; as the *ikh* runs after his father's coffin, an action which represents the poet's desire to capture his memory of his father ('Ontsayogn ergets dayn zikorn'), the dove is in his bosom, and at the decisive moment, when the temptation to follow his father into the earth becomes very strong, the dove flies up, drawing him back to life. The dove is now no real-life bird, but has become his muse; by following it, he is liberated finally from the child's dependence on the father, and the dead father takes on the symbolic inspirational role which he retains, often represented by the motif of the fiddle, throughout Sutzkever's creative life. This enduring role is indicated in this poem by the lines describing the father under the earth: 'Vu du finklst unter ayz adayem'.

It may well be that this vision of the father under the ice is the main source of the prevalent imagery of buried treasure signifying true, everlasting reality, and widely used in Sutzkever's metapoetic poems. The imagery of burial takes on a particular significance in the poem 'Tsum kind' which can be seen as directly linked with 'Tsum tatn'. In the light of this powerful vision of the father sparkling under ice, the emotional force which the image of Siberia exerted on the poet can be more fully comprehended.

This poem is the decisive turning point: the emotions of the child draw him down to the father, to the realm of death; his poetic muse draws him upward, to the realm of life and poetry, symbolised here in the fusion of dove and sunlight. The dove image has developed organically from the real 'taybele' of 'In khuter' which already was used as a poetic symbol in the idea of the dove tracing out the face of the *ikh*; the metapoetic significance became stronger in 'Fayerdiker pelts', when the artist frost signed his name on the poet's face 'mit gefli fun toyb', and now the dove reaches its full stature as independent symbol. Thus when the birth of the dove/muse is evoked in 'Ode tsu der toyb', the setting is the Siberian childhood, but the dove has its full symbolic value from the beginning, being, not a real bird but a creature born from an angel's wing.

The symbolic weight of 'Tsum tatn' emerges even more clearly if the treatment of the dove-image and the father's death in the earlier *poeme* is considered. The poem 'Toybn' is one of the poems of 'Shtern in shney' in which the *ikh* reminds the reader that he is looking back to events of his childhood which are in the past. The doves *now* in Vilna remind him of this vanished childhood and act as a catalyst to unleash these memories:

Yung bin ikh. Nisht lang fun step gekumen.
 Tate-mame-mayne - shney un vint;
 Kh'hob di kushn zeyere farnumen
 Vi dem flater ayern atsind.
 Kh'leyen aykh, o, lebedike verter
 Inem bukh fun zilbernem arum.

The idea of poetic inspiration is present in the equating of the doves with 'lebedike verter', and in the second stanza this is developed through the idea of the poet's happiness being dependent on his capturing the farthest-away dove; dove, fiddle and sun images fuse in the lines

Un oyf sharfe strunelekh fun shtra^oln,
Flatert ~~di~~^a melod~~eye~~: gli un gloyb!

The poem ends in a self-ironical couplet reminiscent of Heine's *Stimmungsbrechung*. The poet describes how he almost fell off the roof in his attempt to catch the dove:

Sssha. Kh'bin shier fun dakh aropgefaln,
Nor ikh hob gekhapt di vaytste toyb- - -

In Heine's poetry the satire usually has the final word, whereas in Sutzkever's poem, after the touch of irony, the vision of the poet capturing his muse is triumphant.

In this poem, therefore, the idea of the dove as the poet's muse is vividly presented, but from a different perspective: the nostalgia for his old home, aroused through the doves, makes of them *now*, at the time of writing the poem, his inspiration. In 'Sibir' the image of dove as muse develops organically from his childhood perceptions *then*, so that the dove/muse is one of the key motifs which are woven into the whole fabric of the *poeme*.

'Der tate shtarbt', which appears in 'Shtern in shney' after the two poems 'Zey' and 'Tropns blut', dealing with the child's experience of war, is a poem of great delicacy and beauty, where the poet evokes his father's dying moments from the child's perspective:

Un er redt tsu mir mit libn shmeykhl
Verter umfarstendlekhe. Ikh lig
Shvaygik oyfn dil.

Entering into the feelings of his father, he achieves insight into the experience of dying itself:

S'faln ale farbn op. Ayede
Zun hot hinter zikh a vistn thom.

Zayne tife oyern farnemen
Dem geroysh fun leben, vos tsebindt
Ale heysfarflokhtene geknupn.

The moment of death is rendered by various images which in earlier poems were connected with the father, as if they were

flashing before the dying man's inner eye at the last instant, and the last line, cut off abruptly, and followed by lines of dashes, most movingly evokes the end:

Un der vald, vi fun a shverer keyt,
 A tsereytster volf, hot zikh gerish
 Fun di vortslen - - - - -
 - - - - -

The poem stands among Sutzkever's fine poetic achievements, but for the purposes of this study it is important to note that it does not have the symbolic function which the poem 'Tsum tatn' has in the second version, but exists for itself as a moving evocation of an intense childhood experience. In contrast to 'Tsum tatn', the poems 'Der tate shtarbt' and 'Toybn', are not woven into the symbolic fabric of the *poeme*, nor are their positions in the work essential to the development of its theme.

After the turning point of 'Tsum tatn', the theme of the evolving poetic *ikh* is explored in 'Sibir' through significant nature imagery interwoven with encounters with three figures, or groups of figures, which influence the development of poetic consciousness. The poems 'Irtish' and 'Sibirer friling' show the process of change from winter to spring. It has been pointed out by Novershtern that the first half of the *poeme* is dominated by winter, which gives way to spring in the second half.²⁰ This is indeed so, and is consistent with the symbolic movement of the work. From the protection of the *interior* of the hut, wholly under the influence of the father, the child moves outward into the snow which is symbolically linked with the figure of the father ('Shtilkeyt funem shney - oyf zayne hent'). His recognition of his selfhood in 'Derkentenish', and the turning point of

²⁰. Novershtern, Catalogue, pp.116-117.

'Tsum tatn' where the father is consigned to the realm of ice, and the *ikh* is drawn upward, leads naturally to the melting of the snow and ice, and to the flowing movement and melody which are connected with the living poetic word. Throughout the second half of the *poeme* the development of the poetic *ikh* is signalled by ever faster and freer movement, out into nature and soaring upward: the flowing river, the camel ride with his friend Tshanguri, the wild dance of the Kirghiz, his soaring above the countryside, and finally his walk with the North Star.

The second version of 'Irtish' contains the promise of the coming of spring; the river asks: '[....] "Vi lang/ Vet der ayz nit shnaydn mayn gezang?" ', and receives the reassurance from the night: '"S'vert shoy n oysgeshmidt a zun!" '.

Before the thawing of the ice and the release of the river's 'gezung' in the poem 'Sibirer friling', however, the encounter between *ikh* and 'shneymentsh' takes place.

The poem 'Shneymentsh' exists on two levels. On the one hand it evokes the child's delight in the snowman, and his fantasy of the snowman coming to life and visiting the child's house; these aspects of the snowman figure are evoked in the picture of the 'Shneymentsh, umgelumper, mit a tepl/ Oyfn kop [...]', and in the child's excited exclamation 'O, vi sheyn du tantst oyf dayne shtoltsn/ Far di shternmentshelekh in tol!'. The figure of the snowman is however more complex, and on another level he is the incarnation of the poet's longing for Siberia. In the address to the snowman he expresses the correlation between his Siberian childhood and his inspiration, and consciously makes of the snowman a symbol:

Shneymentsh, denkmol nokh a kindheyt, hiter
 Fun a kaltn oytser! Nit umzist
 Gleybn gleyb *ikh*: du bist mayn gebiter.

Zay mir, shneymentssh, toyznt mol bagrist!
 Bist der got fun kinder un fun vintn,
 Lebn dir mayn kholem shteyt geknit.
 S'kumen velf in gantsene gezintn
 Un zey rufn: shneymentssh, hit, bahit!
 Eybik bistu shneymentssh, nit tsheshmoltsn
 Vert dayn finkl-pantsør fun krishtol.
 O, vi sheyn du tantst oyf dayne shtoltsn
 Far di shternmentshelekh in tol!

At first the qualities ascribed here to a snowman which in the second stanza is presented as 'umgelumper, mit a tepl/ Oyfn kop', appear exaggeratedly grandiose: 'denkmol', 'gebiter', 'got'- , but taken in conjunction with Sutzkever's words to Katsherginski about the importance of Siberia as the root of his poetry, they give symbolic meaning to the figure of the snowman. All the imagery of the stanza reinforces the idea that this strange figure is the personification of the poet's inspiration. The concept of the 'shney - mentsh' incorporates two ideas: first, snow and ice, of which the symbolic resonance has grown throughout the *poeme* - (his father's hands imbued with the 'shtilkeyt funem shney', the 'shneyenklangen' from his fiddle, his eternal existence under the ice, the poet's life as a sledge leaving tracks in the snow, the 'kinstler frost' writing on the poet's skull, and his own writing on the snow with the wind 'vi mit a pen') - and second, the 'mentsh'. In this way the snowman is a human being freed from mortality, and personifying the eternal: for this reason he is 'denkmol nokh a kindheyt' (an image which resonates in the final line of the *poeme*), 'hiter / Fun a kaltn oytser' (where the treasure can perhaps be interpreted as the father buried under the ice and eternally present to inspire the poet); he is 'der got fun kinder un fun vintn'- an image which combines the child's delight in the snowman with the idea of divinity - ; he is the focus of the poet's longing - 'Lebn

dir mayn kholem shteyt geknit'; and he is eternal - '[...] nit tsheshmoltsn/ Vert dayn finkl-pantser fun krishtol'.

Wolves also play a significant role in this stanza: in the first poem of 'Sibir' the wolf appeared in a symbolic context, in that he was drawn to the music of the father: here the reappearance of the wolves, greeting the snowman as their protector, underlines the metapoetic symbolism of the snowman motif.

Sutzkever's wolf imagery in 'Sibir' is within the mythic tradition of the wild animal tamed by the power of music, as in the Orpheus legend. As we have seen, Sutzkever uses musical concepts - 'klangen' and 'gezang'- throughout his work to denote poetry; the attraction of the wolves to the personification of the poetic impulse here is therefore the equivalent of their being drawn to music in the first poem.

The metapoetic significance of the snowman reaches its climax in the second stanza of the poem, where the *ikh* asks the snowman to be his permanent inspiration. In this stanza aspects of his childhood experience are equated with poetry. The little house has become 'a shtibele fun klangen' and the snow has attained its full symbolism as a quasi-mystical image of poetic inspiration:

Oyb mayn benkshaft iz tsu dir dergangen -
 In di zelbe trit-simonim gey,
 Vestu in a shtibele fun klangen
 Mikh gefinen tfile ton tsu shney.

The underlying idea of this stanza is that the poet, absent in body from the home of his poetic inspiration, should be represented there by the snowman:

Yarshn mayn geveznkeyt fun shtibl
 Un farendik otemen mayn tsayt.

After 'Derkentenish' and 'Tsum tatn', this poem represents a third stage in the poet's deepening awareness of his identity;

significantly, the snowman has replaced the father as the dweller in the little house which is now a 'shtibele fun klängen', the snowman, his poetic inspiration, will always be there even if the *ikh* is physically absent²¹.

From now on the pace of the *poeme* 'Sibir' accelerates: the snow and ice imagery of the first half gives way to movement, fire, dance, and the image of the *ikh* soaring over the countryside. All this represents the poet having *found* his identity, and becoming alive and creative. The imagery of spring and the melting of the ice floes which evoke this awakening in 'Sibirer friling' do not conflict with the seminal imagery of snow and ice as poetic inspiration, or of the snowman as 'eybik'- all these images must be understood as different symbolic means of exploring a complex process of growing experience.

The positioning of 'Shneymentsh' between the poem 'Irtish' which describes the promise of spring, and 'Sibirer friling', its fulfilment, reveals it as a second turning point, after which there is the release of the poetic impulse, evoked in 'Sibirer friling' by the cascading images of movement, colour and music which represent spring:

S'nemen patshn filko~~o~~lirte fligl
 Iber tayge-vildenish in vint.
 S'kvalt un rizlt vi tselozter shpigl
 Mayl nokh mayl un bay di randn grint.
 Nase shneyen zingen a gezegns,
 Fliglen, shpiglen ful mit farb un klang.

This evocation is followed by the vision of the soaring flight of the *ikh*:

Flakert oyf der kindersher farlang
 Ontsuyogn ale vilde shtromen,
 Gebn zikh a foygldikn trog

²¹. This and 'Mayn khaverl Tshanguri' are the only poems in the second version which make allusion to the poet having left this landscape.

Iber mentshn, velder, feldzn, thomen -
 'Tsu dem nayem, yontevdikn tog!²²

It is significant that in 'Sibir' Sutzkever has omitted the first stanza of the earlier version of 'Sibirer friling' which describes the very beginning of spring, choosing instead to plunge straight into the intoxicating movement which formed the second stanza of the original poem, and that he adds an additional stanza to the second version, for this new second stanza develops images which remain throughout Sutzkever's work as key images of poetry: the flowing river, waves, and the sun, in its two moods, fierce and gentle: describing the Irtish, the poet says:

'Kukt er itst mit khval~~e~~ye mit der mindster
 Vi es geyt di velt a karahod
 Rund arum der zun, vos i mit hoze
 Varft zi shverdn, i zi lekt atsind
 S'finklendike ayzlikht fun berioze,
 Vi es lekt zayn tsukerl a kind.'

The concept of the 'karahod', or circular dance, is a recur-

²². This extremely Chagallian vision is taken by that artist as the basis for the two final illustrations, which show the poet soaring over the landscape; in the first, the dove is clutched to his bosom, and in the final illustration the poet is riding on a bird which seems like an amalgamation of the dove and the mysterious bird of the poem 'Kirgizn'; in this way Chagall seems to indicate visually the growing power of the muse, which in the end carries the child-poet along above the universe. Thus the five moments which Chagall chose for his illustrations corroborate my interpretation of the *poeme* and the movement I have discerned in it: as the poetic awareness of the *ikh* increases, so the poem moves from hut and father(1), to the snowy landscape and the symbolic sledge(2), to the decisive upward movement from the dead father, led by sun and dove(3), then into the air holding the dove(4), and finally he is borne through the air, a free and independent poet, by his poetic muse(5). This interpretation of both the poem and the illustrations refutes Shteynberg's contention that Chagall's pictures are 'a bekivndiker kinsterisher disonants tsu Avrom Sutskevers oysdertseyltn sipur-ha-mayse' (Shteynberg, Yoyvl, p.61).

vivid and pointed. Where the first version has 'Freyd, vos iz farvandlt in geveyn', the second has 'Yeder zupt vi bronfn zayn geveyn', and the camel image in the second version has acquired the playful, idiosyncratic element which characterises Sutzkever's animal imagery:

Nor di kemlen ayere di shtume
 Un di shtern - kenen bloyz farshteyn
 Dem batayt fun ayer klängenfiber. ('Shtern in shney')

Un der alter hoyker funem keml
 Shmeykhlt mit di kneytshn, kon farshteyn
 Di muzik fun ayer geln fiber. ('Sibir')

The most significant change however is in the final three lines of the two poems. Both versions express the importance which the encounter with the Kirghiz people has for the *ikh*. The first version of the poem ends:

Ven di tsayt geyt oys vi a lamter - -
 Boyg ikh oftmol zikh tsu aykh ariber
 Un ikh her - - -

There is an inner contradiction between the moment-of-death image of the lamp going out and the 'oftmol' of the second line. In the second version, this problem is resolved and the whole concept given a deeper significance:

Ven mayn lebn tsankt vi a lamter,
 Beyg ikh mayn gezang tsu aykh ariber,
 Efn zibn oyern un - her.

By changing 'di tsayt' to 'mayn lebn' the poet has made the image much more personal, and the substitution of 'mayn gezang' for 'zikh' specifically places the Kirghiz in the realm of *poetic* inspiration; the image is further intensified by the pause before the word 'her'.

The Tshanguri poem is similarly intensified in the second version by alterations to form and imagery. The four stanzas of 'Tshanguri' in 'Shtern in shney' are a leisurely remembrance of a friendship in the childhood past. The second version has been

reduced to three stanzas, the superfluous descriptive or impressionistic material eliminated, and the poem takes the form of a passionate address to the childhood friend; whether he is still alive or has disappeared into the snows of Siberia ('a shneyike geshtalt'), the poet can summon him through the power of the word. The real person who was vividly described with 'Felhut. Sandaln. Pelerine./ Un a lulkele in breytn moyl' in the first version has now become the personification of the noble savage or the mysterious forces of nature:

Fun di volkns flemlt mir dayn tsore
Mit di aplen oysgeborgt in vald.

The camel ride has also changed its emphasis. In the first version it was announced anecdotally: 'S'treft amol: in umgerikhter rege/ Rayt er zikh arayn tsu unz in hoyf'. In the second version it is evoked through the imagination ('Kum tsu raytn vider oyf dayn toybn/ Hoykerdikn keml') instead of being described as a past event, and, more than in the first version, it is a magic journey rather than an impressionistic description of the beauty of the steppes. In its shorter form, the second version concentrates on mysterious anthropomorphic images - the 'geburt fun shotns erev nakht', the 'lange ovnthand' which fuses all forms together in the dusk, - and on concepts which are already laden with metapoetic significance: the blueness of the camel in the evening light, the camel's 'grozn-kholem', and the idea of the word being replaced by 'shtilkeyt':

Oyf di lipn tantst dos letste vort.
In a grozn-kholem knit der keml.
Tunkeler. Un bloyz di shtilkeyt klort.

This is the moment of pure poetry, when the word has been transcended by stillness, and human beings, the animal and nature are in complete harmony.

Even more dramatic are the changes in 'A shayter', called 'Baym shayter' in the second version of the *poeme*. The first version, in three stanzas, is an atmospheric picture of the music and dancing of the Kirghiz people around the night fire. The second version is shortened to two stanzas, and several new aspects emerge. The ambivalent nature of the Kirghiz motif, already seen in the fusion of joy and pain in the poem 'Kirgizn', intensifies through a certain sinister, menacing quality in the scene. The word 'shrek' occurs for the first time as part of the nature description, and the menacing gleam of axes is seen:

Blozt di nakht funand in vald a shayter,
 Vern yunge beymer gro fun shrek.
 Tsvishn knakndike tsvaygn, krayter,
 Faln shotns, vu es blitsn hek.²⁴

Parallel to this uncanny quality in nature, produced by the fire of the Kirghiz, is the increased emphasis on the Dionysian nature of their dance. The second stanza depicts the ecstatic dance of the 'bronzene geshtalt', mounting to a climax of frenetic movement, in which all nature whirls wildly with the intoxicated Kirghiz:

A gedrey tsuzamen mitn vald.
 A gedrey. A poyk. A heyser nign.
 Biz in funken-ritem fun kontsert -
 Nemt di gegnt glokik zikh tsevign,
 Faln letste shtern in di berd.
 Nemen shiker tsutantsn kirgizn
 In a keyt baym flakerdikn tish.

Sutzkever's frequent use of the adjective 'shiker' (or 'begilufn' in 'Ode tsu der toyb') to evoke the Dionysian element in poetic creation probably stems from the young poet's fascination with the intoxicated dance and music of the Kirghiz tribe.

²⁴. 'Shrek' and 'hek' return in the early 1950s as two key words in the opening poem of 'Helfandn bay nakht', where the fascination of the cruel and menacing power of nature emerges as a central aspect of the cycle.

The third major development in the second version of the poem is the important bird image at the end of the first stanza. In the final lines of the first version, the coming of dawn is evoked as a bird with flaming wings:

Ergets, oyf tseglite shtraln-fliglen
Flatert shoyt a blonder inderfri...

The image in the second version may well have suggested itself from the earlier image; but here the bird is not a metaphor for the dawn but a mysterious bird rising out of the darkness, as if born of the fire of the Kirghiz:

Un a foygl in der nakht farzunken -
Kumt tsu fliyen, un zayn fidl brent.

This bird can be seen as a variant of the dove/muse image of the first half of the *poeme*. The burning fiddle links the bird with the image of the father's fiddle, making of it an image of poetic inspiration, which suggests partly the phoenix, partly the firebird of Russian folk tale.

All the new elements of the three Kirghiz poems in the second version, and the fact that they are presented together, mounting to a climax, effect their thematic integration into the whole work: the dance, music and fire of the Kirghiz people epitomise the ecstatic Dionysian element in the poetic consciousness, which the poet, having emerged from the protection of home and father, is free to explore.

After the third Kirghiz poem, both 'Shtern in shney' and 'Sibir' end with one single-stanza poem. In the case of the former *poeme* this is an untitled farewell to his childhood home, contrasting it with the 'vister vayt' which he now inhabits. Through the *poeme* the vanished past has gained new substance and eternity; addressing the home of his childhood, he ends the whole

work with two lines which are similar to the final lines of the later *poeme*, though with significant differences:

Un dayn likht, vos ikh hob oysgehimnt,
Loykhtn zol mir vi a monument.

The final poem of 'Sibir' is addressed to the North Star. Like the snow, stars are a recurrent motif in this work, as throughout Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry. In 'Derkentenish', the realisation 'Tate hert nit' is juxtaposed with 'Shtern faln grine'. The emotion experienced by the child in the forest is seen by him in terms of his response to the stars granting him the gift of poetry:

Nemen shtern mit gezang mikh kreynen,
Shtern oyfgeblozene in vint!
Un lekoved shtern vilt zikh veynen... ('In a Sibirer vald')

The pledge of reawakening spring is a star kissing the wintry river ('Irtish'), and stars fall into the beards of the Kirghiz tribesmen, at the climax of their intoxicated dance.

'Tsofn-shtern' is the climax of the whole *poeme*; here, stars and 'shneymentsh' attain their full symbolic significance, and the key images of snow and fire are fused. The upward and outward movement is complete: beginning with the child in the hut, 'Sibir' ends with the poet walking through the heavens with the North Star:

Tsofn-shtern, shpanst mit mir in eynem,
Kh'bin dayn shneymentsh in a kleyd fun hoyt.

The *ikh* has been transformed into the snowman, the spirit of poetry, but as so often, the true essence is disguised²⁵. The

25. Reference has already been made to the prevalence of imagery of disguise or metamorphosis. A later poem in which the true self is also disguised by 'a fremde hoyt' is the 1984 poem where the *ikh* comes face to face with his 'benkshaft', in the form of a being with a 'blondn kop', to whom he says: 'Batsoygn bin ikh mit a fremder hoyt, mit fremde yorn'. (Ts-b, p.180).

fearful coldness of the snowman-poet, from which all the neighbours flee, represents the isolation which is an intrinsic condition of the poet's existence, as Sutzkever saw it then, still tinged as his view was with the Romanticism of 'Cyprian Norwid'. Here only inanimate nature can bear his presence: 'Bloyz beryozes blaybn lebn ployt.'

The petrarchist fusion of snow and fire, which in the post-war period signifies the integration of his earlier life into his new life in Israel, is here achieved through the oxymoron

Ale zumer shneyt oyf mir a fayer,
Ale vinter glinstu mir un glonst.

In the final four lines of the poem the poetic credo is expressed:

Zol di nit-fargangene dermonung
Tsu dayn bloen shmeykhl zayn gevendt.
Zoln ot di klangen, zol di monung,
Blaybn iber mir a monument.

The important word here is 'monung', a demand for the repayment of something which is owed: the use of this word lays the final stress on the ethical element in his poetic identity: through the formative inspirational experience of his childhood, recreated in 'Sibir', he has become a poet, and to be true to this inspiration is his vocation. The solemnity of this calling is signalled by the word 'monument', which echoes his earlier description of the snowman as 'denkmol nokh a kindheyt'. The *poeme* ('ot di klangen'), which represents his faithfulness to his inspiration (to the North Star, which in turn is 'bizn toyt getrayer'), constantly stands over him, reminding him of his vocation. The disparity between the two versions is epitomised by the differences in their final lines: in 'Shtern in shney' the final lines mean merely that the memory of his home will shine like a monument throughout his life. Thus, the ethical dimension

is absent. The earlier poem ends, as it began, as a nostalgic memory of a vanished childhood; the second poem is a recreation of the development of his consciousness as a poet during that period, and a dedication of himself to that vocation.

In the light of the foregoing analysis, it seems clear that the narrative, impressionistic first version of the *poeme*, which evoked the poet's longing for his lost childhood, becomes in 'Sibir' a structured exploration of the growing poetic consciousness, in which motifs and incidents which were primarily anecdotal or atmospheric in the first version realise their inner symbolic potential. It is justifiable therefore to consider the second version as a new *poeme*.

Taken together with 'Epilog tsu Valdiks', it represents the transition to a new stage in his development. The predominantly aesthetic movement inward of 'Valdiks' was questioned to a certain extent in the 'Epilog' where there were signs of the intrusion of outward events, and a slight unease about the poetic vocation. From 1939 onwards, the question facing most European artists, and, most urgently of all, those living in the midst of the horror, was whether it was morally justifiable, or even possible, to attempt to create works of art in the face of the catastrophe which threatened to lay waste the very foundations of culture. Sutzkever's response to this dilemma was twofold: first, a turning in upon himself, to find meaning through the reinterpretation of the Siberian experience, *coupled with* and inseparable from the moving outward again - not to nature this time but to the brutal reality of the ghetto - in order to seek meaning and justification for poetry even in that situation. The result of this latter response is 'Di festung', together with other poems of the years 1939-1945.

The poetic word in the poetry of the war years.

The poems written between 1941 and 1945 have until recently been the best known of Sutzkever's works, and certain problems emerge in attempting to analyse them and integrate them into the poet's *oeuvre*. The main difficulty is the unique nature of such poetry, produced in almost intolerable circumstances throughout the whole period Sutzkever spent in the ghetto and in the woods with the partisans; the very existence of the poems is little short of miraculous¹. This emotional factor invests them with a kind of sanctity which renders dispassionate analysis very difficult, as Dovid Volpe remarks:

M'ken yene lider nit shatsn mit der kriteriye fun kunst
bloyz. Zey zenen fil mer vi dos - zey zenen kunst plus
katastrofe. Beser tsu farshteyn un sharfer tsu derzen zey,
muz men hobn farn oyg dem groylbild fun yener erev-epokhe,
vos iz geshtemplt mit yidish blut.²

Much writing in Yiddish on the poetry of this period has taken the form of emotional panegyric, but several critics have provided perceptive analyses both of individual poems and of the wartime poetry in general. Ruth Wisse's introduction to Burnt Pearls, a selection of Sutzkever's ghetto poems in English translation, concentrates on the 'theme of art as resistance'. She

1. The whole question of the moral or aesthetic acceptability of lyric poetry deriving from images of the Holocaust has of course been debated by many writers. Brian Murdoch's article ('Transformations of the Holocaust', Comparative Literature Studies, 11, no.2, June 1974, 123-150) considers this problem in the light of the adverse criticism of Sylvia Plath for her use of these images. Murdoch sets the Yiddish poetry of the period within the context of the development of Holocaust imagery, focussing particularly on Sutzkever's poem 'A vogn shikh': he cites the fact and the success of Sutzkever's poem as evidence to refute Adorno's and Steiner's fears about the possibility of poetry of the Holocaust.

2. D. Volpe, Lidervelt, p.72.

discusses the actual situations which inspired many of his poems, and the way in which certain images are used to transform these experiences into general statements, stressing the importance of the poems not only as private questioning, but also as 'rallying calls' which inspired the ghetto population, and she ends the article by stressing Sutzkever's sense of poetic mission, which he 'served with priestly devotion'³. Benjamin Harshav's comments touch on the importance of setting the Holocaust poetry within a wider context, which is also the aim of this chapter:

[...] his Holocaust theme gained depth with time, precisely because he was able to confront it from the base of another alternative of Jewish existence. [...] In his world, the Holocaust is part of personal memory, steeped in those two years of hell, but it is never cut off from the larger view of Jewish past and future, as it is with some assimilated writers. The omnipresent, explicit or tacit, coexistence in his poetry of the alternative domains of Jewish history - Vilna, the Bible, Israel, the Destruction, and rebirth - places each theme in a multiple perspective.⁴

Novershtern devotes a section of the catalogue of the Jerusalem exhibition of 1983 to an informative discussion of the ghetto period, giving the historical background, both to the period and to the genesis and publication of the poems, discussing the importance of the chronological presentation and the changes which were made to many of the poems for publication; he pinpoints the constant tension between outside reality and Sutzkever's poetic conviction, and analyses specific poems to illustrate the importance of particular themes and motifs.⁵

³. Ruth Wisse, introduction to Burnt Pearls. Ghetto poems of Abraham Sutzkever, translated by Seymour Mayne, (Ontario, 1981), p.18.

⁴. Benjamin Harshav, 'Sutzkever: Life and Poetry', introduction to A. Sutzkever. Selected Poetry and Prose, translated by Barbara and Benjamin Harshav (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991), p.5.

⁵. Novershtern, Catalogue, pp.128-147.

Essays by David Roskies and Yekhiel Sheyntukh in Yikhes fun lid both take a single poem as a paradigm and analyse it in some detail to reveal its significance in the poetry of the period and in Sutzkever's poetic development⁶. Roskies again uses Sutzkever as an example in Against the Apocalypse, his wider study of Jewish literary response to catastrophe throughout the ages. In the chapter entitled 'The Burden of Memory', he considers Sutzkever as a poet who refused to mythologise the events, but rather took real events and people as his starting point, and 'made Vilna the text, forcing us to look back upon a specific place at a specific time, making each reader a partner in poetic resurrection'. Roskies investigates a number of the poems in order to illustrate the means by which Sutzkever, using reality as his 'touchstone' managed to transcend its brutality in order to 'follow the neoclassical norm, unbending and absolute, with its impossible demands of order and sublimation'.⁷

Rachel Ertel's interpretation of the ghetto experience also focusses on sublimation, and she stresses an idea which is central to this study: Sutzkever's belief in the fusion of all entities and experiences, with the word as a powerful, quasi-corporeal reality:

Il existe donc là une fusion, une coalescence entre le psychique, le biologique et le mot. Face à la mort, dans la mort, un rapport [...] au mot, concret, charnel, s'impose - implacable. Il s'agit du corps à corps avec le mot, au sens littéral du terme. Quand tout échappe, le mot se fait maître du poète. Mais à l'inverse, quand on examine ses manuscrits de l'époque, la lutte du poète avec chacun de ses vocables est semblable à la lutte de Jacob avec l'Ange: l'enjeu - la

⁶. David Roskies, 'Der tsikl fun oyfkum in Sutskevers a getolid' [on the poem 'Tsum kind'], in Yikhes, (pp.243-256), and Yekhiel Sheyntukh, 'Di biografiye fun lid "Der tsirk" ', *ibid.*, (pp.258-279).

⁷. David Roskies, Against the Apocalypse, (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp.227 and 257.

vie et la mort. Pour vivre par le mot qui le possède, le poète doit soumettre le mot.⁸

All the commentaries have in common the underlying premise that these poems do indeed represent a break with his earlier, predominantly aesthetic concerns, but that they should not be viewed in isolation, in that they represent a further stage in his development, and must be seen as part of a progression. Novershtern draws attention to this dual character:

Baym leyenen zey lozt zikh nit funanderteyln dos literarishe verk fun dem meuyemdikn fon oyf velkhn [dos literarishe v rk] iz oysgevaksn. Ober Sutzkever hot zey batrakht nit nor vi a dokument fun yener tsayt nor oykh vi an integraler teyl fun zayn shafn vos hot zikh ongehoyn friyer un hot zikh getsoygn nokh der bafrayung.⁹

Rather than attempt a detailed analysis of all the strands of the ghetto poetry, which would necessarily duplicate some of the research which has already been done, this chapter will concentrate on these ideas of change and continuity, particularly the development of the metapoetic theme, investigating whether the already established images continue and evolve during this period, and considering new images which appear.

The history of the poetry of that time is extremely complex. Sutzkever wrote continuously, even when confined in a hiding place or in the woods with the partisans, and in the early days in Moscow. Some of these poems were hidden by him, and in 1943 Sutzkever gave a book of poems to a partisan who came into the ghetto, with the request that they should be passed on to Perets Markish or Dovid Bergelson in Moscow. After Sutzkever's arrival

⁸. Rachel Ertel, introduction to Avrom Sutzkever, Où gisent les étoiles. Oeuvres en vers et en prose, translated by Charles Dobzynski, Rachel Ertel and others (Paris, 1988), p.21.

⁹. Novershtern, Catalogue, p.129.

in Moscow in 1944, these poems were sent to New York, where they were published as Di festung by the Yikuf publishing house in 1945 (the volume comprises thirty-seven lyric poems and the two longer epic *poemes* 'Kol-Nidre' and 'Dos keyver-kind'). Another twenty poems which Sutzkever had buried in a Vilna cellar and retrieved on his return after the liberation of the city in 1944 were published separately in 'Yidishe Kultur' 4, 1946, and then in book-form as Lider fun geto by Yikuf in 1946. The volume Yidishe Gas, published in 1948, contains the poems of Lider fun geto as well as other ghetto poems which had not appeared in either of the previous collections. The section entitled 'Di festung' of the first volume of the 1963 Poetishe verk contains all the previously published ghetto poems as well as eleven which had only appeared the year before in the 'Almanakh fun di yidishe shrayber in Yisroel'. The majority of the collection was reprinted in Lider fun yam hamoves, in 1968; here Sutzkever placed the poem 'Di toyern fun geto' written in 1936, at the head of the section 'Di festung', thereby investing it retrospectively with prophetic significance.

In 1979 a small book of thirteen previously unpublished 'lider, lidvariantn, fragmentn, geshribn in di khurn-yorn 1941-1944'¹⁰ was published in Tel-Aviv. The most significant of these are the fragments of a lost poem 'Dray royzn', the last section of the poem 'Di festung', and 'Der tsirk'. Finally, the 1982 collection Fun alte un yunge ksav-yadn contains two poems from 1943 and 1944.

The reasons for the gradual appearance of these poems are not entirely clear, but it seems reasonable to assume that many

¹⁰. Avrom Sutzkever, Di ershte nakht in geto, (Tel-Aviv, 1979), title page.

of them reappeared after having been lost. In some cases, particularly that of 'Der tsirk', the suppression of the work until much later may have been dictated by emotional reasons. On the whole, the changes made to certain poems between the various editions were relatively minor.

In the original edition of Di festung, and in Lider fun geto, the poems are not presented chronologically, but from the immediate post-war period onwards, the poems of this time are always presented in strict chronological order; this, together with the meticulous dating, and the accurate designation of the place of composition are signs of Sutzkever's ever deepening awareness of his mission to record the essential events of these years, and also, perhaps, to make of them a *khezrbm-hanefesh* (a spiritual stocktaking) of his own inner development. Since the object of this study is to consider the evolution of themes and images in the general context of continuity and change, I shall also take a broadly chronological approach to the poetry, using the texts in Poetishe verk and Di ershte nakht in geto, referring to earlier variants where appropriate. The major poem 'Der tsirk' is a unique case, however. The incident which underlies the poem is also the basis of the later 'Erev mayn farbrening' written in Israel in 1949, and the significant differences between the two poems epitomise the evolution of Sutzkever's perception and poetic treatment of the Holocaust in the light of his experience of Israel: the two poems will therefore be considered together in chapter 6.

The poetry of this period represents a return to *ayndruk*: almost all the poems stem from the outward circumstances of the poet's life. Sutzkever's prose account of the period 1941-1944, Vilner geto, was written in Moscow in the summer of 1944, and

many incidents described there can be seen as the origins of poems in Di festung. Sometimes specific incidents give rise to particular poems, like the forced 'dance' round the fire and burning of the Torah scrolls, which is the theme of 'Der tsirk', or the poet's hiding in an empty coffin, where, he says 'azoy ligndik in orn hob ikh oysgevebt mayn lid "Ikh lig in a mise".'¹¹ Often, descriptions of personalities and situations in the ghetto can be recognised as the background of other poems of the collection.¹²

Several broad categories of poem can be discerned. First there is the large group of poems which describe specific events or people, or which struggle with the moral and physical problems of the situation, and particularly with the poet's own anguish and guilt: poems such as 'Di lererin Mire' (PV1, p.307), 'A vogn shikh' (PV1, p.275), 'Di ershte nakht in geto' (EN, p.10), 'Derfar vayl kh'hob getrunken vayn' (PV1, p.247), 'Unter dayne vayse shtern' (PV1, p.285), 'Es flit arayn a flaterl' (PV1, p.303), 'Tsum kind' (PV1, p.278), and many others. These poems are not obviously metapoetic in that the theme of the word or the poetic mission of the *ikh* do not specifically feature in them. The second category consists of the many poems which do centre on the specific problem of the viability and moral justification of poetry, and the role of the poet in this time of catastrophe: most of these again spring from specific situations which Sutzkever *transforms* into truths about poetry, - for example 'Ikh lig in an orn' (PV1, p.249) and 'Tsum khaver' (PV1, p. 252) -

¹¹. VG, p.31. This is the poem 'Ikh lig in an orn' (PV1, p.249).

¹². The complex and interesting relationship between Vilner geto and the poems of Di festung cannot be analysed in detail here, but will be the subject of a later study.

while some are poetic visions, like 'Der dikhter' (PV1, p.324), or 'Verter' (PV1, p.292), or a discussion of the problem, like 'Gezang fun a yidishn dikhter in 1943' (PV1, p.318).

Rhetorical, declamatory addresses to the Jewish people comprise a third group. Some of the poems in this category castigate the failings of the people, and exhort them to be worthy of their heritage, for example 'Lid tsu di letste' (PV1, p.293), while others are stirring hymns to the heroism of individuals or groups, such as 'Itsik Vitnberg', (PV1, p.376), or 'Bagleytlid baym avekgeyn in vald' (PV1, p.334).

In fact these three types of poem should not be seen as clearly defined categories, because underlying *all* the poems written during these years is the response of the *ikh* to the outward and personal inner crisis; all the poems are a reassessment of his until now fervently held belief in the poetic word - an expression of his urgent need to find some kind of meaning which will enable him to continue to believe in his vocation. Even those poems which do not have the *ikh* at their centre, but which witness to events or address the people, are also part of the same poetic search; they arise out of Sutzkever's need to use his poetry as a record and as an inspiration. All the poems are therefore different facets of a unified whole, and they are linked by certain key motifs, many of which have occurred in the earlier poetry. In this sense, therefore, the poems must be seen as the continuation of the metapoetic search of 'Valdiks'.

In the poems which depict the situation of the victims, reference is hardly ever made to the oppressor by name. In the poem 'A tog bay di shturmistn' (PV1, p.254), only the title mentions the oppressor, and the only poem to be specific about an

incident involving 'tsvey adelike, lange Daytshn' ('Oyfn veg tsu Butslav', PV1, p.353) is poetically one of the least impressive poems of the collection. This lack of specificity avoids the weakening of poetic impact by political comment. Instead the poems gain universal validity; they are characterised by the physicality of their imagery, and often by a kind of metonymy, which could be called imagery of absence. Before looking in more detail at the development of certain specific themes, it is useful to examine several poems dealing with the general situation, in which certain important aspects of the development and transformation of key images can be discerned.

'Penemer in zumpn' (PV1, p.246), written *before* the construction of the ghettos in Vilna, expresses despair through the transformation of images of nature which until now have been almost always used in a positive metapoetic context: the morning sun, the white doves, the earth:

Un gro durkh nakht gevorn zenen undzere makhshoves,
Morgnzun hot ongeglitn zalts farzeyt in vundn.
Un vayse toybn hobn bald farvandlt zikh in soves,
Lakhndik fun undzer troyrn, vos roykhik iz farshvundn.

- Vos tsiterstu, mayn erd? Tsi verstu oykh vi mir tsheshpoltn
Oder dayne nozlekher dershpirn shoyrn korbones?
Shling undz ayn! Di tsu-fil zikherkeyt hot undz farsholtn;
Shling undz ayn tsuzamen mitn dor un zayne fones!

Again the word 'gro' denotes the absence of the light and colour associated with poetry: as in the poem from 1940, 'Di groe tsayt', it represents the negation of the poetic, as do the images in the second and third lines of the first stanza: the sun, inspirer of the young poet in 'Sibir', is here a cruel inflicter of intense pain, and the doves of poetry have become

dark birds of night.¹³ The central, ambiguous image is that of the earth, which is seen as either a victim or a devourer. This is the first transformation of the motif of 'aynshlingen' which until now has been used in a positive, metapoetic context, as in the poem 'A tsvaygl karshn'. Here the poet is speaking in anger to himself and his people; their punishment for foolish optimism (symbolised by the 'fones' of the second stanza) should be annihilation, and he begs the earth to swallow up the whole generation, thereby, by implication, cutting off the future of the Jewish people.

The poem culminates in a vision which is astonishing in its prophetic accuracy:

Dorshtik bistu, veln mir vi oyfgeplatste kvaln
 Mitn gold fun undzer layb farfiln dayne griber;
 Un a koshmar fun penemer in zumpn vet bafaln,
 Penemer in zumpn iber zunfargang un shtiber...

The earth as devourer of humanity contrasts strongly with the earlier impulse of the *ikh* towards fusion with the forces of nature; the menacing aspect of the earth, which was already perceived in the earlier poetry, has here become all-pervading, and is a total metaphor of the new circumstances.

The idea of being swallowed up is also seen in the grave-metaphor in 'Di ershte nakht in geto' (EN, p.10):

'Di ershte nakht in geto iz di ershte nakht in keyver,
 Dernokh geveynt men zikh shoyntsu' - dos treyst azoy mayn
 Di grine gliverdike gufim, oysgeshpreyt oyf dr'erd. shokhn

Here too, nature and inanimate objects are imbued with sinister characteristics: the roof tiles are 'aroyserisene mit

¹³. A similar transformation of positive nature images has already been remarked in the earlier poem 'Badarfst far undz zayn a derleyzer' from 1938, (PV1. p.206), which also denoted the poet's awareness of the impending crisis.

shtiker fleysh fun ire vent' - a further example of brutally physical imagery - , and the night is synonymous with poison:

S'iz nakht. Es rint a shvartser sam. Ikh bin a holoveshke,
Farratn funem letstn funk un thomik oysgeloshn.

Throughout this poem, however, runs a thread of hope and consolation, which is achieved through two images of transformation: the poet's *spirit* emerges, free, like a butterfly, - the gentle wind 'bagleyt mayn gayst, vos teylt zikh oys fun shmatikn gebeyn, / Vi s'teylt zikh oys dos flaterl fun vorem', - and the end of the poem is a triumph of the imagination, when the drops of poison dripping onto the poet's head are transformed into eyes, which flood him with light, and enable him to experience again the happy *erev-shabes* with his mother. A key note of the ghetto poetry is the transformation of horror into beauty through the power of the poetic image.

There is, however, no such optimistic outcome in the two poems 'A vogn shikh' (PV1, p.275) and 'Es flit arayn a flaterl' (PV1, p.303), the first dated 1 January 1943, and the second 5 May 1943. Both poems capture a moment which encapsulates the horror of the situation. The earlier poem is based on a true incident, when the poet, watching a waggonload of shoes being driven through the ghetto en route to Berlin, catches sight of shoes which had belonged to his murdered mother.¹⁴ The chilling effectiveness of this poem lies in the way form is used to impose order on chaos. As Brian Murdoch has pointed out, 'Catastrophe may [...] lead to an *increased* emphasis on form, as Sutzkever's use of the ballad, surely the least fragmented of poetic forms,

14. The incident is referred to in Vilner geto, p. 88. After describing the way in which clothes and precious articles from the victims were either sent to Germany or kept by the Nazis, Sutzkever says 'Ikh hob gezen amol in geto a vogn shikh. Ikh hob derkent tsvishn zey der mames a tufl.'

offers proof that poetic transformation may still play a normative role even in the face of such intense suffering.¹⁵ The poem is an apparently artless ballad, the regular iambic metre of the alternately rhyming four-line stanzas suggesting the ponderous rhythm of the heavy cart rolling through the streets:

Di reder yogn, yogn,
Vos brengen zey mit zikh?
Zey brengen mir a vogn,
Mit tsaplendike shikh.

As in the traditional ballad, the 'story' unfolds through childlike questioning, at first expressing the idle curiosity of the innocent bystander ('A khasene, a yontev?'), but later, as realisation dawns, the questions have an agonising urgency:

Ikh darf nit fregn *vemes*,
Nor s'tut in harts a ris:
O zogt mir, shikh, dem emes,
Vu zenen zey, di fis?

Di fis fun yene tufl
Mit knepelekh vi toy, -
Un do - vu iz dos gufl,
Un dort vu iz di froy?

In kindershikh in alle
Vos ze ikh nit keyn kind?
Vos tut nit on di kale
Di shikhelekh atsind?

The transition between the first, harmless impression conveyed by the second stanza ('Der vogn vi a khupe/ In ovntikn glants;/ Di shikh - a fule kupe/ Vi mentshn in a tants. '), and the cruel reality takes place in the fourth stanza, where the onomatopoeic 'klapn' of the heels and the urgent 'vuhin, vuhin, vuhin' make the rattling and shaking into a question which the shoes themselves answer, with the emphasis on the fateful word 'Berlin':

Es klapn di optsasn:
Vuhin, vuhin, vuhin?

¹⁵. Murdoch, 'Transformations', p.129.

Fun alte Vilner gasn
Me traybt undz keyn Berlin.

The juxtaposition of Vilna, the home of the victims, with Berlin, symbol of the source of their fate, renders the stanza even more poignant, as does its recurrence at the end of the poem: the emotion is intensified by its being repeated after the enumeration of the imagined victims, and its status as the final, helpless summing-up is subtly indicated by the variation in the first line: '*Un s'klapn di optasn [...]*' (my italics).

The central, metonymical image of the shoes, and the conjuring up of the dead victims through the question 'vu?' are eloquent images of absence¹⁶, and the idea of annihilation is intensified by the fact that no human being, but only the empty shoes, evoking their murdered owners, answer the question 'vuhin?'.

The powerful impact of 'Es flit arayn a flaterl' is achieved by a different poetic technique, well known in the ballad genre and also typically Sutzkeverian, that of the sudden, unexpected twist at the end. The poem also has the form of a simple ballad in iambic trimeter; but whereas the rhythm of 'A vogn shikh' with its alternating masculine and feminine rhyme evoked the ponderous jolting rhythm of the cart, the extra syllable at the end of almost every line here, giving feminine rhyme throughout, produces a light dancing rhythm which evokes the flight of the butterfly and the corresponding joy of the children:

¹⁶. Sutzkever often evokes desolation by such images of absence. A further striking example from this period is the poem 'Farbrente perl' from the same year (PV1, p.323) where the victim is evoked by the empty, charred string of pearls which remains. Later, 'Erev mayn farbrenung', written in 1949, (PV2, p.103), uses a flooded landscape where all the normal landmarks are 'nit benimtse' in order to evoke the disorientation and isolation of the *ikh*.

Es flit arayn a flaterl
 Fun ergets het, fun oybn,
 Un efnt a teaterl
 In oysgehakte shoybn.

The poem describes the effect on the ghetto-children of the sudden appearance of a butterfly, a symbol of nature, of another beautiful reality *outside*; symbolically the young prisoners become 'bafligte', 'regn-boygene' through its presence, and the butterfly transforms the ghetto:

Dos flaterl, dos flaterl
 Mit gold batsirt di khurves. -

The hope enshrined in the butterfly seems to stem from its own genesis; like the children, it was once imprisoned but now has blossomed into its true identity:

Dos flaterl - geven a mol
 A vorem unter shteyner.
 Atsinder ze dos peneml -
 Nito nokh aza eyner.

As the poem unfolds, the message of hope increases, and with it the fairy-tale quality of the poem, as the ghetto miraculously blooms:

Un vi es shpilt - bagrozn zikh
 Di opgebrente beytn.
 Un yunge vintlekh lozn zikh
 A bezn-reyekh shpreytn.

Playful neologistic diminutives invest its antics with a delicate touch of humour:

Dos flaterl, dos frilingl
 Nemt zingen vi a foygl.
 Es blit a bloyink blilingl
 Bay itlekhn in oygl.

The sudden plunge into horror at the end of the poem therefore comes as a great shock: the butterfly unexpectedly flies through some barbed wire, and the children, rushing after it, are entangled there:

Un oyf der drot - bahangene
 Es blutikn di kinder.

Vi flaterlekh gefangene
Zey ranglen zikh atsinder.

The impact of the stanza is achieved through the contrast between the continued light dancing rhythm and the brutal words, and the lack of transition between the two phases of the poem - delightful fantasy changes to horror without any warning. The change is also effected by the transformation of the butterfly-image: the free butterfly had personified hope for the children, but now the same image symbolises their cruel fate, for they are compared to butterflies caught in the wire and struggling vainly to free themselves.

In the poem 'Di festung' (PV1, p.321), which gave its name to the first printed collection of ghetto poems, Sutzkever creates a powerful and multi-layered image. The poem provides an illuminating example of the complex history of some of the poems of the period. Novershtern (Catalogue p.144) shows that the original manuscript of the poem began with a rhetorical appeal to the people to protect the 'festung', which was left out of the published version. The original final section of the poem was a similar call to arms, but this was not published until 1979 (EN, p.23). The reason for the omission of these two sections, according to Novershtern, was Sutzkever's bitter disillusionment with the ghetto population after the death of Vitnberg, leader of the resistance movement, whom the people had prevailed upon to give himself up, out of fear that otherwise the Germans would liquidate the whole ghetto. Novershtern quotes a note of Sutzkever's written at the time of composition, illustrating his profound depression at the events: 'Geshribn eyernekhthn. Ken zayn dos letste lid mayns. Tsu fil gegleybt in der heylikeyt funem vofn. Di tragishste far mir iberlebung far der tsayt: geto, 16tn yuli

1943'. The resulting poem as published in the various editions of 'Di festung' is therefore very different from the original conception, but nevertheless a message of hope underlies it, despite Sutzkever's despairing words.

The fortress is not merely a metaphor for the beleaguered ghetto; rather, in the first of the two sections printed as the poem 'Di festung', the image is shown to be an abstract philosophical one: a visualisation of the fate of the Jewish people which is linked to the whole tradition of their ancestors. This is conveyed by the image of the grandfathers, (also seen in 'A shtim fun harts'), who represent the idea of the continuing generations:

S'hobn zeydes geklept ir geheyme geshtalt
Fun leyman geveykte in trern.

A halbn yortoyznt geboyt un geboyt, -
O, vayte geduldike
Zeydes!

In 'A shtim fun harts', the grandfathers awake the sons 'Vi shturemhek in brondz fun gleker' (PV1, p.248), and here their bones awake and call on the people to protect and purify the fortress, which is their tradition and inheritance:

Nit farzam,
Nit farzam,
Reynik
Dem shtal,
Fareynik
Dem shtam.

The last part of the section reinforces the interpretation of the 'festung' concept as an image of Jewish identity and continuity, for a strange instruction is given to the people: 'Un s'eygene layb in der festung farmoyer!'. This line suggests that the 'festung' is a metaphor for Jewish history and culture: the poet is urging the people to take refuge in their true identity,

as a moral protection against the enemy. Once again the abstract idea is conveyed in an image of great physical concreteness.

The image changes surprisingly in the second part of the poem, where the 'festung' seems to denote the actual ghetto:

Bay nakht iz di festung farloshn,
Bloyz di sine glit.

In the section there is a surprising development of the 'festung' conception : a second fortress is being built under the town. On one level this refers to the 'geheymstot' in the sewers of Vilna, through which many escaped, but it seems also to function as a metaphor for the resistance of the people, now inspired by their awareness of their identity, and the feelings of solidarity which this brings:

Do grobt men a festung a tsveyte,
In shteynerenem tsorn - a shakht.
Un knoytn fibern greyte
A tsund zikh tsu gebn in shlakht.

Thus the shifting image conveys on the one hand the walled-in ghetto, but also the idea of protection and resistance; this in turn is built on the philosophical dimension of the image in the first section, the 'festung' as a symbol of reawakened consciousness of Jewish identity and history: the idea of the *goldene keyt* which is a fundamental concept in Sutzkever's poetry.

Another seminal image in the collection 'Di festung' is the cornstalk, which by this time was already an established metapoetic symbol in Sutzkever's work. The use of the image in the poem 'Zangen' (PV1. p.339) is a paradigm of the way in which images develop in the poetry of the war years. The poem was written in September 1943, after the poet had escaped from the ghetto and was living in the woods with the partisans. It opens in a realistic descriptive mode, telling of the poet's yearning for the cornfield during the two years in the ghetto. His escape from

the ghetto is described in a vivid metaphor ('Un ven mayn otem hot tseshmeltst di tsvangen -') the supernatural tone of which leads into the visionary phase of the poem, where the poet hears himself being called to a sacred task:

A vint hot in di odern
 Geton a fayf, a ruf:
 '- Shtey oyf, Ben-Odem, tsaytik shoyn di zangen.
 Geglikhn iz shoyn tsu a zang dayn guf.'
 Un ikh bin, vi der goyrl geyt, gegangen
 Durkh farbrente shtet
 Nokh yenem ruf.

This image takes up the vision of the poet as prophet or creator, which, as I shall demonstrate, has been achieved during 1943 in poems like 'Verter', and 'Der dikhter': here the poet's task is to ripen the corn, and he sees himself as part of this natural process,- (his body is 'geglikhn tsu a zang')- and as an emissary of destiny; in this section of the poem the corn is mythologised, and retains the metapoetic colouring from the earlier poetry.

The poet's arrival at the cornfield abruptly brings the poem back into the real situation: in place of the longed-for field of waving corn, he sees a field of corpses:

Nor ven ikh bin durkh zunfargang a mider
 Gekumen tsu mayn oysgebenktn feld -
 Ersht es lign dortn mayne brider
 Oysgekoylet iber gorn feld.

The poet then describes in painful detail how the stalks of corn grow up around and through the bodies of the dead:

Un di zangen, mit tseglite shtekher,
 Adurkhgevaksn zenen shikht nokh shikht
 Durkh sharbns, ripn,
 Un zey shtaygn hekher, hekher, hekher,
 Tsu der zun, vos klaybt tsunoyf ir likht,
 Vi eyn zang volt di tsveyte bekipozn
 Gevolt aribershtaygn in ir gang
 Un ot a zang
 Hot voglen zikh gelozn
 Durkh a moyl mit oyfgedrikte tseyne!
 Un zangen tsvey adurkh di akslen krikhn.
 Un ot a zang vos zukht vuhin tsu geyn,

Un tsu a hant fun dr'erd iz zi geglikhn.
 Un a kornbliml durkh an oyg, vi a geveyn - -

Here on the one hand is the appalling horror of death and decay, the growing corn no longer an aesthetic symbol but the blind force of nature. Through the vivid realism, however, Sutzkever conveys a strange awesome beauty: the cornstalks are being drawn up *through* the dead bodies towards the sun to fuse their light with hers, and the martyred human beings seem to become part of this mystical process. There is a feeling of resurrection in the image of the cornstalk rising like a hand from the earth; here, and in the image of the cornflower 'vi a geveyn' nature is invested with human qualities; at the end of the section the dead human beings are fused with the sentient forces of nature.

The familiar figure of the reaper appears in the last four lines of the poem:

Vos ze ikh itst in ovntshayn tsegliter?
 Ikh ze a feld mit zangen blutik royt.
 Alts neenter tsu mir es aylt a shniter
 Un shnaydt dos nokhmilkhomedike broyt.

The hackneyed image of the reaper is redeemed by its fruitful ambiguity in the context of this poem: the reaper is of course usually linked with the idea of death, and indeed the last line could be interpreted pessimistically: death has cut down the young people of the next generation, and destroyed the corn which would have provided sustenance for the time to come. More fitting to Sutzkever's corn imagery and to his ideas of regeneration is the interpretation that the dead, returning to the earth, are nourishing the new corn which will ensure continuity after the catastrophe has passed: the reaper is thus a prophetic vision of a future harvest. This interpretation would relate the image here to the chain of sustenance in one of the important

metapoetic poems in the collection, 'Tsum khaver': even out of death comes new life for future generations. This optimistic interpretation is also given weight by the symbolic colouring of the corn image in other poems of the period: in 'Kerndlekh veyts', grains of wheat buried in a Pharaoh's tomb grow and flourish again after thousands of years, and in the visionary poem 'Der dikhter', the poet, buried under a thousand corpses which are 'vi farfleytste zangen', bursts out through them to be reborn together with his poetic word.

The corn image in 'Zangen' is thus multi-layered. It retains the mystical, metapoetic connotation of earlier poetry, but gains a new dimension as a stark image of the blind force of nature. This image is, however, transformed into an image of hope, when the corn becomes a symbol of the cycle of life, death and regeneration. This integration of earlier symbols into poems which confront the ethical and existential problems of the time leads to a deepening and a broadening of the scope of the pre-war aesthetic imagery.

The six poems so far considered represent a small sampling of the poetic techniques and vivid images through which Sutzkever presents and transforms aspects of the nightmare situation of the ghetto. In many poems his response is more intensely personal; the two main areas of ethical questioning are first, the problem of God, and second, an anguished probing into his own burden of guilt in the ghetto situation.

In his early period, traditional questions of religion did not seem to concern Sutzkever. In 'Blonder baginen' and 'Valdiks' spirits of earth or forest replaced any Jewish concept of the deity, and these spirits essentially served Sutzkever's aesthetic

quest to understand the relationship between the self, the universe, and the nature of poetry. In the face of the unprecedented catastrophe of the Holocaust, it was almost inevitable that ontological questions should preoccupy the sensitive individual, and several of the poems of 'Di festung' address the problem of a transcendent deity directly.

The earliest of these is 'Glust zikh mir tsu ton a tfile', (PV1, p.253). The two possible deities posited in the poem are the traditional Jewish God and the star, which echoes the pantheistic religious feeling of the earlier poems (and, in the form of the North Star of 'Sibir', represents the source of poetic inspiration). The urge to pray is ironically contrasted with the absence of God:

Glust zikh mir tsu ton a tfile - veys ikh nit tsu vemen,
Der, vos hot *amol* getreyst mikh, vet zi nit farnemen.
Vey, ikh nit tsu vemen -
Halt zi mikh in klemen.

The poem posits the *existence* of the Deity, but God's unwillingness or inability to comfort the *ikh* leads the *ikh* to seek an alternative deity. The laconic 'Efsher zol ikh betn bay a shtern' of the second stanza does not suggest a *real* hope on the part of the supplicant, and the pantheistic alternative of his youth has also disappeared:

Oykh der guter shtern
Vet es nit derhern.

The words of the prayer which the poet imagines himself saying to the star are crucial to an understanding of his relationship to religion. The theme which has the greatest urgency for him is his *word*

Kh'hob mayn vort farloyrn, kum un zay im a farbayter!

This suggests that until now the word has been the real source of his spirituality, and that it is the breakdown of his

faith in the word which leads him to seek another object of comfort and veneration. It is clear from this revealing line that the theme of the preservation of poetic inspiration underlies the poetry of this period too.

The problem is unresolved at the end of the poem. The urge to pray is invincible and is expressed in the strongest terms:

Nor a tfile zogn *muz* ikh, emets gor a nonter
Paynikt zikh in mayn neshome un di tfile mont er, -

but the solution is one of impotence:

Vel ikh on a zinen
Plaplen biz baginen.

The verb 'plaplen' contrasts strikingly with the venerable, traditional Jewish concept 'ton a tfile', which presupposes the listening God. Since God is absent to the poet, his only alternative is senseless babbling. It is clear from the last stanza however that the impulse to pray is so strong that even his 'plaplen' is a partial solution.

The poem 'Nokhn toyt' (PV1, p.260), written in May 1942, a few months after the deaths of his mother and child, investigates the question of life after death. The poet imagines he has been killed and creates a bitterly ironic vision of the afterlife, rejecting the romantic ideas about death which poets have propagated:

A lign, es tintlen poeten a lign
As toyt, mayne fraynd, iz aza un azelkher!

This vision of life after death - perhaps partly inspired by two experiences from 1941, when the poet hid for weeks in a hideout, then later sought refuge in an empty coffin¹⁷ - reverses

17. These experiences are described in Vilner geto, pp.24-25, and pp.30-31.

conventional images of eternal life: here it is the body which remains, while the spirit has disappeared:

Un nokh a zakh veys ikh: mayn gayst iz, a shteyger,
Nito. Nor mayn guf bayt nit iber zayn forem, -
Far vos ober klapt oyf mayn hant nokh der zeyger,
Ven tsayt iz nit neytik shoy n mer in di kvorim?

The sudden 'nito' at the beginning of the second line, coming after the laconic, everyday expression 'a shteyger', comes as a shock because of its unexpectedness. Time, which is commonly thought not to exist in eternity, is still dragging pointlessly by, marked by the relentless ticking of his watch. The body of the poet is forced to lie still in a constant state of painful awareness, signified by the neologistic verb 'vorn' which denotes the opposite of the imaginative dream:

Ikh troym shoy n nit mer vi gevezn, ikh vor itst,
Di shtilkayt, vos frest zikh aleyn, iz mayn loshn.

This self-devouring stillness is not the metapoetic 'shtilkayt' which Sutzkever often uses, but rather an idea of total nothingness;¹⁸ here he seems to be saying that language also has ceased to exist.

In the bitter climax of the last two stanzas the *ikh* rejects this state of life-in-death which is total emptiness, the annihilation of language, spirit, and the imagination, but at the same time a continuation of the *physical* sufferings of the previous existence - a cruel parody of the ecstatic bliss of 'Nirvana':

Iz dos yene ru, vos me ruft zi Nirvana?
A lign! Dos nit-zayn iz paynlekher, shverer.

At the same time the poem represents an affirmation of *this* life, despite its imperfections, ending with a picture which must

¹⁸. Here, as in 'Glust zikh mir tsu ton a tfile' and 'Unter dayne vayse shtern' there is the all-pervasive silence of God of which Neher speaks (see chapter 2, note 19).

have been inspired by the days in hiding, looking out at the outside world through cracks in walls:

Ikh ze itst mayn lebn - vi kh'volt durkh a shpeltl
 Gekukt oyf a zunfargang biz er farnidert -
 Un epes tserint durkh di finger dos veltl,
 Mit velkhn es vilt zikh tsurik zayn farbridert.

Nirvana represents the extinction of the individual and all his passions, and this would be anathema to Sutzkever's strong individualism. Three different nuances of meaning can therefore be discerned in the poem: it is a vision of the afterlife which refutes the transcendental and shows an empty life-in-death; it can also be seen as a metaphor of the 'non-existence' of the person in hiding in the ghetto, an impotent death-in-life. Finally, it obstinately affirms the individual's existence in this life, even in the state of 'toytshrek' of which the dead poet is envious, since in life he still had the choice of believing in the traditional teachings about bliss in the world to come; this is the most logical interpretation of the rather obscure lines:

Ikh bin zikh aleyn in mayn toytshrek mekane,
 Vayl demolt hob ikh nokh gegleybt mayn geberer.

The same scepticism pervades 'Unter dayne vayse shtern'¹⁹ (PV1, p.285). Because of the lyrical beauty of the poem, it is easy to overlook its inner pessimism. Unusually, the poem is a direct appeal to 'Got getrayer'; the *ikh* in his isolation is searching for the certainty of a divine presence. Typically, it is his *words* which he wants to entrust to God:

Unter dayne vayse shtern
 Shtrek tsu mir dayn vayse hant.
 Mayne verter zenen trern
 Viln ruen in dayn hant.

¹⁹. Shmerke Katsherginski, in his song collection Dos gezang fun Vilner geto (Paris 1947), p.37, says that the poem was written at the beginning of 1943. Music for the poem was written by A. Brudno, and the song was very popular in the ghetto.

The tension of the poem is created through the various realms of the poet's striving: the dark 'kelern un lekher' are contrasted with the 'vayse shtern' which are the realm of God. Novershtern sees in the adjective 'white' a further proof of the pessimistic viewpoint of the poem, in that white has a 'konotatsiye fun toyt' (Catalogue, p.135). It could be argued, however, that in Sutzkever's poetry the colour white usually has the connotation of snow, which in 'Sibir' and in poems of 'Di festung' is a sign of hope and a symbol of poetry. Stars also are usually linked with poetic inspiration. Thus the image of the white stars is one of hope, but the outcome of the poem is ambivalent, because the longing for the God of the white stars is apparently not fulfilled.

The poet seeks God in the depths, but there he only finds 'merderishe ru'. He then climbs upwards:

Loyf ikh hekher, iber dekher
Un ikh zikh: vu bistu, vu?

Certainty seems to be unattainable to the *ikh*, for his search leads to paranoia and despair:

Nemen yogn mikh meshune
Trep un hoyfn mit gevoy
Heng ikh - a geplatste strune
Un ikh zing tsu dir azoy:

Unter dayne vayse shtern
Shtrek tsu mir dayn vayse hant.
Mayne verter zenen trern
Viln ruen in dayn hant.

The inanimate surroundings are howling ferociously like the wolves which symbolise the wild forces of nature in 'Sibir' and elsewhere in 'Di festung', and a further image from the Siberian poem creates the idea of the destruction of the poet's words: the violin is a symbol of poetic inspiration, but the *ikh* sees himself as a *broken* violin string: the words sung by the broken

string are a helpless repetition of the appeal to God made at the beginning of the poem: the longing for God, expressed in the 'viln ruen' (my italics), has not been fulfilled.

These three poems dealing specifically with the question of belief in a transcendent deity are unique in Sutzkever's work. It is clear that his shaken faith in his *word* leads him to pursue this question, and that underlying his search for God is the urgent need to find a basis on which his poetic belief can be confirmed. It is perhaps significant that all these poems occur earlier than the important metapoetic poems 'Verter', 'Der dikhter', and 'Zing nit keyn troyeriks', in which renewed faith in poetry is achieved.

Another aspect of Sutzkever's personal response to the catastrophe is his feeling of guilt vis à vis those who have died. In an eight-line poem written in July 1941, the poet describes how he failed to save the life of a comrade:

Derfar vayl kh'hob getrunken vayn un trinken nit getoht,
Ven du mayn khaver host gevart kh'zol kumen dikh bafrayen, -
Hot vidershpenikt kegn mir mit has mayn eygn vort,
Un s'hot zayn gliyendike sharf tsheshnitn mir dem rayen.

Derfar vayl kh'hob fartoybt mayn harts, vi men fartoybt a
bik,
Nit mitgetsaplt ven tsu dir es hot geaylt der shekhter, -
Iz hobn verem oysgepikt zikh fun mayn epl glik
Un vi a Kayen-tseykhn shtartst gevezener gelekhter...

The poem is direct, but the imagery is marked by several features which typify the way in which Sutzkever deals with this painful material. He does not name the enemy, but merely uses the anonymous 'shekhter', just as elsewhere he uses 'sonim' ('Oyfn toyt fun Yankev Gershteyn', PV1, p.264), or the metonymous 'hek' and 'bagnetn' ('Di lererin Mire', PV1, p.307): this restraint intensifies rather than diminishes the powerful effect of the

poem. The second interesting aspect is the fusion of the concrete with the abstract in one image: until now this fusion has been seen in the nature and metapoetic imagery of the pre-war poetry, conveying harmony in the universe, but throughout the ghetto period the same fusion, often using cruel and violent physical imagery, expresses the turmoil of the time, and the complete interdependence of the physical and the emotional in this time of crisis, where the human being exists in the closest possible proximity to death. The image which illustrates this here is that of the word as a knife-blade which cuts through his imagination, an image which bears a striking similarity to the first poem of 'Sibir', where the poet's father cuts the bread 'mit blankn/ Rakhmimdikn meser', which produces in the child 'nay-tseshnitene gedanken'. The parallels in the imagery may not be purely coincidental, as Sutzkever was rewriting the poem 'Shtern in shney' during this period. The reverberations of the 'Sibir' image suggest the idea that the positive poetic inspiration which came from his father has now been destroyed through his own guilt.

Furthermore it is significant that the central expression of self-hatred and guilt is the idea of the word turning against the poet. His punishment is the destruction of his thoughts ('rayen') by his own word, which has become a cruel blade.²⁰ Again it is clear that the word has a life and a will of its own, and at this stage Sutzkever fears that the savage circumstances will call forth words from him which will destroy his poetic imagination.

The person on whom the poet's guilt and anguish are most sharply focussed, in the poems of this period, is his mother. In

²⁰. The same theme of the murderous word occurs in 'Farbrente perl', where the word has become like a lion, devouring flesh in the darkness.

Vilner geto he describes her death at the hands of the Nazis.

Sutzkever had just returned to the ghetto after a period in hiding in the cellar of a Lithuanian family:

Nit bavizn kumen tsu zikh nokhn umglik mitn kind, ersht a nayer umglik: ikh gey tsu mayn mamen, un mayn mame iz farshvundn.

Ikh dervis zikh, az dos iz di arbet fun dem daytshn agent Oberhart. Baynakht iz er gekumen af Shpitol-gas 7, vu es hot gevoynt mayn mame, un hot avekgefirt dem gantsn hoyf in turme. (VG, p.76)

The 'umglik mitn kind' refers to the murder of Sutzkever's new-born child in the hospital by the Gestapo. There is some confusion about the date of these events. The date given by Herman Kruk for the German edict forbidding the birth of Jewish children is 5 February 1942,²¹ but the date Sutzkever quotes at the Nuremberg Trials for the death of his child is December 1941.²² In this passage from Vilner geto he suggests that the death of the mother followed closely on that of the child.

The two poems which deal with the death of his mother, both written in October 1942, would therefore have been written seven or eight months after the event. These are 'Mayn mame', published in the first and subsequent editions of 'Di festung', and 'Fun der poeme Dray royzn', which was not published until 1979, in Di ershte nakht in geto.²³ In both poems the poet tries to come to terms with his anguish because he was in hiding when his mother was taken, failed to protect her, and survives while she is dead.

21. H. Kruk, Togbukh fun Vilner geto, (New York, 1961), p.159.

22. Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg, 1947), pp.306-307.

23. A further undated poem entitled 'Fun a farloyrener poeme' in which the poet appeals to his mother to put an end to his life, appears in Yidishe gas and subsequent editions of 'Di festung'. It may be that this is another fragment of the lost poem 'Dray royzn'- it could logically be the sixth section, coming between the sections 'hey' and 'vov'.

Through this excruciating subject matter Sutzkever expresses some of the ethical and existential questions which arose from the Holocaust for many writers. In both poems the poet struggles through to a kind of hope or consolation which has implications for his poetic development.

'Mayn mame' (PV1, p.265) opens with an evocation of the mother's celebration of the Sabbath in the ghetto, in which she combines her traditional piety with protection of the son in hiding, and the courage to give him hope for the future. It is significant that in this depiction of maternal love and piety, several motifs from the beginning of 'Sibir' occur: the doves cooing ('Es vorket a fraytik tsu nakhts oyf a boydem'), the moonlight, the motif of 'shvartsaplen', which later becomes a key metapoetic image; as in 'Sibir' there is imagery which fuses the abstract and the concrete: there the music was 'fleysh' for the wolf, here the mother's prayer is food for the doves: 'Du kormest mit hartsiker tfile di toybn'. These parallels link the figure of the mother to the symbolism of the father and the poet's Siberian childhood.

In the next five sections, the poet tries to come to terms with his mother's death. In the first two he pictures the actual event in his imagination, and in the second two he remembers his return to her home in the ghetto, which he found empty, a half-drunk glass of tea still on the table.²⁴ In the central section

²⁴. Shortly before this he had found the body of his newborn baby still warm on the hospital bed, and in the poem 'Tsum kind' written exactly a year after these two deaths, the image of the glass of tea is used in what must be among the most moving lines of poetry ever written:

'Ikh hob gevolt dikh aynshlingen, mayn kind,
 Baym filn vi dayn gufl kilt zikh op
 In mayne finger,
 Glaykh ikh volt in zey gedrikt
 A vareme gloz tey,
 Filndik dem ibergang tsu kaltkeyt.'

of these five, he faces the subject of his own guilt, using bestial images to castigate himself:

Un vu bin *ikh* geven,
 Beys unter tsimblen
 Hot men dikh geshlept tsum eshafot?
 - in hintisher bude fargrobn s'gebeyn,
 Mit hintisher freyd vos farshilt zikh aleyn,
 Oyf lipn - a pyavke,
 In oyer - a shpin.

Even his innocent delight in the moonlight is perceived by him as tainted, for he describes himself as a dog baying to the moon:

[...] un mir hot dos bild
 Farshaft aza tayneg,
 A7 kh'hob azh gebilt...

The degradation and despair in these five sections are resolved in the last two sections. This is achieved in two stages. In the penultimate section the despairing poet puts on his mother's torn shirt in an effort to *become* his mother: he is symbolically annihilating his own defiled identity in order to let her purity live on in him, thereby rescinding her 'superfluous death'. The image which he uses is already familiar from his earlier poetry:

Tserays ikh fun layb mayne kleyder un krikh
 In dayn ofenem naketn hemd vi in zikh.
 S'iz mer nit keyn hemd, s'iz dayn likhtike hoyt,
 S'iz dayn kalter, dayn ibergeblibener toyt.²⁵

In 'Valdiks' such imagery of metamorphosis was used in the aesthetic, metapoetic context, as was the concept of the poet as 'shneymentsh in a kleyd fun hoyt' in 'Sibir'. Now Sutzkever is

²⁵. Out of this image of the shirt emerge related images in the later cycle 'Di karsh fun dermonung' which comprises poems about the Holocaust experience written from the perspective of the poet's new life in Israel; the development of these images and the difference between these contemporaneous ghetto poems and the retrospective ones will be studied in chapter 7.

using already established images to try to solve the moral dilemmas of the traumatic new situation.

This attempt to overcome death through metamorphosis into the dead person is however only a stage in the solution of the problem. The dead mother speaks to the poet:

Redstu tsu mir
Azoy vorhaftik ekht:
-nite, mayn kind,
S'iz a zind, s'iz a zind,
Un undzer tseteylung
Nem on far gerekht.

Az du bist faran,
Bin ikh do say-vi-say,
Vi der yoder in floym
Farmogt shoyn dem boym
Un di nest un dem foygl
Un alts vos derbay.

The only solution is acceptance of the natural order of things. This does not mean that the manner of the mother's death is to be viewed as natural, but rather that the fact of 'tseteylung' must be accepted, because the attempt to resurrect the dead through metamorphosis into the dead person runs counter to nature. Instead the mother posits the eternal chain of being in the example of the plum-stone containing within it all that will evolve from it. There is a touching folk-song quality in the way in which Sutzkever envisages not only the leaves of the tree but also the bird in the nest as already existing. This kind of cumulative folk-song motif is traditional in Jewish as well as in European folklore.

In this evolutionary process, that which exists now is a microcosm of what is to come, and, conversely, the present also contains all its own past. (That is why the mother says 'Az du bist faran, / Bin ikh do say-vi-say'). As in 'Tsum khaver', Sutzkever is here expressing his belief in the great chain of being, which ultimately enables him to reconcile the experiences

of the Holocaust with the idea of a poetic mission: to give voice to this chain of being. Here too the metapoetic image of the kernel gains depth from its use in this ethical-existential context.

If the general tenor of 'Mayn mame' is reflective, the fragment of the poem 'Dray royzn' (EN, p.12) is rawer and more akin to the Expressionist scream - a torrent of nightmarish imagery conveys the poet's anguish. Notable is the 'tsesherblter zun-fargang' which is echoed three months later in the line 'Es meg di zun tsebreklen zikh vi gloz' in the poem 'Tsum kind'; further, the knife motif of 'Derfar vayl kh'hob getrunken vayn' is used again in a more brutal image:

Un fintsternish-messer shnaydt oyf aza oder
 Durkh vanen di tsayt
 Ri lt oys fun mayn sharbn.

These and many other violent images culminate in a vision of a grotesque homunculus which personifies the misery and guilt of the poet himself, and of the Jewish people; this is 'A mentsh di greys a fingerhut,/ Un greser vi ayeder'. The naked body of this strange being is of glass, through which can be perceived all the senses which are normally hidden from view, warring with each other:

Un yeder khush bazunder
 Bayst baym andern dem gorgl:
 - du bist shuldik, du.
 Un shrayt oyf yidish...

The eyes of the homunculus symbolically combine the suffering of the *ikh* with that of the whole Jewish people, for one eye is 'goldik-bloy,/ A denkmol nokh a kindheyt/ Inem keyver fun a diment' - a reference, surely, to his lost Siberian childhood - and the other is 'An oysgeblitster volkn,/ Un oyfn volkn belmet zikh/ A geler mogn-dovid' - an allusion to the yellow patch epitomising the people's present slavery.

This nightmare vision of personal and general suffering leads the *ikh* to contemplate suicide; he reaches the conclusion, however, that he has not the right to be his own judge and jury, that his punishment is to carry on suffering, and realises that it is the spirit of his mother who is teaching him this:

Un efsher iz opgruntik-falsh der o khezhbm
 Un dos iz di shtrof: zikh tsu paynikn vayter?²⁶
 Un efsher derfar iz geblibn dayn libshaft
 Un lozt mikh nit vern an eybik bafrayter?

This insight is related to the ideas expressed by the mother in the previous poem: the correct path is submission to the natural order. The poet's anguish is not assuaged by this, however, and two further sections express his isolation from his mother; his determination to be united with her leads in the final section to the frenzied idea of digging up the earth, searching through the graves, asking grasses and thorns. The threatened bathos of this conceit is redeemed in the final stanza, when a solution is found which has a profound bearing on the metapoetic theme: the literal concept of digging is transformed into the figurative 'grobn in verter':

Un vel ikh nit kenen ahin-tsu derlangen
 Kh'vel grobn in verter un ridlen in klangen,
 Biz vanen ikh vel nit bafrayen di royzn
 Fun tunkeln land vu zey zenen fargangen.

The three roses of the last lines are a key motif in both poems. They occur in the second section of 'Mayn mame':

[...] Vos brenen
 In dayn hartsn dray royzn in sharlakhn royt? [...]
 Farshtel zey nit mame, vos narstu dayn kind,
 Vi kumen do royzn tseblite?
 Ikh ze dokh dray purpurne koyln atsind:
 An ershte, a tsveyte, a drite.

²⁶. A similar conclusion is reached in 'Der tsirk' when the poet realises that he is not worthy of *kidesh-ha-shem*, but must be punished by continuing to exist, carrying the burden of his own guilt and the suffering of the times.

Here the red roses, which in 'Valdik's' were an aesthetic symbol of beauty, signify the bloody bullet holes in his mother's body, but by the end of the 'Dray royzn' fragment they have again been transformed into a positive symbol - the roses buried underground which will be freed from their dark prison by the words and music of the poet - and from this time on the rose always appears as an image of the mother, and is extended into metapoetic images like that of the 'fidlroyz' where the rose, fused with the father's fiddle, is an image of resurrection in a poem which speaks of the eternal life of poetry. (F. p.7).

In both these poems Sutzkever struggles with his loss. The poem 'Mayn mame' finds a resolution in the idea of the chain of death and renewal, and at the end of the 'Dray royzn' fragment the poet realises that through the power of the word he can make his mother live for ever. These two ideas, the 'goldene keyt' and the eternal life of the word, are the keystones of those poems of 'Di festung' in which Sutzkever explores the theme of poetry and his own poetic vocation.

In 1941 Sutzkever wrote several important metapoetic poems which resolve the conflict between the outer situation and the inner world of the poetic *ikh* in an optimistic mode, expressing the two ideas of the chain of being and the eternal power of the word in vivid, original images. That Sutzkever could find hope in the redeeming nature of the word at such a time is the strongest evidence of the *reality* which the poetic word had for him. (The ghettos were not set up until September 1941, so that when he was writing 'A shtim fun harts' (July 1941) and 'Ikh lig in an orn' (August 1941), the full dimension of the impending catastrophe was not yet foreseeable, but from the beginning the slaughter of

Jews was massive. Roskies reports 'Over 33,000 Vilna Jews were systematically murdered in the first six months of the Nazi occupation, [...], mostly in the woods of Ponar, some five kilometers away.'²⁷ Nevertheless in 'A shtim fun harts' (PV1, p.248) Sutzkever can still speak of belief in justice:

A shtim fun harts bafelt mir: gleyb
 In shoyrn farshvekhtn vort *gerekhtshaft*.
 Der vayter yoyresh fun a leyb
 Muz vidershpenikn zayn knekhtshaft.

The lion metaphor brings the desolate present-day Jews into the line of the great ancestors.²⁸ The image introduces the concept of continuity, upon which the poem is built: in the second stanza this is expressed through the image of the 'vildn urvald fun zikorn' and through the puzzling idea of the poison-bacillus:

S'iz do a gang. Es ligt zayn tsil
 In vildn urvald fun zikorn.
 S'iz oykh faran aza batsil,
 Vos trogt dem sam fun toyznt yorn.

The poet seems to be putting the present persecution of the Jews into the context of a thousand years of persecution and defamation (the poison of the bacillus); this negative continuity must be countered by the Jews' ability to preserve their memory ('zikorn') of their real identity even in this crisis. The last two stanzas are a ringing challenge to the Jews to resist their degradation:

Un zukhstu far dayn payn a zin -
 Farvandl zikh in ir antpleker,
 Un her vi zeydes vekn zin

²⁷. Roskies, Apocalypse, p.227.

²⁸. The first reference to the lion as a metaphor for the descendents of Judah occurs in Jacob's blessing of his sons, Genesis 49.8-9: 'Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?'

Vi shturemhek in brondz fun gleker.

S'z do a gang. Iz kleter, shprayz,
Koyf oys dem doyresdikn shtroykhl.
Der toyt iz moykhl yeder grayz,
Nor zayn a knekht iz er nit moykhl.

The rhetorical nature of the poem does not detract from its powerful impact, attained in these stanzas particularly by the striking image of the grandfathers as 'shturemhek'. The poem is important for this investigation because it introduces the idea of the chain of the generations: here the chain is that of memory and tradition - it is a philosophical concept, whereas in 'Tsum khaver' (PV1, p.252), written five months later on 30 December 1941, the idea takes on a shocking physicality.

In 'Tsum khaver' the *ikh*, coming across a dead man, eats his bloodstained bread. The dead man is thus nourishing the living poet and enabling the poem to come into existence. The dead man, and the poet, will live on in the poet's word, which in turn will provide nourishment for another:

Shvaygndiker khaver,
Ikh zap dikh ayn un leb.
Mon bay velt a khezhbm
Durkh yeder mayn geveb.
Oyb vi du kh'vel faln
Baym shtekhedikn ployt,
Zol a tsveyter shlingen
Mayn vort, vi ikh dayn broyt.

Here two important aspects of Sutzkever's philosophy come together: the idea of the continuity of the human chain, and the affirmation of the poetic word. In his interpretation of the incident, flesh and word have become one. In the image of nourishment, the actual reality (swallowing the bread, and the blood of the comrade) and the metaphorical image (the comrade living on in the word, and the word nourishing another human being) are for Sutzkever equally valid and real; the dead comrade and the word are, on the same plane of reality, part of the

poet himself. It is clear at the end of the poem that he is turning to the ethical idea of his poetry as a means of nourishment to others (an idea which was already present in 'Cyprian Norwid' but diminished in the more inward-looking poetry of 'Valdiks').

The image of eating the bloodstained bread is an audacious one. For a poet whose background was the Christian tradition, the context would be obvious and the image have a natural sacramental quality, but the fact that swallowing blood is absolutely contrary to the *Torah*²⁹ makes this image all the more striking in a Jewish poet.

The blurring of boundaries between 'reality' and metaphor through the transformational power of the word is the central theme of the other poem written in the first months of German occupation, 'Ikh lig in an orn' (PV1, p.249). This poem was composed while Sutzkever was actually hiding in a coffin (VG p.31). The poet describes his situation in the first two lines:

Ikh lig in an orn
Vi in hiltserne kleyder.

A comparison of this concept of 'hiltserne kleyder' and of the concept of 'aynshlingen', which underlies 'Tsum khaver', with their respective occurrences in the pre-Holocaust poems, is extremely illuminating: images of disguise or metamorphosis had been used to convey the idea of the essence hidden by an outer shell (notably in the last poem of 'Sibir' where the *ikh* is the 'shneymentsh in a kleyd fun hoyt'); now the previously *aesthetic* image has become biographical reality. Similarly, the physical swallowing of the bloodstained bread in 'Tsum khaver' had been prefigured in the image of swallowing the cherries as a means of

29. 'Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh' Deuteronomy 12.23.

experiencing their essence (in 'A tsvaygl karshn'). In both cases, already established poetic images have been transformed by the events of the poet's life into all too literal reality, but they are then re-transformed into images which fuse the physical and the metaphorical in a way which reflects Sutzkever's deepened perception of the reality of the word and the indivisible nature of the physical and spiritual realms.

Through his imagination the poet is able to transform the coffin which imprisons him:

Zol zayn, s'iz a shifl
Oyf shturmische khvalyes,
Zol zayn, s'iz a vig.

Ruth Wisse sees here an allusion to significant symbols from Jewish religion and history:

Through its choice of image and verbal plays, the box assumes the likeness of the tarred little boat that saved the infant Moses when an earlier Pharaoh condemned Jewish males to death. The box is also an Ark - for the muse.³⁰

This interpretation is interesting in that Wisse also focusses on the idea of the chain of continuity of Jewish history on the one hand, and on the idea of the sanctity of the poetic muse which pervades Sutzkever's poetry, on the other. Also implicit in the two images is the idea of movement, in contrast to the rigidity of the coffin, the immobilising 'hiltserne kleyder'. The coffin represents imprisonment, the boat embodies freedom; the coffin symbolises death, the cradle new life. Thus the poet has overcome the power of imprisonment and death, willing the coffin to become its opposite: freedom and life.

This transformation enables the poet to see his muse: the sister who comes to him recalls the sister/muse/lover from 'Erd un aker' where the *ikh* also lies passively waiting for the liber-

³⁰. Wisse, introduction to Burnt Pearls, p.13.

ating touch of the beloved. The contrast between the two poems illustrates the development of the imagery in response to the experience of the poet and the needs of the time: the aesthetic concept of the 'frilingdike beyt' in the earlier poem, where the poet imagines himself as fertile ground for the organic growth of the poetic word, has given way to the stark image of immobility, imprisonment and death inflicted by an all too real situation. But the power of the muse is increased rather than diminished, in that she is able to prevail in the realm of death, and effect the triumphant last lines of the poem:

Azoy iz a ponem der seyder:
 Haynt do,
 Morgn dort,
 Un itst in an orn,
 Vi in hiltserne kleyder,
 Zingt alts nokh mayn vort.

Similar transformations of ugly outer reality into poetic inner truth are achieved in 'A horde muzik', written in December 1941, (PV1, p.250), and 'A tog bay di shturmistn' from May 1942 (PV1, p.254). The first section of the former poem originally appeared on its own in Lider fun geto, with the title 'Bay a varemen bergele', and the other two sections were added for the publication of Yidishe gas in 1948. In the first section the poet muses on the potential of the insignificant or the banal (in this instance the horsedung at which he warms his frozen hands) to be transformed into 'a lid fun derhoybener sheynkeyt'. While this does stand adequately as a self-contained poem, albeit not one of startling originality, it gains deeper resonance from its development in the complete poem 'A horde muzik'. The poet expands the initial idea by suggesting that in the ability to effect such transformations lies salvation for the individual. The struggle to achieve the transformation is depicted through a vivid image:

the attempt to escape from the war by means of these moments of beauty is a greater struggle than that of the dying man fighting the germs which are killing him. The physicality of the image is typical of this period:

Mit azetike reges
Bagegnt in shneyvald,
Muz men zikh ranglen,
Firn milkhome,
Nokh mer vi der goyses
Mit zayne mikrobn.

It is suggested that in these moments of transformation some *meaning* can be perceived in the whole struggle:

Gevinstu -
Veln zey blaybn dayn eygns,
Antplekn dem zinen fun gorn gerangl,

whereas the individual's failure to transcend ugly reality by transforming it into beauty, will be punished: the individual's responsibility for his own fate is conveyed by the final image of his own breath freezing him to death:

Nor vestu farshpiln dem sharfn gefekht -
Vet dikh dayn eygener otem
Farfrirn.

At first sight the third section appears to bear little relation to the *aperçu* of the first section, and its development into a general philosophical principle in the second. The third section depicts the poet hiding in the snow longing for the voice of a comrade, but hearing only the howling of wolves. In fact, however, this section represents the development of the ideas of the first two sections, intensified into a more personal image than that of the 'bergele mist'. It is in a certain sense an echo of the poem 'Ikh lig in an orn'. The poet is again imprisoned: the coffin is the snowy earth where he lies, and the coffin-lid is the moon:

Aleyn. Farfroyrene loytere shtilkeyt.
Unter der shtilkeyt -

Mayn naketer guf.
 Bloyz tsvey eyln erd zenen mayne -
 Di, vu ikh lig mit a tsudek levone.

As in 'Ikh lig in an orn' the poet calls for another human being; here it is the wolves which answer. The poet is able to transform them into his muse, by perceiving their howling as music which inspires him to survive and offer resistance:

Aher mayne velf,
 Mayne tayere velf!
 Lomir vern khaveyrim un tretn tsuzamen
 Kegn fayndlekhn mentsh, kegn genemsher kelt.
 Horde muzik, -
 Farnem di velt!

The wolf image probably has two origins; first, the symbolic linking of wolf and music in 'Sibir', and second, in the transformation of wolf into inspiration and confidant, there are distinct echoes of Moyshe Kulbak's visionary 'Velfishe lider', with which Sutzkever must certainly have been familiar.³¹

Like 'Ikh lig in an oren', the poem ends triumphantly; the potential instrument of death is transformed into music, which is synonymous with the poetic word, and this music fills the world, displacing and defeating the forces of evil. The whole poem is unified by the motif of cold and snow. Although here the snow embodies the forces against which the *ikh* must battle - an unusual change of symbolic value dictated by the outer circumstances - an echo of the normal metapoetic symbolism of the snow is evoked by the wolf/music image which links this poem with 'Sibir'.

The principle of transformation is effective even in a situation of extreme physical anguish. 'A tog bay di shturmistn' is a poem full of guilt and questioning, and finally physical

³¹. Mikhl Astor comments on the influence of Moyshe Kulbak on very early poems of Sutzkever. (Yoyvl, p.30).

pain, when the *ikh*, wounded, hides in a lime-pit (a further echo of the coffin-image). The pattern of his own blood on the white lime restores his sense of creativity:

Di kalkhgrub vert mir lib. Ikh lig un trakht:
 'Atsind vel ikh nit oyfhern tsu gafn
 Biz nakht, biz nakht,
 Oyfn shenstn zunfargang, durkh mir aleyn bashafn!'

Again poetic image and physical reality are fused on the same plane through the poetic word, and the created beauty has more power than the cruel fact.

It is in the poem 'Tsum kind' (PV1, p.278)³² that the sublimation of brutal reality takes place through material which seems almost too raw, too intimate for poetry, and yet Sutzkever succeeds in advancing from the intensely personal to the general, from rage and grief at an individual loss to positive affirmation of the great chain of life, death and regeneration; this transformation is achieved, as in 'Tsum khaver', by the development of the idea of 'aynshlingen'.

In the first five sections the bereaved father struggles to establish some meaning for his grief. The initial idea is shocking: the impulse of a father to eat his dead child:

'Tsi fun hunger,
 Tsi fun groyser libshaft, -
 Nor an eydes iz derbay dayn mame:
 Ikh hob gevolt dikh aynshlingen, mayn kind,
 Baym filn vi dayn gufl kilt zikh op
 In mayne finger,
 Glaykh ikh volt in zey gedrikt
 A vareme gloz tey,
 Filndik dem ibergang tsu kaltkayt.'

³². David Roskies, in his valuable article 'Der tsikl fun oyfkum in Sutzkevers a getolid' (*Yikhes*, pp.243-256) has analysed the poem in some detail, discussing its seminal role in the process by which 'der egotsentrisher kuk funem poet vert [...] di prizme farn klal', and its importance in the development of Sutzkever's credo of 'di tsiklishkeyt fun lebn'.

The anguish is made even sharper by the poet's questioning of his own motives: the two impulses, hunger and love, though apparently diametrically opposed, are often related, as Roskies points out:

Vi kumt ober, az hunger un libshaft zoln hoyzn tsuzamen,
 heyoyts vi der ershter iz a fizisher un reyn egoistisher far-
 lang beys emese libshaft kumt for demolt ven der mentsh iz
 oysgeton fun zikh aleyn? Akhuts dem vos dos vayzt on oyf a
 gvaldikn ineveynikstn kamf, shaft zikh a bahaltn shaykhes
 tsvishn ot di kegndike breyres: di libshaft nemt on gevise
 shtrikhn fun hunger. Bay groyser libshaft, punkt vi baym
 esn, vil men opvishn di grenetsn, hobn yenem in gantsn far
 zikh un take in zikh.³³

In the possibility that he may have been motivated by hunger lies the guilt at what Roskies rightly sees as the egocentrism of the urge for food at all costs.³⁴ The impulse of love could be seen as a desperate attempt to *preserve* the child - to prevent the cooling of the body which means irrevocable recognition of the fact that the child is dead: such an interpretation is suggested by the analogy with the rapidly cooling glass of tea, and also by the otherwise puzzling second section. The conjunction 'vayl' does not seem to link the two sections causally in any logical way, *unless* the sequence is interpreted to mean that if the poet wished to consume the child out of love, to preserve him, it was because the child and the father are in any case part of each other:

Vayl du bist nit keyn fremder, nit keyn gast,
 Oyf undzer erd geboyrt men nit keyn tsveytn, -
 Zikh aleyn geboyrt men vi a ring,
 Un di ringen shlisn zikh in keytn.

³³. Roskies, Yikhes, p.247.

³⁴. Sutzkever's guilt about this egocentric urge for self-preservation, which results in his eating an innocent creature, a swallow, is also the main theme of 'Oytoportret' (PV2, p.95), the first poem in the cycle 'Di karsh fun dermonung' written in the early fifties.

Through this insight the idea of the 'goldene keyt' or what Roskies calls 'di tsiklishkeyt fun lebn', which already underlies much of Sutzkever's thinking, is enunciated explicitly for the first time, and the thought process moves from the personal to the general. This movement is continued as the poet sees the birth of his own child as part of the great cosmic process by which human beings are united in love. Roskies has pointed out that Sutzkever represents the child as already present in the act of union between the parents, as *causing*, in fact, this process which leads to his own birth.

The general philosophical train of thought cannot be maintained, however, and the idea that the child is a ring in the chain and the progenitor of love, leads to renewed anguish at his being cut off, - leads back, in other words, to the poet's *personal* loss. Just as the child had been the cause of his parents' joy, so the return to the egocentric perspective makes the child responsible for the loss:

Far vos hostu fartunklt dem bashaf,
 Mit dem vos du host tsugemakht di oygn
 Un gelozt mikh betlerdik in droysn,
 Tsuzamen mit a velt an oysgeshneyter
 Vos du host opgevorf'n oyf tsurik?

The personal anguish continues in the fifth section: the cradle, as in 'Ikh lig in an orn', represents the beginning of the individual's life:

Dikh hot nit derfreyt keyn vig,
 Vos yeder ir bavegung
 Bahalt in zikh dem ritem fun di shtern.

The child has been denied the natural life span, which begins with harmony between the child and nature, signified by the rhythm of cradle and stars. The intensity of grief for the child comes to a climax with striking use of the pathetic fallacy:

Es meg di zun tsebreklen zikh vi gloz,
Vayl keyn mol hostu nit gezen ir shayn.

After the release of violent emotion in this explosive image, the section ends on a quiet note of deep sadness:

A tropn sam hot oysgebrent dayn gloybn,
Du host gemeynt:
S'iz varem-zise milkh.

With this the poem has returned to the theme of nourishment: the child's attempt to nourish himself from poison, like the father's impulse to nourish himself from the child, was a delusion contrary to nature; at the same time, implicitly, there is underlying guilt: these parents have failed to provide nourishment for their child.

Here the emphasis has been transferred from self-pity to pity for the child, and this shift facilitates the broadening out and sublimation of the final section, signalled by the line of dashes denoting a pause, a technique often adopted by Sutzkever, especially in the earlier poetry. After this pause, the poet, prompted perhaps, by the implications of the previous lines, contemplates again his initial impulse to devour his own child; in the light of his reflections in the intervening sections of the poem he is now able to perceive his motives clearly:

Ikh hob gevolt dikh aynshlingen, mayn kind.
Keday tsu filn dem geshmak
Fun mayn gehofter tsukunft.
Efsheer vestu bliyen vi a mol
In mayn geblit.

In effect, by absorbing the child into his own body, he was hoping to return it to the stage before conception, when the future child was still part of himself - 'in mayn geblit'. This attempt runs contrary to the natural process.

The insight he has gained into his guilt and the vanity of his desires now leads to the serene final stanza, when the personal theme opens out into the universal and poetic:

Nor ikh bin nit vert tsu zayn dayn keyver.
 Vel ikh dikh avekshenken
 Dem rufndikn shney,
 Dem shney - mayn ershtn yontev,
 Un vest zinken
 Vi a shpliter zunfargang
 In zayne shtile tifn
 Un opgebn a grus fun mir
 Di ayngefrirte grezlekh - - -

All the imagery is that of poetic inspiration: the childhood snow, the 'zunfargang' the 'grezlekh' which were a recurrent image in 'Blonder baginen' and 'Valdiks' and which develop in 'A briv tsu di grozn' (PV2, pp.155-161) into a permanent metapoetic image. The idea of 'aynshlingen' underlies the ending of the poem: not the unnatural devouring of the child, but the absorption of the child by the earth, which is the natural process. In this respect 'Tsum kind' can be seen as the apotheosis of the horror of 'Penemer in zumpn', where the devouring of live human beings by the earth epitomised the complete breakdown of the natural order. Here the absorption of the dead child by the earth denotes a return to the natural cycle, for by rejoining the earth he is becoming part of the great chain. By burying him, in his imagination, in the snow of Siberia, the poet is assuring eternal life for him: the child has become part of the realm of poetry. Here too the essential reality is poetry, which can overcome grief and death, and the particular power and importance of this poem is that Sutzkever has managed to achieve the synthesis of the personal and the universal, starting from one of the most painful situations which the individual has to suffer: the death of his own child.

Apart from some notable exceptions, ('A shtim fun harts', 'Oyfn toyt fun Yankev Gershteyn', 'Der zokn', 'Tsum yortog fun geto-teater' and 'A vogn shikh'), the poetry written between 1941

and January 1943 concentrates largely on the inner problems of the *ikh* and their effects on his poetry. From early 1943 onward a shift of emphasis takes place. It seems as if the poems 'Tsum kind' and 'Dray royzn', by reaching solutions to the personal dilemmas of the two deaths, have had the cathartic effect of freeing the poet from his deep doubts in himself, and there is now both a broadening out to embrace wider social concerns, and a deeper probing into the nature of poetry.

The increased commitment to ethical questions is manifest in 'Un azoy zolstu reydn tsum yosem' (PV1, p.281). Written only 25 days after 'Tsum kind' this poem should be seen as its development and counterpart. In the earlier poem the point of departure was the anguish of a bereaved father at the death of a particular child, and from this individual situation a general truth about humankind was found. The second poem builds upon this universal truth. The bereaved child stands for the whole of humanity. In contrast to the intensely private nature of 'Tsum kind', this poem is a confident command to all the people. The poem draws on the mythical motif of the simple person or innocent child who asks the correct question, as in the Parsifal legend. The orphan asks three questions: 'Ver bin ikh?', 'Un vi iz mayn nomen?', and the slightly cryptic 'Far vemen?', which, in its context signifies 'For whose sake do I exist?'. The poet dictates the appropriate answers to the 'du' who represents the threatened Jewish people. Thus Sutzkever universalises his personal convictions.

The answer to the first question centres on the concept of the chain, in the negative context of its destruction. The murderers of the child's family have

[...] mitgeschlept oykh di fargangene doyres,

Un di, vos bahaltn
 In trakht fun der tsukunft.
 Vayl der, vos kumt um,
 Derharget di doyres
 Vos yoyren in im
 Un vartn oyf oysleyz, -

The death of an individual leads not only to the destruction of future generations, but also to the obliteration from memory of ancestors whose history he contains in himself. The orphan is seen as the hope of avoiding this oblivion. He is the inheritor of the past generations. The image which describes the essential nature of the 'yarshn' sums up the newly won conviction of the interrelatedness of all things:

A teylkhl, vos iz
 A farklenerte gantskeyt.

This theme is reiterated and developed in the answer to the second question: 'Un vi iz mayn nomen?' The surviving orphan is the whole people, because he carries within him all of Jewish history, and the generations of the future. It is for these latter that he exists, so the answer to the third question 'Far vemen?' brings the poem to a rhetorical, visionary climax, in imagery until now familiar from Sutzkever's earlier, aesthetic poetry:

Kleter aroyf oyf di trep fun der nakht,
 Bagegn dem oyfgang
 Un shray im antkegn:
 - reynik mikh, zun, oyf dos nay
 Un zay moykhl,
 Alts vos geven iz dem goyrls a toes.

Kh'vel tsugreytn emese teg anshtot kvorim,
 Kh'vel oysboyen eygene shtet mit mayn orem.
 Un dortn vet kumen di eybikeyt voynen
 Un teg veln laykhtn in gildene kroynen!

In 'Vayter fun di daled ames' and 'Bashafung' the *ikh* had climbed the mountain towards the sunrise; in 'Himen tsu feldzn' he had aspired to reach through the clouds on the mountain tops and bathe in the 'kosmishn fayer'; in 'Sibir' a crucial moment in

his poetic development was symbolised by his climb up the mountain, away from the realm of his father: these were all images of *personal* transformation. Here he transcends the individual realm and the same images signify the salvation of the Jewish people. The child's certainty that he is 'a teylkhl, os iz/ A farklenerte gantskeyt' will enable him to demand that the sun purify him and give him the power to be a creator: the hubris with which the young Sutzkever expressed his creative urge in the aesthetic realm in poems like 'Vayter fun di daled ames' and 'Himen tsu feldzn' has now become the expression of his ethical conviction. So complete is his confidence in the indestructibility of the regenerative principle that he is able to say: 'Alts, vos geven, iz dem goyrts a toes.' The achievement of this Schillerian sublimity in the Vilna ghetto in 1943 is truly remarkable.

These wider ethical concerns are evident from 1943 onward in the increasing number of poems where instead of the *ikh*, persons or events are the main theme: 'Mayn reterin' (PV1, p.287), 'Yehoash' (PV1, p.296), and 'Di lererin Mire' (PV1, p.307), or where the poet addresses the existential problems of the victims in general: as in 'Vi azoy?' (PV1, p.284) and 'Moyshe' (PV1, p.301). Increasingly, where the *ikh* plays a role, it is as a member of the collective, or as a prophet who encourages or sometimes chastises the people. Striking examples of the latter category are 'Lid tsu di letste' (PV1, p.293) and 'A nem ton lem ayzn' (PV1, p.299). These and other rhetorical, 'prophetic' poems stem from the development of Sutzkever's view of the vocation of the poet from 1943 onward.

Until now, when Sutzkever has written of the word, he has focussed principally on his own private, aesthetic word, but now the threat to two thousand years of Jewish culture broadens the scope of his view of the word to embrace this tradition. His reverence for the endangered Jewish word through which the chain of the cultural tradition continues unbroken, goes hand in hand with the increasing emphasis on the ethical vocation of the poet. This deep concern with the relation between the word and the ethical demands of the time is exemplified in several meta-poetic poems of 1943.

'Kerndlekh veyts' (PV1, p.289) was doubtless inspired by Sutzkever's work in the 'Rosenberg-Stab', during which he and his colleagues saved valuable Jewish documents from the Germans. The poem begins with a first-person depiction of the efforts of the *ikh* to hide these treasures, and then opens out into a legend: grains of wheat buried in a Pharaoh's tomb, when exposed to the sun thousands of years later, had sprouted and grown.

The depiction of the ancient holy manuscripts in the second stanza reveals again several important characteristics of Sutzkever's developing view of the word:

Altinke, tkheylesne dafn
Mit purpur oyf zilberne hor,
Verter oyf parmet, geshribn
Durkh toyzenter groyzike yor.

The adjective 'tkheylesne' (the blue used in dyeing the *tsitses* - the fringed undergarment worn by Orthodox Jews), the use of 'dafn', (the pages of the *Talmud*), the purple, silver and parchment, and the final line of the stanza, all emphasise the venerable Jewish tradition, and the importance of its preservation. In the third stanza, the emphasis is laid on the identity of the spiritual and the physical: the manuscript is like a vul-

nerable child, and word and spirit are one: to protect the word from destruction is to rescue the spirit:

Vi baym bashitsn an eyfl -
Ikh loyf mitn yidishn vort,
Nishter in itlekhn heyfl,
Der gayst zol nit vern dermordt.

In gathering up these materials the poet is preserving the essence of all the centres of Jewish learning and tradition over the centuries-'Amsterdam, Worms, / Livorne, Madrid un YIVO': just as all the past was alive in the surviving orphan, so it lives in the manuscripts.

The legend which forms the second half of the poem is that of the grains of wheat buried in the Pharaoh's tomb: they were intended by the Pharaoh to be a *memory* of 'undzer, der erdisher velt', but instead, thousands of years later they grow and flourish. The final two stanzas of the poem express the poet's faith that the words he is burying will also live and nourish the people in times to come. The poem ends with the faith that the Jewish people *will* survive:

Veln di verter gehern
Dem folk, in zayn eybikn gang.

Several important aspects of Sutzkever's conception of the poetic word are present here. There is the physicality of the word, which can be seen as a particularly Jewish perception,³⁵ and the idea of the eternal life of the word. Both these ideas have been seen in earlier poems, and are the underlying theme of

³⁵. David Goldstein gives an interesting example of this literal interpretation of the word: 'It was the custom in some medieval Jewish communities for a child to have his first taste of the Torah by actually eating some selected Biblical verses. The Hebrew letters of Scripture would be smeared in honey on a slate, and the child would lick them avidly, thus fulfilling the verses: "how sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Psalm 119.103).' D. Goldstein, Jewish Mythology, (London, 1987), p.7. See also Ezekiel 2.8-3.3.

two other poems from Di festung, 'Der zokn' (PV1, p.270) where the old man willing himself to die by refusing physical nourishment, wraps himself in a Torah scroll, and becomes one with it, and 'Di blayene platt fun Roms druckeray', where the lead letters, melted down into bullets, retain the spirit of the words, which inspire the heroic fighters. To a certain extent these features of the word have always been present in Sutzkever's poetry, but from this period onward they gain a new intensity.

The struggle to find a poetic vocation in this time of crisis is the theme of several other poems, most striking of which is 'Gezang fun a yidishn dikhter in 1943' (PV1, p.318). The poem begins on a note of pessimism, conveyed through images of death and decay ('meysim', 'kroen', 'zumpn'):

Tsi bin ikh der letster poet in Eyrope?
Tsi zing ikh far meysim, tsi zing ikh far kroen?
Ikh trink zikh in fayer, in zumpn, in rope,
Gefangen fun gele, gelatete shoen.

The transition from this pessimistic viewpoint to faith in his vocation comes through the inspiration of his mother's tear: this motif links the poem to the earlier fragment 'Dray roy'n' where confidence in his vocation is provided at the end through the idea of his mother living on in him. The tear acts as a mirror, through which he sees 's'milyonike harts, fun di beyner/ Vos yogn tsu mir fun der erd in galopn.' As in the earlier 'Morgnkind', the image, derived from Ezekiel's vision, of bones which spring to life, is a powerful image of the eternity of the Jewish people, and later becomes an image of poetry. This vision leads to a mystical conviction:

Ikh bin dos milyonike harts! Bin der hiter
Fun zeyere ibergelozte nigunim.
Un got, vos der mentsh hot farbrent zayne giter,
Bahalt zikh in mir, vi di zun in a brunem.

The confidence with which the poet sees himself as the guardian of the spirits of the dead and their poetry ('nigunim'), and as the holy vessel containing the indestructible divinity, contrasts strikingly with the tentative or hopeless search for the divine in earlier poems such as 'Glust zikh mir tsu ton a tfile' and 'Unter dayne vayse shtern'; the gradual emergence in these later poems of his conviction in the ethical vocation of the poet goes hand in hand with the achievement of his own private mysticism:

Un zing fun di zumpn, un zing fun der nider,
 Biz vanen es lebt nokh a trer fun der mamen!
 Derhern dayn kol zoln beynerne brider,
 Di brandike geto, un s'folk hinter yamen...

This final stanza represents a significant development in Sutzkever's poetic credo. With it he defines his poetic task as a social one: to record all that is, even the darkness and horror, and absorb it within his poetry. The task has also a resurrective, mystical function: through his poetry he will reach the dead (his mother's tear, the 'beynerne brider') and make them live again; the final line also suggests a commitment to those in the ghetto, and those in foreign lands who are unaware of the catastrophe which is taking place.

This sense of ethical vocation never departs from him. Later a fusion of the aesthetic impulse towards beauty and the ethical dimension is finally achieved in 'Ode tsu der toyb' - meanwhile the struggle between the two impulses continues. Only a few weeks after the 'Gezang fun a yidishn dikhter in 1943' the profoundly pessimistic poem 'Farbrente perl' (PV1, p.323) focusses again on the private inner realm of the poet, struggling with the threatened destruction of his inspiration:

Nit derfar vayl mayne verter varfn zikh
 Glaykh vi hent tsebrokhene nokh retung,

Nit derfar, vayl tseynerdik zey sharfn zikh
 Tsu a layb in fintsternish, - nokh zetung, -
 Blozstu oyf di koyln fun mayn grimtsorn,
 Du geshribn vort, - mayn velts farbayter;
 Nor derfar, vayl dayne klängen glimtsern
 Vi farbrente perl
 Nokh an oysgetsanktn shayter,
 Un keyner - oykh nit ikh - durkh teg tseribener,
 Derkent shoyt nit di froy in flam gevashn,
 Vos fun ale freydn iz geblibn ir
 Gro-farbrente perl in di ashn- -

The whole poem consists of one complex sentence. The first two images are established through negations (not because [...] not because [...]), but these negative images linger in the mind: the words as broken hands, as teeth preying on flesh in the darkness. They are eclipsed by the main image of the unrecognisable victim with her string of charred pearls, achieved by the climactic 'Nor derfar' (but because [...]). The poem has become justly famous among the ghetto poems, perhaps because of the savage power of the imagery, creating a picture of the barbarism of the Holocaust. The essential theme of the poem, however, is the poetic word, and its potential destruction, and it is the word which is the subject of the three images, the hands, the teeth and the charred pearls of the victim. But there is a strange shift between 'mayne verter', which are spoken of in the third person, and 'du geshriben vort', to which the poem is addressed. This is an early occurrence of the distinction between the human words which are the tools of his poems, and the quintessential Word, which he speaks of in various terms (the sparkling essence, the word-soul, or 'di shtilkayt'). Here, the poet is addressing this essential Word, which for him represents the world. It is an indication of the deep despair of this poem that for the first time the word is given an inferior status in comparison to the 'real' world, by being called 'mayn velts farbayter'. His rage stems not from the fact that his poems ('mayne verter') are

injured and helpless, nor because the circumstances have turned them into hungry, cruel things - but from something deeper: the essence of his word, his inspiration, has become *unrecognisable* to him, like the anonymous woman with her charred pearls; the kernel of the poem is therefore the annihilation of his poetic word. But at the same time, a double texture is created, for the third image, evoked, like the others, as a mere simile, grows and takes on an independent existence which remains at the end of the poem as reality, and the poem becomes simultaneously a raging lament for the human victim: as in 'A vogn shikh', its effect is created by an image of absence and annihilation - the victims in the former poem are evoked by their empty shoes, and the murdered woman here by her string of pearls.

Beside the themes of the inner poetic word of the *ikh* and the ethical vocation of the poet, a third, new strand can be discerned in Sutzkever's conception of the word, which is already present in 'Farbrente perl' and becomes a cornerstone of his later metapoetic poems. In 'Farbrente perl' Sutzkever seems to speak of the essence of the word, in contradistinction to words as mere tools. This heralds an ever intensifying attempt to transcend the word in much of the later poetry, and several poems of the ghetto period already allude to a realm beyond ordinary words.

'Verter' (PV1, p.292) written in March 1943, predates 'Farbrente perl' by four months, and resembles it in the distinction between the plural 'words' and the concept of the essential Word. The poem has an illuminating history, which is analysed by Abraham Novershtern in his essay 'Der nartsis un der regn'

(Yikhes, pp.197-210). It was not published until 1962,³⁶ when Sutzkever significantly altered the text of the original manuscript. The published version reads as follows:

Aropshindn, aropshobn fun mir - tu mayne verter.
S'iz foylndiker fleysh. Ikh darf zey nit.
Un loz bloyz iber eyns: a vort-neshome,
Farknotn vi a nign in granit.

Ikh vel di zun aropraysn un shraybn mayn tsavoe,
Az ikh vel vern raykh,
On verter - raykh.
Un iber khvalyes lebedike, bloe,
Aveklozn mayn zunike tsavoe mitn taykh...

In the original manuscript, the first stanza was the same, but the rest of the poem was significantly different. The second part was divided into two stanzas:

Un im, dem eyntsik-blaybikn, dem klugn,
Gefinen vel ikh, un der vet genugn
Tsu makhn mir filverterdik un raykh.

Di zun vel ikh aropraysn un moln
Mit mayn blut dos vort oyf ire goldike krishtoln
Un lozn mitn shtrom es oyfn taykh...

The poem begins with violent imagery similar to that of 'Farbrente perl': art (here the word), and flesh are again equated, just as in 'Sibir' the wolf scents the 'fleysh fun der muzik', but for the first time it is in a negative context ('foylndiker fleysh'). In fact the concept of stripping off the word is part of the imagery of disguise, where the true essence is concealed by an alien covering; here the scraping away of the decaying words reveals the true essence, which is conveyed by the two images 'a vort-neshome' and 'a nign in granit'.³⁷ The latter

³⁶. In Almanakh fun di yidishe shrayber in Yisroel, (Tel-Aviv 1962), pp.31-37.

³⁷. Novershtern draws attention to the appropriateness of the 'nign' as an image of the poetic word: 'Un tomer vil der poet onrufn baym nomen dem tokhikn neshome-oysdruk muz er onkumen tsum thom fun muzik - tsum nign. Der romantisher kuk oyf muzik vi di ummitldike shprakh fun gefil un derfar di emese analogiye tsu poeziye (anshtot dem klasitsistishn farglaykh tsvishn poeziye un moleray) khazert zikh iber say in 'Nokturn' un say do.' (Yikhes, p.197). Novershtern is correct, in that the 'nign' and the

phrase leads back to the metapoetic context of granite in 'Vayter fun di daled ames' and to the 'blanke feldzn fun granit' from the poet's ride with Tshanguri in 'Sibir'. In both versions of 'Verter' the poet seeks to capture the inexpressible nature of 'di vort-neshome' by a paradoxical juxtaposition of the abstract and the concrete: the melody kneaded from granite,³⁸ and in the second stanza, the concept of tearing down the sun. In the original version, however, the poet seeks the 'vort-neshome' through one essential word, 'dem eyntsik-blaybikn, dem klugn' (the tension here is, as in 'Farbrente perl' between ordinary words and the essential Word); and the poet envisages in the earlier poem the possibility of finding this word, through which he will become 'filverterdik un raykh'.

In the final version the poet has gone beyond this conception to something much more abstract: the word is no longer adequate, and the 'vort-neshome' will be captured by *divesting* himself of his words. Thus the 'filverterdik un raykh' of the first version becomes the paradoxical 'on verter raykh' in the final poem.

Novershtern interprets the changes made in the second version as a symptom of the extent to which

di dervayterung tsvishn poet un zayn vort iz oysgevaksn in di fuftsiker un zekhtsiker yorn. Anshtot dem poetishn nodus fun eksistents vert do postulirt a gor prozaisher kiyum, ven der ikh vert 'on verter raykh'. Di tsavoe, vos vert in dem fal farvandlt punkt in dem heypekhn fun a poetishn dokument, vert der oyfrikhtikster ikhisher oysdruk. (Yikhes, p.198)

'klang' are for Sutzkever permanent expressions of the essence of poetry, but the painting analogy is often used too: it has already been encountered in 'Ekstazn', and in 'Cyprian Norwid', where both images are used side by side.

³⁸. The idea of kneading marble occurred as early as 1936, in 'Cyprian Norwid', and thereafter in 'Fir matones':
'In mirml knetstu ayn dayn otem,
Biz dayn skulptur vert fleysh un viln' (PV1, p.143).

It is possible to place a different interpretation on the difference between the two poems, in the light of the increasing abstraction and interiorisation of symbolic motifs relating to poetry from the 1960s onward. Rather than being a prosaic and negative rejection of the word, the second poem represents a further step on the path towards that which lies *beyond* words: 'yenem alef-beys on verter' as Sutzkever calls it in 'Oysdresirte khayes' (PV2, p.356), in 1960, or 'dem finklendikn iker' in a poem from 1983 (Ts-b, p.167). The alterations which he made to the poem show the progress along this road of inwardness, which is symptomatic of his later poetry.

A further striking feature of the poem is the return to the kind of nature imagery which was typical of the poetry of the pre-war period: the sun and the flowing wave and river imagery. Novershtern suggests that the testament unleashed on the waves denotes the opposite of a poetic document, but in fact waves and river are always associated with the poetic in Sutzkever's net of imagery, and here this image denotes a state of harmony between poet and nature when he has reached the 'vort-neshome'. Such imagery is rare in the ghetto poetry, and it is significant that in this visionary poem Sutzkever is able to distance himself from outward reality and immerse himself in the imagery of fusion between *ikh*, nature and poetry which denoted the development of his poetic consciousness in 'Sibir'.

Two other visionary poems which transcend the physical circumstances are 'Der dikhter' (PV1, p.324) and 'Zing nit keyn troyeriks' (PV1, p.352). The former poem, written only two weeks after the despairing 'Farbrente perl', is a vision of resurrection. The poet who has lain under 'toyznt gufn' is called in a

dream, by the voice of his unborn poem: the poem is in li bo, waiting to be brought to life; the function of the poet is to be its redeemer: '- "Dervakh! Vi tor an oysleyzer farzamen!" '. Rising up from under the pile of corpses, the poet finds, lying on his hand, a trembling girl who is the personification of his 'nign'.

The poet is represented as a mythical figure: he is an eternal being, lying under the corpses of the victims, waiting to arise again; he has a mission to release the imprisoned poem, which, as in 'Verter' is evoked as a 'nign'; he has the grace and symbolic attributes of the Classical poet:

A naketer, un oyfn shleyf a mirte.

Zayn hoyt - vi royter vayntroyb kegn fayer -
Hot roz bamolt de volkndlekh in himl.

The second couplet suggests that the poet is the dawn, always a symbol of poetry for Sutzkever; the light from his body illuminates the clouds. Finally, he is an Adam figure: from him the girl is born, and the Genesis allusion is reinforced with the final line: 'Un s'hot bagartlt zey a vint fun breyshes.'

This mystical vision of the resurrection of the poet from under the pile of corpses, the assurance of his poetic mission and of the eternal rebirth of poetry, contrasts strongly with the despair of 'Farbrente perl', but reinforces the mysticism of 'Verter': in 'Verter' Sutzkever has returned to the pre-war nature imagery for inspiration, and in 'Der dikhter' he creates a vision of the poet who has transcended the earthly sphere: he is a mature version of the child of 'Sibir' who talked and walked with the North Star.

The third poem which marks the beginning of the attempt to transcend outward events, and to move from *ayndruk* towards a more

private, visionary *oysdruk* is the short poem which occurs near the end of the whole collection, 'Zing nit keyn troyeriks' (PV1, p.352). This meditative poem was written in a situation of great danger and uncertainty, when Sutzkever and his wife were living in the woods with the partisans, and is placed in the midst of a series of 'public' poems, whose subjects are events and personalities of the poet's immediate situation, - 'Strashun-gas tsvelf' (PV1, p.346), 'Golde' (PV1, p.349), 'Oyfn veg tsu Butslav' (PV1, p.353), ' Dos meyd l fun vald' (PV1, p.360), - or which address his people, often in rhetorical style - 'Un oyb mayn folk vet blaybn bloyz a tsifer' (PV1, p.351) or 'Gezegenish' (PV1, p.355) - all of which reflect the pressing concerns of his situation. This serene poem is in startling contrast to the others written in the same weeks, and shows that the inner sphere of reflection upon the nature of the word always remained active in the midst of outer turmoil.

Written in February 1944, this poem, like so many of Sutzkever's metapoetic poems, is inspired by the snow:

Zing nit keyn troyeriks,
 Tu nit farshemem
 Dem troyer.
 Verter farratn
 Es shteln zikh nomen
 Kapoyer.

Kuk oyfn shney
 Un balaykht mit zayn ru
 Dayn zikorn:
 Likht iz di shprakh fun dayn hartsn.
 Un du -
 Nay-geborn.

Shtrek dayne finger tsum shney,
 Tsu di kalte
 Gevebn.
 Oysleyzn vestu in zey
 Dos bahaltene
 Lebn.

The serenity of the poem is achieved technically by the rippling movement which results from the *enjambement* of short and

longer lines, and thematically by the silent presence of the snow which pervades the poem. It is a direct address, in the form of three commands, to a 'du' who is the poet himself. On one level the poem is a negation of poetry: the opening stanza can be interpreted to mean that any attempt to capture in words the tragedy of the events can only be embarrassing in its banality. It is a negation of the power of words: not only are words deceptive but, he suggests, to name something is to turn it on its head. It is important to note that in Jewish mythology the opposite belief is held: when Adam named the animals he gained dominion over them, and the reversal of this Jewish belief gives Sutzkever's contention even more dramatic force.

The link between the first and second stanza gains significance in the light of Sutzkever's snow symbolism, and of 'Verter' where the poet first enunciates his desire to penetrate beyond the realm of human words: in this context the snow of the second stanza is the sphere of the 'vort-neshome'. Sutzkever is not negating poetry, but is positing the snow as the realm of poetry beyond human words; only there can the true language be found ('Likht iz di shprakh fun dayn hartsn') which, by implication could express the true essence of 'troyer'. Understanding this, the *du* can make more intimate contact with the snow: 'Kuk oyfn shney' in the second stanza becomes 'Shtrek dayne finger tsum shney' in the third. The 'du' is given godlike powers: in a gesture reminiscent of God giving life to Adam, the hidden life in the snow is released by the poet - the term 'oysleyzn' links the mystical power of the *du* of this poem with the figure in 'Der dikhter'. This poem is not therefore a negation of poetry, but a search for a poetry which transcends words- in a realm symbolised by the snow, under which lie the dead child and the frozen Jews

of a poem written a few months later (PV1, p.362). The child is part of the personal sphere of the poet, and the frozen Jews a symbol of the martyred people. Both spheres are waiting for redemption through poems which strive to reach the 'vort-neshome' *beyond* the words and images.

In the poetry of the ghetto period there is therefore no real break in the continuity of Sutzkever's themes and imagery: the search for the essence of poetry continues to underlie his work, and the key images occur here as before, often developing new connotations to reflect the traumatic subject matter of the ghetto poetry. There is, however, striking innovation: the physical, ethical and metaphysical dilemmas of the circumstances produce constant tension between the aesthetic and the ethical, out of which two new and fruitful elements are beginning to emerge: the poet's conviction of his poetic vocation as a witness, a recorder, and a link between generations, and at the same time an ever deepening private mysticism: the search for the 'vort-neshome'. These strands of *ayndruk* and *oysdruk*, the ethical and the aesthetic, the public and the private spheres of poetry have not yet been resolved into harmony and synthesis. New stimuli arising from the land and the history of Israel will effect further changes.

CHAPTER 5

Transition: the years after the Holocaust.

Before arriving in Israel, Sutzkever wandered for three years. The poet and his family lived in Moscow from March 1944 until early 1946, and during this period Sutzkever spent two months in the liberated Vilna (July-September 1944), travelling to Germany to testify at the Nuremberg Trials in February 1946. Having realised that the political climate in the Soviet Union was changing to the detriment of Jews, and that there was no possibility of a Jewish community regenerating in Vilna, the family left the Soviet Union. For more than a year they travelled in Poland, France, Holland and Switzerland, before leaving for Israel in September 1947.

A situation of extreme crisis often provides parameters: when it is not possible to think beyond the immediate situation, or influence the course of events, the senses may be numbed, and wider emotional and ethical concerns shelved, so that the individual concentrates on the exigencies of the moment, devising his own means of survival. It is when the extreme stress is alleviated that the person is forced to contemplate the full horror of the ordeal, and the existential problems which arise from it: in the case of Holocaust survivors this often meant feelings of guilt about those who had perished, and an acute awareness of the precarious fragility of existence.¹ The survivor must devise a strategy for continued existence, facing the task of reconstructing his sense of identity - his previous self having

1. Nelly Sachs expresses these problems of the survivors, for example in her poem 'Chor der Geretteten'. Die Gedichte der Nelly Sachs (Frankfurt am Main, 1961), p.50.

been violated, perhaps destroyed. All this is evident in Sutzkever's poetry of the immediate post-Holocaust period. In the unrelenting strain of the previous three years, writing had been his anchor and the focal point of his existence, and this continued to be the case. He wrote throughout these years of wandering, appending the date and place of composition to each poem. An indication of the continuing essential role of poetry to his existence is the fact that he was able to write the cycle 'In Sdom' while in Nuremberg, composing the eight-line poem 'Farn Nyurnberger Tribunal' on February 27, 1946, the very day after his testimony.

The ghetto poems, despite their harrowing subject matter, and their anguished questioning about the nature of poetry, are underpinned by clearly defined concerns and shared tribulations of a *community*. Now these foundations have disappeared, and the rootlessness, loss of identity and existential questioning of the survivors permeate the lyric poems, so that both in Sutzkever's life and work, this period may be seen as a no-man's-land, a time of transition.

The output of these three turbulent years is not small: as well as some thirty-five shorter poems, Sutzkever wrote the monumental epic *poeme* 'Geheymshtot', which describes the community of ten Jews living in the sewers under the town of Vilna; the poem was begun in Moscow in 1945, and continued in Lodz and Paris, where he completed it in 1947. He also completed a cycle of 'Epitafn', begun in the Vilna ghetto and dated 'Vilner geto - Moskve - Lodz, 1943-1946'. A further achievement of the first months in Moscow in 1944 was the valuable autobiographical account of the years 1941-1944, Vilner geto. Finally there is the

powerful ode 'Tsu Poyln', his leavetaking and attempted reconciliation.

Many of the poems of these years were first published in East European journals, before being collected for the volume Yidishe gas.² In the Poetishe verk of 1963 they are published as a collection entitled 'Yidishe gas' and are presented chronologically, according to Sutzkever's policy of that period (a policy which he abandoned in favour of thematic cycles in the middle period of In fayer-vogn, Oazis, and Tsaytike penemer, but which is resumed later with the Lider fun togbukh (1974-1985). The chronological presentation reinforces the importance of the ethical dimension, the poet's sense of mission to witness and record, whereas the earlier and later thematic cycles reflect the more aesthetic phases, where the expression of the poet's inner vision predominates.

The poems are transitional in that they look backward and attempt to look forward. The poet struggles to exorcise the past by rehearsing its horror in nightmare images. In 'Lid vegn a hering' (PV1, p.578), the normal is used to underscore the madness: the child, waiting with its mother in the line of victims at the open trench, cries for food, and the mother's last act is to nourish her doomed child. The final image of the poem is of 'A kind mit a blutikn hering in moyl/ In eynem a zumers baginen'. The actuality of Germany is overlaid with the shadow of the past, as when the poet, looking at the Brandenburg Gate, sees 'A geto- toyer, frish fun hak un zeg', (PV1, p.557), or when, in another

². The volume Yidishe gas also includes earlier poetry: a collection of the ghetto poems, and the group of poems written between 1937 and 1940, here called 'Fun antlofenem indzl', which in the Poetishe verk are entitled 'Epilog tsu Valdiks'.

poem of the cycle 'In Sdom', he notices the kind of goods which are being sold in the market:

Me krigt do alts. Un volvl, far a shpot:
 An atlasene zhupitse a fayne,
 A kleyd, avu s'iz kentik nokh der J
 Un oyeringlekh baflemit mitn sod
 Fun shabes-likht in Poyln tsi Ukrayne. (PV1, p.558)

Anguish and guilt, connected, as in the poems written in the ghetto, with the death of his mother, and with the situation of the survivor, are expressed through new images or by means of established images which contrast with their earlier context. One powerful new physical image is that of the 'Shvartse derner' (PV1, p.546):

Es vaksn derner
 Oyf mayn mames hoyz -
 Dem nekhtns dule, ongeshpitste blikn!
 Un ikh -
 Oyf zeyer shtekhikeyt ikh hoyz,
 Ikh zukh a tikn
 In di shvartse derner.

The image unites the physical and the emotional: the 'shtekhikeyt' of thorns causes pain to those who lie on them: at the same time the image of thorns covering the once cared-for house³ signifies the absence of the mother; the *ikh* is seeking a resolution of his anguish through inflicting upon himself the physical pain of lying, and at the end of the poem, dancing on the thorns, which signifies at the same time his need to punish himself, and to attempt to join his mother:

Tsu dem
 Vos hot geflantst di shvartse derner
 Bet ikh:
 Tu mikh oykh vi zey farflantsn,
 Ikh vil do lebn,
 Gut iz mir do, gut.

³. This image, like many others in Sutzkever's poetry, has an almost fairy-tale character: it is like a macabre echo of the hedge of thorns surrounding the castle of the Sleeping Beauty.

The desire to 'plant himself' among the thorns which surround his mother's house also reflects the need of the *ikh* who has lost his roots to seek them in the 'nekhtn'.

This feeling of homelessness is expressed particularly clearly in 'Tsu Poyln' and in 'Di froy fun mirml oyfn Père Lachaise' (PV1, p.601). In the latter poem, visiting Chopin's grave, the poet discovers that Chopin's birthplace was very close to his: 'Vedlik ort iz er kimat a bruder'. The marble statue on Chopin's grave, however, ironically points out to the *ikh* the difference between his situation and that of Chopin:

Dos harts fun dem vos ikh hit
Iz lang avek in zayn heymland.
Un bloyz der shtoyb zayner blit
In roytn, toytn leymland.

Nor du az du vilst, mesye,
Vi mayn har Chopin farbrengen, -
Tsi veystu vu neyn, vu ye,
Me zol dos harts dayns brengen?

In respect of *time*, Chopin was more fortunate than the *ikh*: his birthplace was still intact when he died, and thus his heart had a 'heymland' to return to. The *ikh*, by contrast, is suffering a double exile: he is in a foreign land, but his original homeland has disappeared also.

A further characteristic of these poems is the use made of images of nature. The elemental forces which inspired Sutzkever's earlier metapoetic poetry, are explicitly, almost bitterly rejected here, as having no relevance to this situation. A powerful statement is made in 'A mol iz gegangen a regn', (PV1, p.543), written in April 1945. Here nature images which were formerly linked to poetic inspiration are used to pinpoint the contrast between the 'amol' and the present.

The poem is addressed to a 'du' who is called 'mayn liber fraynd': this conversational mode with its chatty refrain ('Du

host es bamerkt?/ Oyb neyn - a shodn!'), together with the folk tale framework of the 'once-upon-a-time' ('Amol iz gegangen a regn'), gives an initial impression of lightness and gaiety which is maintained throughout the first part, where the poet reminisces about the way the earth used to be. The images are specifically those of the metapoetic poetry of 'Blonder baginen' and 'Valdiks': as in the poem from 1940, 'Regns fun farbn un blumen' (PV1, p.103), the elemental force is rain, which, combining with sunshine, forces the grass out of the earth 'In a vaserkleyd,/ In a zunenkleyd'. There are images of delicate sensuality:

Iz aroysgeshvumen di vayse royz
 Arumgekhaft mit dershrokene bletlekh
 Vi a naket meydil baym derhern trit.

In the image of the cherry tree succumbing to the caress of the rain and giving forth the 'kushn-vaynshl' from its lips, a playful echo of 'A tsvaygl karshn' can be discerned.

The human beings in this Garden of Eden are treated with a humorously ironic touch: after the initial idyllic nature description there is a *Stimmungsbruch* reminiscent of Heine, as in their white straw hats the people rush to shelter from the shower in conservatories where vines are grown:

Es hot gor di erd zikh gefreyt mitn regn,
 Bloyz mentshn in vayse shtroyene hit
 Zenen gelofn
 Mit hirshene trit
 Gikh un gikher
 Tsum glezernem toyer,
 Vu a veserl hot gezhumet in troyb
 Vi a flig, vos falt arayn in oyer.

It could be argued that the turning point of the poem is the introduction of the human beings, whose behaviour shows them to be out of harmony with the elemental forces - though the depiction of them has an affectionate comedy which preempts any tragic

effect. Certainly the strange comparison of water dropping on grapes to a fly falling into the ear suddenly introduces an uncomfortable note to the nature imagery, which heralds the change in mood:

A mol iz gegangen a regn.
Haynt-
Iz nito mer keyn regn,
Mayn liber fraynd.

The 'haynt' is characterised by an image which represents the negation of life and growth in Sutzkever's poetic vocabulary: the cloud:

Anstot a regn
Geyt, kumt
A volkn, tunklt arop tsu der erd
Un barirt shtet mit shpinike finger.

Clouds are hardly ever present in Sutzkever's early landscapes, but where they occur, they are the antithesis of the life-giving sun, and are usually a metaphor for despondency or deception, as in 'Tsu mayn geboyrn-tog' (PV1, p.51: 'Kuk zikh ayn, di volkns rund arum -/ Dos zenen di iluziyes, ful mit groyl') or in 'A blayene hant' (PV1, p.59: 'Es yogn farbay mayne teg vi a volkn-tabun/ Un hengen zikh on oyf di verbes fun heymishn kant'). Here the cloud has 'shpinike finger' and envelops the human habitations with 'tropns tsin'. In the remainder of the poem, the imagery evokes in a surreal vision the devastation of the Holocaust:

Shvimen aroys di tsekneytshte hayzer
Mit farhakte lodn,
Farzhaverte hokns,
Un anshtot heymishe dekher -
Shtoynen
Shvartse derner vi bintlekh blitsn.

These lines gather together surreal images from other Holocaust poems of Sutzkever. In 'Yehoash' (PV1, p.296), 'a bintl kranke hayzer' is being driven downstream; 'farhakte shleser' is

the metaphor which characterises the paralysis which the poet foresees for Holocaust survivors in the prophetic poem 'Vi azoy?', written in 1943 (PV1, p.284), and 'zhaver' (rust) is a frequent negative image in the poetry of the ghetto period, as in the poem 'Oyfn toyt fun Yankev Gershteyn' (PV1, p.246), which begins: 'Mir hobn shoyrn adurkhgezhavert ale zibn toyt'n'. In 'Der tsirk' (EN, p.6), the people's demoralisation is conveyed by the lines

Di tsung iz oyfgebletert fun der zhaverdiker treyst,
Az volf un lam vet hoyern tsuzamen.

The hooks suggest the already familiar 'shvartse derner' which again cover the roofs. The earlier picture of the carefree people is explicitly negated:

Nito mer di vayse shtroyene hit
Vos loyfn tsum toyer,
Tsum glezernem toyer.

It is replaced by a vision of destruction where the drops of molten tin - each one representing the annihilation of one victim - swirl into nothingness:

Tsiyen zikh,
Shnirlen
Shurshen
Rizlen
Ahin, ahin,
Tsu der eybiker nider,
Tsum uraltn foter fun ale tropns.

It would be unwise to perceive in the 'uraltn foter' a consoling image of the Deity; this is rather the source of destruction, the cloud out of which the drops emerged. The proof is that from this rain no life comes:

Nor ahinter zey -
Vey, vey,
Grozn mer nit aroys keyn grozn,
Blimlt mer nit aroys keyn blimlung,
Nor es blaybt a veg,
A tsekarbter veg,
Vos hot nit keyn oysveg vuhin tsu firn.

Un nit keyn regn-boygn geyt oyf -
Ncr a shteynerne foyst in zibn kolirn.

In order to express the human tragedy Sutzkever negates and rejects the life-giving forces of nature which were the core of the early metapoetic imagery: rain, sun, grass, rainbow.

Another central metapoetic nature image, the mountain, is rejected in 'Pilatus' (PV1, p.597), which can thus be seen as a direct counterpoint to 'Vayter fun di daled ames' and 'Himen tsu feldzn', where the mountains represent the sublime, and reaching their summits is poetic fulfilment. The earlier positive symbolic resonance increases the significance of the poet's sombre rejection of Mount Pilatus.

The mountain here is a victim, condemned to be blind and petrified as a punishment for its earlier arrogant attempt to reach God:

Pilatus, geven bistu volkn, gekletert tsu Got,
Nor er hot mit feldzikn blik dikh farblindt un farglivert.

This image of the cloud's metamorphosis into mountain draws on the idea of change and renewal in nature expressed in the earlier poem, 'Oyf a barg' (PV1, p.128):

Altsding iz farvandlenish, banayung,
A sekund, un andersh zeyen oys
Di geberg,

but in 'Pilatus', the metamorphosis idea, which normally expresses *life*, is perceived by the poet as a change from movement into a blind, petrified state. The *ikh* tries to draw strength from the mountain, not, as in the earlier metapoetic poems, by climbing to its summit, but instead, by *entering* the mountain:

Ikh klamer zikh ayn mit di negl un tseyen in dayn kark,
Vil onton dayn kleydung.

The difference between this and the earlier triumphant imagery of climbing is very significant: here the *ikh* is like an

animal burrowing into the mountain. But the mountain is not capable of curing the ills of the *ikh*:

Farkerperter breyshes! Mayn kleyne, mayn mentshlekhe vund
 Bistu nit bekoyekh fardekn mit feldzike lates.
 Un shpring ikh in opgrunt, - afile in yener sekund
 Vet mikh nit derfreyen dayn galik gelekhter, Pilatus!

In contrast to its earlier clear metapoetic force, the mountain image has become ambiguous: the mountain is still 'farkerperter breyshes', but is impotent and mocking. This combination of images suggests that creation itself - with all the positive resonance of the term 'breyshes'- has been defiled. In this poem, as in 'A mol is gegangen a regn' the established, positive nature image is distorted and rejected to convey the poet's despair.

As well as struggling to come to terms with the horrors of the past, the poet manages to confront the future, and the problem of the poetic vocation. The poem 'Ikh hob gezukht dos nit antplekte shvaygn' (PV1, p.551) most strikingly anticipates later trends in Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry. The poem develops the theme already embarked upon in the ghetto poems 'Verter' (PV1, p.292), and 'Zing nit keyn troyeriks' (PV1, p.352), that of the realm beyond words. The earlier poems are both in the form of commands or prescriptions to the self, and both express, in the future tense, a *hope* of achievement. Here, by contrast, the form is that of the narrative; in playful vein the *ikh* describes being helped in his search by a little worm, significantly dressed in a 'groznkleyd, mit perlshayn bahort' - grasses and pearls being recurrent metapoetic images. This is one of the earliest appearances of the small creatures, whimsically portrayed - (and in translation at times coming dangerously near to the absurd!) -

which convey the metapoetic theme: elsewhere there are the ants of 'Murashke-nest' (PV1, p.225), the 'milbn' in 'A briv tsu di grozn' (PV2, p.158), the ubiquitous bees, and the little bird which plays the Stradivarius violin (Ts-b, p.148). These motifs are another aspect of his adaptation of folk- and fairy-tale motifs.

The silence which the poet seeks is inside a stone, which he must crack open. Force does not achieve this, but when his 'letste trer' falls upon it, the granite rock splits open, and the miracle occurs:

Un vunder iz geshen: a goldn funkl
 Hot durkhgeshvign mayn geleynte tsung,
 Un gor di velt in ashikn getunkl
 Iz oyfgegangen breyshesdik un yung
 Tsuzamen mit mayn gayst. Dos hot dos shvaygn
 Zayn malakh-vort mir foterish fartroyt.
 Atsind vel ikh shoyt kenen shtaygn, shtaygn,
 Ahin, vu es derklettert nit der toyt.

This remarkable poem looks forward to a new phase of *oysdruk*, where the experiences of the Holocaust have been integrated into the poet's consciousness, so that the ethical and the aesthetic are fused, and he is free to create a new universe from within himself. This fusion is achieved here in the final stanza, where the world and the *ikh* are renewed through the poet's perception of the quintessential 'shvaygn'; the experience is described as a 'goldn funkl' (anticipating the 'finklendikn iker' of later poems) which drenches his tongue with *silence*, thus freeing it. Simultaneously, his inner achievement frees the world, which is reborn 'breyshesdik un yung': this is in a sense the *ikh*-centred vision of the universe which the young poet had in the poetry of the thirties, but deepened and transformed by the real experience of death and by his newly gained ethical perception. This gives the final lines, where death is transcended

through the 'malakh-vort' a profundity lacking in the earlier visions.

Silence gives birth to the word, which is described as an angel: this is the essential life-giving, all-meaning Word, rather than the human 'verter' which are merely the tools of the poetry. Not until 'Ode tsu der toyb' does Sutzkever again achieve a similar mystical perception of the realm beyond human words.

The poems of this period show the poet oscillating between the anguish of the Holocaust trauma, and hope in survival and renewal through poetry. The fact that the despairing 'Pilatus' was written about two years after the positive 'Ikh hob gezukht dos nit antplekte shvaygn' shows that there was no progressive 'cure' but rather a turmoil of impulses and constant plunging from one mood to another. In the gradual re-emergence of the poet's faith in renewal through the word, external influences played an important role: the stimulus of new or rediscovered places. Paris excited him with the experience of intellectual and physical freedom, and was perceived as a town 'Vu mentsh iz *mentsh*, mit zayne freydn, benkshaftn un tsarn' (PV1, p.588), where he heard a voice calling to him 'Gut morgn, nay geboyrener!' (PV1, p.591).

Confrontation with the places of the deepest tragedy also provided the stimulus to come to terms with his own anguish and that of the people: among the ruins of Warsaw ('Shures geshribn in Varshe', PV1, p.582), he was able to turn to Isaiah's words 'Nakhamu, nakhamu',⁴ and call on other poets to identify them-

4. 'Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.' (Isaiah 40.1).

selves with the collective rather than with their own personal emotions:

Poetn! Lomir zikh farvandlen
 In zikh aleyn. - in fray gezang.
 Mit undzer troyer mer nit handlen, -
 Vayl er iz listik vi a shlang.
 Un mitn folk in eynem vandlen
 Ariben eygenem fargang.

This is a rejection of the aesthetic Romanticism of his early years, and a turning to the idea of an ethical vocation as a Jewish poet after the Holocaust. The symbol of this identification in the final lines of the poem is Yisroel Shtern, the poet associated with the *Khaliastre* group who had died in the Warsaw ghetto:

Un shtarbn vi Yisroel Shtern
 Un lebn oyf mit im tsuzam.

During this visit to Poland between July and September 1946, Sutzkever also wrote the monumental 'Tsu Poyln' (PV1, p.567), in which he tries to reconcile the shared history of Poles and Jews with the incomprehensible events. Finally, at the moment of deepest despair in the poem, he finds a resolution at the tomb of Perets in Warsaw, where a Jew had made a hiding place for himself:

A geto-yid hot es mit forkht, eygnhentic
 A heym zikh geboyt baym antrinen fun shkhite, -
 Di goldene keyt zol do hobn a shlite
 Un hitn dem letstn vos tulyet zayn gloybn
 Tsu Peretses eybike, gleybike shtoybn.

This image is particularly appropriate for Sutzkever's needs: it echoes his own escape by hiding in a coffin in 1941, and it is an image of the symbiosis of life and poetry, in the sense in which he saw the poetic word as protection in the ghetto ('Kolzman dos lid farlozt mikh nit, vet mikh dos blay nit fartilkn' - YH, p.5). Here the unknown fugitive has preserved his own life through clinging to the greatness of the poetic word

incorporated in Perets. Here Sutzkever explicitly uses the image of the 'goldene keyt' taking it from Perets's play, where it symbolises the survival and constant renewal of Judaism. This idea, together with the wider human implications of the great cycle of death and regeneration with which Sutzkever endows it, underlies Sutzkever's poetry from the beginning, as we have seen. Now it appears as an explicit image which leads into the final vision of the poem, within which Sutzkever incorporates lines from Perets's play:

Un ikh, vos aher bin gekumen kedey tsu
 Gezegenen zikh - nem aroyf oyf mayn pleytse
 Dem oyel un vander avek mit zayn nign
 Vos gor di fargangenish tut er tsevign
 Un vet mir a veg in di morgns farakern:
 - 'Ot azoy geyen mir,
 Di neshomes - flakern!'

Here too, Sutzkever sees himself as a representative of the collective, carrying Perets's monument, which symbolically unites the past and the future, and taking with him the whole Jewish people who, in Perets's vision, are an eternal chain.

In this period the ethical vocation and the aesthetic impulse, seen in 'Ikh hob gezukht dos nit antplekte shvaygn' are still in somewhat uneasy balance: the experience of Israel was to enable him to sublimate and integrate the pain of the period in his consciousness.

Two further poems exemplify the transitional nature of this period in Sutzkever's creation. The first is 'Shpinoze' (PV1, p.593). In the 1937 volume Lider Sutzkever had published a poem entitled 'A nakht mit Shpinozen'. This poem was augmented by two further sections written in The Hague and Amsterdam in 1947, and the different use to which the poet puts the figure of Spinoza in the later sections is an illuminating illustration of develop-

ments in his life and poetic consciousness in the intervening ten years.

It is not difficult to see why the young Sutzkever was fascinated by Spinoza. The inherent romanticism of the figure consists in his being, like Cyprian Norwid, misunderstood and rejected by his fellow men, and living in isolation and poverty, faithful to his beliefs, which were dearer to him than riches or society. More poignantly even than in 1937, Spinoza represented in 1947 the isolated, homeless Jew. More important than the man himself, perhaps, is Spinoza's philosophy: his unification of the spiritual and the corporeal, the divine and the human,⁵ is in harmony with Sutzkever's early Romanticism, which develops into his mature perception of the oneness of all entities and generations and their participation in the chain of being.

The young Sutzkever's 'A nakht mit Shpinozen' is inspired by the spirit of the philosopher, and is a Romantic evocation of the poet's harmony with nature. The *ikh*, the world, and poetry are unified in love:

Der gayst fun der velt ligt gefangen bay mir oyf di hent.
Vi blumen un grozn
Es bliyen di oysyes in eybiker libshaft derkent.

The *ikh* can sense every impulse of nature:

In veltisher zeung
Farnem ikh mayn toyznt-geshtaltikeyt noent un horkh.
Un ot - a gesheung:
Ikh shpir durkh di glider fun grozn un beymer dem shorkh,

⁵. 'The corporeal or extended substance was not created by God but is one of the infinite attributes of God.'

'Substance thinking and substance extended are one and the same substance, comprehended now through one attribute, now through the other.'

'The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.'

Arnold Zweig, The Living Thoughts of Spinoza, (London, 1959) pp.63 and 72.

while, in a Romantic pathetic fallacy, nature feels and expresses the emotions of the *ikh*:

S'geveyn fun di griln
Trert oys mayne leydn. Di milb varft in fayer mayn toyt.

As in many other poems of this period, the world exists as a projection of the self, and Sutzkever perceives Spinoza as the inspiration of these insights and of the poetry which arises from them:

Avek shoy'n Shpinoze.
Es hoykht nokh zayn varemer otem oyf mayn manuskript.

The figure of Spinoza in this earlier part of the poem has essentially an aesthetic function in Sutzkever's fundamentally *ikh*-centred vision.

In the second section, written ten years later, rather than using the imaginary figure as an attribute of his own vision, Sutzkever seeks the real Spinoza, entering the house in The Hague and imagining the philosopher there with the painter Van der Spijck (who painted the best known portrait of Spinoza). The poet asks an urgent question of the philosopher:

- Man, du shtarbst, nor entf'er, hob ikh dikh farshtanen gut,
Vayl derfar ikh ken nit lebn, shlof nit:
Iz der umkum oykh an umbadingter atribut
Funem krayz, vos hot keyn onheyb, sof nit?

The significance for Sutzkever of Spinoza's pantheism has moved from the aesthetic to the ethical, and he tries to find in this imagined encounter a resolution of the questions about death and immortality which the Holocaust has brought to the forefront of his mind; the poet tries to find confirmation of his own belief (expressed in 'Tsum khaver', 'Tsum kind', and 'Un azoy zol-stu reydn tsum yosem') of the great and unbreakable chain of life, death and renewal.

In the final stanza it seems as if the poet *has* received an answer, characteristically by way of a visionary rather than a philosophical path:

Oyfn tish di ovntzun fun eybikeyts kolir
 Shlayft a gloz, vos er hot nit dershlifn.
 Un an entf'er git mir di muzik fun griner tir,
 Efnt a gedank in mayne tifn.

Symbolically the sun continues the work of grinding the glass which Spinoza had not been able to complete, and the creak of the door, which in the first stanza had evoked 'di muzik fun zayne shoen', seems to signify the continuing presence of the philosopher. These two poetic images suggest continuity despite physical death, and are thus an answer to his question.

The third section illustrates the importance of the visual arts for Sutzkever. The analogy between painting and poetry was made in the imagery of 'Cyprian Norwid' ('Faran aza tsuzamenhang fun klang un loyter bild,/ Dan vert di kritsndice pen - a fayer-diker pendzl, -'), and Sutzkever has written many poems inspired by sculpture and by particular artists: Chagall, Van Gogh and especially Rembrandt.⁶ The poem of 1954, entitled 'Rembrandt', illuminates the significance which the encounter with Rembrandt's painting had for Sutzkever during his visit to Amsterdam in 1947, - the encounter which gives rise also to the third section of 'Shpinoze'. In the later poem, 'Rembrandt', Sutzkever remembers having seen Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' which had been hidden under the snow during the German Occupation; the effect of the snow on the canvas had been to reveal other shadowy figures in the painting. The poet perceives this fact as a paradigm of *his* inner

⁶. See 'Di mirmlne statue', (PV2, p.114), 'Chagallisher gortn' (PV2, p.357), 'Chagallische verter' (FOM, p.27), 'Van Gogh tsu zayn shvester' (FOM, p.26), 'Der veg tsum Gan-eydn' - a poem inspired by Rembrandt's painting of the carcass of a cow which hangs in the Louvre, (PV2, p.358), and 'Rembrandt', (PV2, p.310).

situation: beneath the surface of freedom 'Ven m'hot zikh shoy'n fargunen lebn, libn,', there lie 'di gayster/ Farhoyn in zikorn, in der blind', which his poetic word brings to light. The figure of Rembrandt is also connected therefore with these questions, and knowledge of this gives a profounder meaning to the final section of 'Shpinoze' when the poet sees the painter and the philosopher walking together through the streets of Amsterdam. They are perfectly complementary: Spinoza has painted with words what Rembrandt was unable to convey on his canvas, and Rembrandt is able with his brush to give the finishing touch to Spinoza's picture of God. Their perfect inner harmony, the absolute unity of word and picture, has vanquished death:

Beyde shotns nemen eynik trakhtn.
 Dekn tsu mit durkhzeyiker hoyt
 I di shtot, kapoyer in di grakhtn,
 I dem klugn, vartndikn toyt.

Though the poem 'Shpinoze' is not the most eloquent of Sutzkever's expressions of the theme of the word, death and eternity, its significance lies in its exemplary nature; in the first section the pantheism of Spinoza is a peg on which hangs the poet's Romantic aesthetic outpouring, and the philosopher himself seems a mere cipher; under the influence of the events and the changes which they wrought on the poet's life and thought in the intervening period, the second and third sections are founded on experienced reality; the focus of the poem moves away from the inner world of the *ikh*, and outward to the real person and ideas of Spinoza, attempting to find answers to Sutzkever's urgent aesthetic and ethical questions. This shift from the egocentric and aesthetic plane to that of the ethical, and the collective, reflects developments in Sutzkever's work from 1941 onward.

Consistent with Sutzkever's normal practice, the collection 'Yidishe gas', in the Poetische verk, volume 1, ends with a poem of particular thematic significance, which leads, in this case, into the next phase of his life and poetic development. 'Shturem oyf di vasern bay Krete' (PV1. p.605), like 'Di neshome fun yam', one of the earlier poems in the collection In fayer vogn, was written on board the *Patria* in which the Sutzkevers sailed to Israel in September 1947. Both literally and thematically, therefore, the poem marks the transition from Europe to Israel, and from the past into the future.

The sea had not until then on the whole been part of Sutzkever's poetic landscape.⁷ Now in 1947, as he crossed to Israel, the sea became a decisive part of his own experience, and passed into his poetic vocabulary. In this sense 'Shturem oyf di vasern bay Krete' can be said to be Sutzkever's first sea-poem.

The storm of the title threatens the hoped-for new life in Israel, and the poetic means by which the poet confronts it highlights an important new strand of poetic imagery which will develop during the early period in Israel. He seeks courage through inspirational figures from the *Torah* and from Jewish history. The first is Jehuda Halevy, the twelfth century Hebrew poet who, after a lifetime of expressing his longing for Zion in eloquent poems, embarked for the Holy Land when he was at least sixty-five years of age, surviving a hazardous sea crossing which he evoked in poetry. Inspired possibly by Halevy's poems 'Song at

7. Despite its title, the earlier poem 'Baym yam' (PV1, p.235) confirms rather than refutes this assertion, in that the main focal points of the poet's interest are the stork and the amber on the shore, which are infused with symbolic significance, rather than the sea itself.

Sea' and 'On the High Seas',⁸ in which the poet maintains his faith despite the storm, or perhaps purely by the similarity between Halevy's longing and his own, Sutzkever conjures up the Hebrew poet as a talisman:

Entfer ikh dem shturem kinig: oyfn zelbn yam
 Hot Halevi zikh gelozn fun zayn heym der shpanisher,
 Un zayn Tsi~~e~~n-benkshaft, vos ikh otem-ayn ir flam,
 Vet dayn kinigraykh bahershn, hersher du vulkanisher!

The second important image is that of the *Akeyde Yitskhok* - the binding of Isaac, signifying perfect faith and submission to the will of God, leading to salvation and the continuation of the Jewish people. Sutzkever applies the image to his own situation, equating the plight of the helpless ship *Patria*⁹ in the storm with the submissive neck of Isaac under his father's threatening knife:

Vi der khalef a geleynter in Avrahams hant -
 Iber mir der shturem. Un mayn 'Patria' di boygike,
 Oysgeglaykht dem nakn, in a gildenem girland,
 Hoydet funem feldz avek mit zeglen regn-boygike.

The rainbow is also a biblical symbol of deliverance, and a permanent Sutzkeverian image, and here the 'zeglen regn-boygike' signify the transition from storm to calm, like the moment when God stayed Abraham's hand. The poem ends with the vision of Galilee:

Biz antkegn shvebt mir der Galil -
 Zunen zeks milyon in zayne toyen.

⁸. The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, ed. by T. Carmi (Harmondworth, 1981), pp.351 and 352. Jehuda Halevy's longing for Zion is also the subject of a further poem by Sutzkever, 'Di benkschaft fun Yehuda Halevi', published as one of three poems about the sea at the beginning of the section 'Vu shtilkeyt ranglt zikh mit shvaygn' in the collection 'In fayer vogn' (PV2, p.39).

⁹. The fortuitous symbolism of the ship's name strikes the reader very forcibly: Sutzkever had lost his actual fatherland, and the ship, now his only 'patria', is also in danger.

The six million dead have been transfigured into the reflections of the sun in the dewdrops of Galilee.

The image of the sea, which acquires ever deepening symbolic quality from this point on, the turning to Biblical and Jewish historical themes, and, in the final line, the sublimation of the catastrophe through poetry, are all seminal aspects of the collection In fayer-vogn.

CHAPTER 6

The development of a theme: 'Der tsirk' and 'Erev mayn far-
brenung'.

In fayer-vogn, Sutzkever's first volume of poetry published in Israel, appeared in 1952. Before considering the collection as a whole, it is enlightening to focus on the history of one of the longer poems, 'Erev mayn farbrenung' (PV2, p.103). A consideration of the evolution of this poem illuminates important aspects of Sutzkever's poetic development after his arrival in Israel, as well as casting an interesting light on the general question of the way in which experience is transformed into poetry.

The origin of 'Erev mayn farbrenung' is to be found in an ordeal to which Sutzkever was subjected in Vilna in 1941. He dealt with the incident in the poem 'Der tsirk', which he probably wrote shortly afterwards, but did not publish until 1978, together with other previously unpublished ghetto poems.¹ The incident is again described in the prose account Vilner geto, (VG, pp.25-28). The poet, however, was not finished with the material, and in 1949 he wrote 'Erev mayn farbrenung'. In a talk which he gave about the volume In fayer-vogn, Sutzkever used the history of this poem to illustrate the long 'biography' of a poem: the coming to fruition over a period, of seminal ideas or problems:

Di biografiye fun a lid iz a sakh a sakh lenger un elter vi di date ven s'vert ongeshribn. A lid vert oysgeshpig! in oysg' tigt lange yorn, a mol a gants leb'n, un efsher kumt es gor vi an opklang, vi a yerushe, fun tatn, fun zeydn, fun

1. Di goldene keyt, 95/96, 320 ff. The poems were then published in book form in Di ershte nakht in geto. Sutzkever has made a mistake about the dates, for in Vilner geto the date of the event is given as August 1941, whereas the inscription at the end of 'Der tsirk' reads 'Geshribn in a baheltenish, onheyb Yuli 1941'.

Oden horishn, ver veys? Ober kedey dos lid zol zikh geboyrn, muz es bafrukhpert vern mit a 'kleynikeyt' - di kleynik yt ker mayn di bevegung fun a tsvaygl, a blik fun a khaye, a shmeykhl, di zegenish fun a gril, tsi a regn-tropn oyfn poezem fun a shoyb. Ober on der gebentshter letster 'kleynikeyt', vos farvandlt verter in gezang, khaos in hattoniye, trern in oysleyzung, - on ot der kleynikeyt vos ir neshomedike funksiye iz umzeevdik un umderklerlekh vi der od fun lebn - ken dos lid nit geboyrn vern. Un se treft az ersht mitn otem fun toyt blozt arayn der dikhter in zayn gezang - lebn.²

Sutzkever's focussing on this poem as a paradigm of the poetic process, coupled with the final sentence of these remarks, about the life of a poem emerging from the 'otem funem toyt', as well as the fact that the original poem 'Der tsirk' was withheld from publication for so many years - all these factors suggest that important insights can be gained into Sutzkever's poetic process by analysing the prose account in Vilner geto, and the two poems 'Der tsirk' and 'Erev mayn farbrenung'.³

In Vilner geto Sutzkever describes how, in August 1941, while attempting to escape from a hiding place to return to Vilna, he was stopped by a German stormtrooper. When it emerged that he had no papers, and that he was a Jew, the stormtrooper forced him into the town, where, together with a young boy and an old Rabbi, Sutzkever had to undress and dance naked round a fire, singing Russian songs, and tearing up and burning Torah scrolls in front of a crowd of spectators assembled by the Germans. Eventually the victims were allowed to dress and escape.

Sutzkever's description is very detailed. The stormtrooper sadistically tried to lull his victim into a false sense of

². Novershtern Catalogue, p.177.

³. Despite the chronology ('Der tsirk', 1941, - Vilner geto, 1944, - 'Erev mayn farbrenung', 1949), it is appropriate to study the slightly later prose account first, because its aim is to give a factual description of the events from Sutzkever's point of view.

security by telling him 'dir [...] vel ikh nisht ton keyn shlekhts. Ikh shver ba Hitlern! Du vest bloyz ba mir shpiln in a tsirk, mer gornisht' (VG, p.26). Sutzkever relates his fear, his attempt to bribe his captor with a watch, he describes the appearance of the old Rabbi, the terror of the youth, the way in which their clothes were neatly laid in a pile, covered by the Rabbi's prayer shawl, the tyre marks all over the scattered Torah scrolls, the difficulty the frail old man experienced in tearing the hard parchment, its slowness in catching fire, and the suffering of the old man when pushed near the fire by the Nazis: 'Der rov hot farmakht di oygn. Der roykh hot im arumgeknoyft. S'hot zikh aroysgerisn fun zayn moyl an "oy" ' (VG, p.28). Finally Sutzkever gives dispassionate details of what each did at the end of the ordeal: 'Der rov iz arayn in der khorever kloyz un zikh geshtelt davenen. Dos yingl iz antlofn, ikh bin oykh in kloyz arayn, zikh avekgeleygt in a vinkl, in dervartung afn morgndikn tog' (VG, p.28).

The precision and factuality of the description are very effective - the very understatement and painstaking recording of small details evoke the atmosphere so vividly that no comment is necessary. Sutzkever does not, however, suggest that the incident had for him the symbolic significance, the dimensions of universal relevance and of personal guilt with which it is invested in the two poems.

One of two specific similarities and discrepancies in the prose account and the poems are worthy of mention. Sutzkever comments on the comfort he received from the old man's composure: 'Ikh hob a kuk geton afn zokn, un zayn blik hot opgeteyt mayn moyre' (VG, p.27). This is an essential motif in 'Erev mayn farbrengung'. Similarly the stormtrooper's words about the 'circus'

are seminal to the poem 'Der tsirk', which takes its title and nightmare atmosphere from this motif.

Omitted from the prose account are any comment on the behaviour of the crowd, and on Sutzkever's feelings after the ordeal: the end of the report is almost laconic. In 'Der tsirk' however, it is clear that these two aspects were of great psychological importance to the poet.

Finally, in this account Sutzkever does use descriptive detail to evoke emotional response in the reader. The description of the Rabbi, for example, is not purely factual, but has subjective, poetic overtones:

A nideriker, greykht koym mayn aksl, vays vi shney, di shvartse lange kapote makht im nokh nideriker. Mir dakh!, er iz a blind fargrimirt far a zokn. (VG, p.26)

This description provides a vivid picture of contrasting black and white, and the motif of the child conveys poignantly the helplessness of the victim. A similar emotional response is awakened in the reader by the juxtaposition of beauty and horror in the description of the desecrated *Torah* scrolls:

[...] a hoyfn sifrey-toyres [...] mit tserisene farblutikte mentelekh, durkhgezoynte mit zilberne fedem.' (VG, p 27)

The poetic image is used with expressionistic power in the description of the naked old man:

Zayn darer ayngeshrumpener guf, in shayn fun oysgeyendikn shayter, hot oysgezen vi a vaksene yortsaytlikht oysg' ygn un g+l. (VG, p.28)

His pathos is combined with an object of great holiness in Jewish life (the 'yortsaytlikht'), so that in his evocation of the old man and of the scrolls Sutzkever is making a strong *poetic* statement about the desecration which this incident embodies, hinting that in this lies its essential horror, a conclusion which analysis of the poems will corroborate.

Two further images contribute vividly to the reader's impression of the scene: the young man helplessly holding his clothes in his hand 'vi shlangn', and the image of the sun t. When the parchment catches fire, the flames shoot up:

Shpeter hot der flaker mit nokh mer kraft zikh adurkht is n durkht n parmet un mit a geknak a flits geton in der hoykh tsu dem fayer fun zunfargang. (VG, p.28)

As well as contributing to the visual power of the picture, this image brings together symbolically the iniquitous fire of the violators and the fire of the natural universe, the sunset; this underlines the grotesque dichotomy between the two and further intensifies the motif of desecration. Through the symbolic colouring of the image the hopelessness inherent in this defeat of human values is expressed.

It is clear therefore that the prose account is less straightforwardly factual than it appears at first sight. Several important psychological aspects are omitted, while subjective impressions and ethical questions are subtly suggested by poetic devices.

The history of the poem 'Der tsirk' and its key importance in Sutzkever's work has been analysed by Yekhiel Sheyntukh.⁴ The poem had not previously been the subject of any detailed attention from critics, apart from one essay by Yitskhok Yanasovitsh, who draws parallels between Sutzkever's 'Der tsirk', Bialik's 'In skhite shtot', and Halpern's 'A nakht', concluding that all three poems are rooted in the despair of the modern secular Jew:

S'iz [...] a fakt, az der moderner yid, der veltlekher yid laydt fun dem khurbm-kompleks un er paynikt zikh aleya mit

4. Yekhiel Sheyntukh, 'Di biografiye fun lid "Der tsirk" ', in Yikhes, pp.258-279.

farakhtung makhmes dem vos er iz nit shtarker fun zayn j yrl
 tsu ayn a korbm.⁵

This aspect is also Sheyntukh's starting point, but he develops his analysis to make important conclusions about the implications of the poem 'Der tsirk' for the development of Sutzkever's poetic *ikh*. In Sheyntukh's view, the poem is of unique thematic significance within Sutzkever's ghetto poetry. He bases his interpretation on four main interlinked themes which he finds there. First, the relationship between what he terms the 'individueler ikh' and the 'kolektiver ikh', second the motif of the *goldene keyt*, third, the desecration of the *Torah* scroll, and fourth, the theme of *kidesh-ha-shem*. Using these four concepts as key points, the main arguments of his article can be presented.

The nature of the *ikh* who speaks in the poem is of central importance in Sheyntukh's theory: he maintains that this is the first poem of that period in which the collective *ikh* rather than the personal *ikh* is predominant. In the poems before 'Der tsirk', he maintains, 'iz der lirisher ikh an individuel-perzenlekher'. In 'Der tsirk', however

iz es a lirisher kolektiver ikh, vos redt s'rov in nomen fun a mir - bifrat in der ershter helft fun der shafung. In der tsveter helft redt oykh der perzenlekher ikh, ober durkhoys in farbindung mit a historishn klal, tsu vemens madrej er shtibt tsu dergreykhn, ober er iz tsu dem nit mesugl.
 (Yikhes, p.258).

The individual *ikh* strives to become part of the collective *ikh* of the Jewish people, and his guilt stems from his failure to become integrated in the history and ethical structure which is conveyed by the symbolic *goldene keyt*, a key concept in the poem. Sheyntukh examines the term as Perets uses it in his drama, with its specifically Hassidic connotations, and then goes on to sug-

5. Yanasovitsh, Sutskever, p.66.

gest that although Sutzkever's use of the symbol is not identical with Perets's, there is important common ground:

Hagam der zinen un toykhn fun dem bagrif di goldene l' y' iz nit identish in Y. L. Peretses khsidisher drame un in A. Sutskevers lid - bindt zey tsunoyf a beshutfesdiker gloybn in a hemshekh-printsip, vos fareynikt tsvey toyznt yor in der geshikhte fun der yidisher neshome; s'bindt zey tsunoyf di dramatishe shpanung fun a bavustzayn, vos is niker beys a sakone, az di goldene keyt zol zikh iberraysn. (Yikhes p.266)

She, tukh analyses various aspects of the keyt concept in the poem; the central one is of the chain as 'a fartsvaygter simbol, a metafor benegeye tsu a traditsye fun lebediker hemshekhdikeyt, fun tsugebundnkeyt tsum klal fun a yokhed, vos iz aktiv bateylikt in a kolektivn tsukunftplan' (Yikhes p.267).

This tradition is an ethical one, and therefore parallelly, in a situation in which the moral foundations of Jewish belief are being destroyed, the only way to keep the chain unbroken may be voluntary death: the chain thus is also 'a trernkeyt fun gleybike neshomes, vos zenen greyt tsu batsol far zeyer emune un far zeyer frayheynt mitn eygenem lebn' (Yikhes p.267).

Sheyntukh maintains that the attempt of the individual *ikh* who speaks in the poem to become a link in the chain which represents the honourable tradition of the Jewish people is the central theme of 'Der tsirk'. The *ikh* fails, in two respects: first, by his act of tearing up the *Torah* scroll: Sheyntukh rightly points out the significance of this act of desecration:

Dos gesheenish aleyn - tseraysn un farbrenen seyfer-toyres, iz a realizatsye fun a metafor: mit di eygene hent farliblikn der yidishn oystaytsh fun mentshlekher eksistents. Di realitet gufe derheybt zikh do tsu a gvaldiker poet'sh-tragissher heykh in poets bavustzayn. Dos identifitsirn zikh mit dem vos di seyfer-toyre simbolizirt far im vi a yid, zoyf im unter dem farglaykh: tserisener parmet - vi di eygene glider. (Yikhes, p.265)

Second, the *ikh* fails to follow the example of the Jews under the Emperor Hadrian who chose death rather than betrayal of Jewish belief and honour: the *kidesh-ha-shem* ensures the unbroken survival of the *goldene keyt*, as shown in the paradoxical, cyclical idea in the last lines of the poem '[...] di letste freyd/ Fun vern oys: dos meynt, fun vern vider'.

For his failures, Sheyntukh concludes, the *ikh* accepts punishment, but at the same time a mission:

Tsu ot der madreyge hot der poet nit dergreykht un dos vert derfar in lid 'Der tsirk' der moker fun a shuldgefil, ober in der zelibiker tsayt oykh a moker far zayn koyekh vayter tsu shafn un tsu nemen oyf zikh di shtrof - tsu zayn a lebediker eydes fun umkum durkh zayne lider (shures 88-89). (Yikhes, p.269)

Sheyntukh's analysis implies that there is, at least implicitly, an optimistic note in the final lines of the poem, that lines 88 and 89, ('Iz dos dayn shtrof tsu zshipen halb geteyt/ Un fresn gsize-khorkhl fun di brider.') contain the idea of expiation and poetic mission.

Sheyntukh has made a very important contribution to Sutzkever studies by pinpointing several key ideas in Sutzkever's poetry: first, the tension between the individual and the collective, and second, the two main aspects of the *goldene keyt* symbol in Sutzkever's work: namely the chain as a symbol of the essential ethical and psychological identity of the Jewish people, continuing through the generations, and, in a more universal application, the chain as a symbol of the perpetual cycle of life, death and regeneration.

The question which demands an answer, however, is whether Sheyntukh's main conclusion - the end of the poem as a partial solution of the existential problem, as the enabling of the poet to be 'a lebediker eydes [...] durkh zayne lider'- does in fact

stand the test of textual examination. We shall demonstrate that the catharsis and fulfilment through poetic mission which he sees in 'Der tsirk' are not fully achieved until the later poem 'Erev mayn farbrening'. Sheyntukh does suggest at the end of his article, that 'in lid 'Erev mayn farbrening' bakumt 'Der tsirk' a tikn, a min tsveytn hemshekh' (Yikhes, p.273), but he does not develop this line of investigation. By examining more closely the imagery of the two poems together, new light will be cast on the relationship between them and on their importance for Sutzkever's poetic development.

'Der tsirk' is divided into three sections. The first falls thematically into three stages, comprising the first two stanzas, the third stanza, and the fourth stanza, but as a whole deals with the problem of individual and collective guilt. Three questions are addressed by the *ikh* to his 'bruder' who represents all the Jews: by calling this representative figure his brother, the poet attempts to make himself part of the collective, and thus to have his own personal guilt absorbed in, and by implication cancelled by a collective guilt.

The three questions (in which Sheyntukh justifiably sees an echo of Job's questioning, although Job questioned God, while Sutzkever is questioning the Jewish people) reflect deep despair:

Zog mir, bruder mayner, zog,
 Vo' i er, vos batayt er, undzer hintisher gerangl? [...]
 Ver zenen mir?
 Vo' i der zin fun ale undzere laydn?

In the 'hintish' one recognises the adjective of self blame which the poet repeated in the 1942 poem about his guilt vis à vis his mother, 'Mayn mame'; the answers which the poet himself provides in these two stanzas suggest that the same impulses of

despair and guilt underlie both poems. All human attributes are shown to be in a state of madness ('dos harts iz dul'), in their death throes ('a tsukndiker pitsl nerv [...] a letster krekhts'), or buried. Hope of some transcendental presence is non-existent: in the first stanza the word 'shtilkeyt' which usually denotes the essence of poetry, evokes the impassive emptiness of the heavens against which the last nerve of humanity twitches in its death throes:

A letster krekhts vos vidershpenikt yene blinde shtilkeyt
Vos vert farkhasmet mit a hoyfn erd.

The folly of trusting in the consolation of traditional belief is conveyed in the second stanza by a metaphor:

Di tsung iz oyfgebletert fun der zhaverdiker treyst,
Az volf un lam vet hoyern tsuzamen.

The block of these lines comes from the violent rejection of Isaiah's promise of a Messianic age when 'the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb' (Isaiah 11.6) as a lie which blisters the tongue. Since faith in the word is the centre of Sutzkever's poetic *credo*, this betrayal of the word is perhaps the most significant aspect of his despair, as can already be seen in the first stanza, where the metapoetic image of the bee-hive is used:

Antlofn zenen ale sheyne verter
Glayk' binen fun a binshtok a bagartlter mit roykh.

Here the earlier aesthetic bee motif (of, for example, 'Ot bin ikh dokh', PV1, p.27) has been adapted to fit the dark times: the 'binshtok' is the brain, from which its essential element, the words, have flown, like bees smoked out of their hive.

Animal imagery recurs in these two stanzas to convey the moral degradation of the Jewish people: the repeated 'hintish', and the image of the frogs in stanza two. The train of thought which starts with the line 'Dentsmol zoln anshtot undz geboyrn

vern zhabes!' leads into the concept of the *keyt*. But the traditional concept of the *goldene keyt* has been turned into a pain where the generations are frogs - cold reptiles which suggest, perhaps, the negative of all essential human attributes. Promises of a Messianic coming seem absurd, and it is pain and servitude which are handed down through generations:

Yarshen mir di enlekhkayt fun doyresdiker plog,
Fun zayn farknekhte kelners bay der velts gegreytn t'sh.

Thus, the *goldene keyt* becomes a *trernkeyt*, and the question of guilt arises. Sutzkever alludes to the oppressor by the images just discussed: the 'roykh' which drives out the bees, the 'khurbm', the 'hoyfn erd' which buries the last vestige of their humanity, and, more plainly, the 'blutdorstiker har'. Nevertheless, despite images of oppression, it is clear from the same images of servitude, that there is collective guilt in the eyes of the poet. The first two stanzas therefore are an indictment of the collective *ikh* of the Jewish people, the *mir* into which the individual *ikh* of the poem tries to be absorbed.

The second stage of this first section is an attempt to understand the historical background to the disintegration of the Jewish people. Sutzkever sees the people's guilt in the foolish political optimism of the Enlightenment: the 'nekhtn' of the third stanza. The Jewish people had not learnt from history - the poet conveys this idea in an image of illusory landscapes where reality ('di nit barute sharbns fun di doyres') is masked by a false hope of acceptance and assimilation. The folly of this is conveyed in the ironic 'Hoho, mir hobn oykh a kheylek in dem kholem-zakroyb', followed by the sad repetition, 'mir, mir', which is almost a sigh. This third stanza ends in an image which restores some dignity to the Jewish people: even the lion can fail to see the trap waiting in his path.

The fourth stanza brings an abrupt change. The general becomes the particular: the broad 'nekhtn' becomes the precise 'haynt', and the collective *mir* among whom the poet had sought refuge becomes the particularised *mir*, namely the three participants in the 'circus'. This specific *mir* gives way immediately to the personal *ikh*: 'Tantsn mir: ikh in der mitn'.

The change in perspective in this stanza is marked by a striking alteration in form and metre. Stanzas one to three each consisted of between nine and twelve lines in blank verse, reflective and flowing. This gives way in the fourth stanza to a series of rhyming couplets, mainly of dactyls and trochees: a nervous jumpy rhythm, whose relentless rhymes drum on the ear - until at the end there is a staccato, unfinished line, a pause, and then a final line which stands on its own:

Rayst zikh aroyf der onoykhi
 Fun girik farshlungener parmet
 Un gornit -
 Oykh er iz dervaytert.

This pause creates an instant of suspense, followed by the finality of the burning parchment.

The transition between the general and the particular is made in the first line of the stanza, where the poet seems to wrench himself from the philosophical contemplation of the general situation of the Jews into the task of confronting his own individual guilt of participation in the shameful 'circus'. This is effected by the pause in the first line ('Un haynt - - erev nakht, in an igl'). The 'un haynt' parallels the 'ot nekhtn' of the previous stanza, and the reader expects a continuation of the historical, reflective examination of the general situation; the shock of the painful, dramatic switch to the personal plight of the *ikh* is the more forceful by contrast.

Here a motif which is merely touched on in the prose account attains its full significance: the *Torah* scrolls represent the continuity and essence of the Jewish people: when the poet burns them he is burning 'di eygene glider' - a metaphor for his identity and that of the Jewish people throughout history. This motif, not fully developed here, becomes the central pivot of 'Erev mayn farbrenung'.

The second main section of the poem is characterised by a further change of tone which seems caused by the inability of the *ikh* further to contemplate the desecration in which he has been involved: the *ikh* disappears, and the central section evokes a frenetic dance of death in which the *ikh* addresses a 'du' representing all humanity, thus again hiding himself within the general guilt: 'Host nokh a gefil - farbren im.'

This horrifying dance is evoked by a further change of rhythm: the regular four-line stanzas of trochaic tetrameters with the rhyme scheme 'abba' provides a relentlessly monotonous rhythm for this inexorable merry-go-round.

The psychological impact of the sadistic behaviour of people who had been neighbours emerges fully here, in contrast to the less emotive prose account, and in order to achieve a poetic heightening of the central motif of desecration, the old rabbi dies in the ordeal. This figure has begun to assume the holiness which he attains fully in 'Erev mayn farbrenung', and the indifference of heaven to his final prayer reinforces the pessimism of the poem:

Faln shayter. Falt der rov
Kushndik in ash di funken.
Un zayn shma vert oykh farzunken
In der kaltkeyt fun eynsof.

In this central section the poet has again moved away momentarily from the inner problem of the *ikh* into the 'refuge'

of the vision of hell which almost mythologises the situation and takes away individual responsibility from him. However in the final section, consisting of two stages, the problem is finally confronted. Returning to the contemplative free verse of the first three stanzas, the poet unequivocally admits his own role in the collective guilt: he sees himself as the 'lets' (who in Jewish folklore is usually the 'beyzer lets') at the circus. His shameful role consists of actions which destroy the *goldene keyt*. They epitomise the failure of courage and truth:

Un ikh, vos bin geven der lets in shendlekhn spektakl
Hob nit gehat keyn mutvil tsu aroysshtamlen a klole [...],

compounded by his begging for mercy from the evil tormentors. That these actions symbolically break the *goldene keyt* as it is defined by Sheyntukh is conveyed by the reference to the desecration of his father's grave: to demean himself before those whose actions have desecrated the grave of his father, - that is, the honour of past generations, - is to contribute to that desecration and so destroy the chain. For this reason his tears are 'shvartse pokn' and the 'trernkeyt' of stanza one is made up of such shameful tears.

Sutzkever then sets against these indictments of the *ikh* an ideal of good action, which would keep the chain intact: the actions of the Jews who went to their death rather than bow to the Roman Emperor Hadrian:

Un nit tsu mol dem koyekh zikh a vorf tsu ton in toyt
Vi mayne brider in der tsayt fun Hadrian dem Roymer [...].

He has failed in this ethical duty, and so after this moral stock-taking the poet addresses himself as 'farsholtener!'. The image of the accursed one is that of a knight stripped of his shield, his noble lineage disgraced.

The question which remains at the end of the poem is whether there is, as Sheyntukh suggests, at least a partial resolution of the conflict, and a pointing forward, a realisation by the *ikh* that he has a mission 'vayter tsu shafn un tsu nemen oyf zikh di shtrof - tsu zayn a lebediker eydes fun umkum durkh zayne lider' (Yikhes, p.269). It would seem that Sheyntukh's assertion is only partially true. In the final stanzas the *ikh* reaches an awareness of the *possibility* of expiation by being forced to live on with the consciousness that he has failed to have the courage to share in that tradition of sacrifice embodied by the Jews of Hadrian's time. Here the paradox of death as a positive act is resolved in the parallelism of 'vern oys' and 'vern vider':

Vayl du host nit fardint di letste freyd
Fun vern oys - dos meynt: fun vern vider.

Death is the closing of the ring, and an honourable death represents the privilege of becoming a link in the chain: the *keyt*-motif is visible in the last line: to die is to become a Jew again ('vern vider'), to join the *goldene keyt*. However in 'Der tsirk' the poet remains a 'farsholtener' who is being punished - so that although by the use of the term 'brider', as at the beginning of the poem, he does at least see himself as part of the collective *mir* of the Jewish people, he is nevertheless *not* permitted to become a part of the chain which in the present situation is created through the paradoxical act of dying in order to preserve the tradition.

The end of the poem expresses the calm of resignation, rather than a resolution of the conflict. In the despairing imagery of the final stanza, especially in lines 88-89 ('Iz dos dayn shtrof tsu zhipen halb geteyt/ Un fresn gsise-khorkhl fun di brider'), it is difficult to see the 'moker far zayn koyekh

vayter tsu shafn un tsu nemen oyf zikh di shtrof - tsu zayn a lebediker eydes fun umkum durkh zayne lider', as Sheyntukh suggests.

The five years between 'Der tsirk' and 'Erev mayn farbrenung' took the poet from the experience itself to the relative security of life in Israel, and yet the fact that Sutzkever returned to this painful theme shows that it was still unresolved at this time.

There are obvious parallels between the two poems: the central event, the word *onoykhi*, the figure of the old man, the existential questioning. But there are very significant differences: formally, the first poem proceeds through a series of rapid, dramatic changes of metre and stanza form, while in the later poem the theme is expressed through the formal unity of smooth flowing trochaic heptameters. It will be demonstrated that these formal differences correspond to differences in the treatment of the theme.

In 'Erev mayn farbrenung', all is internalised. The emotional state of the *ikh* is clear in the first section of the poem, which consists of a complex psychological landscape evoking the isolation of the *ikh*. The features of this symbolic landscape originate in the poet's mind, and only exist as a projection of his own inner state. These aspects can be perceived in the image of the sunset, which, like all other attributes of nature, is created by the *ikh*:

Nit fun mayrev kumt tsu mir der zunfargang tsu kvaln
Ale ovnt - nor fun eygn harts, vos keyner zet nit.

The non-existence of the outer world except in the poet's imagination is a vehicle for the exploration of his isolation, as

can be seen in the development of this imagery: the suns of his imagination have annihilated all the reality of his past, so that he remains totally alone, without past or present reality:

Ale zunen biz-im opgeveltikte, zey fleytsn
 Funem hartskval, shlingen un farshlingen gasn, mentshn,
 Un ikh blayb aleyn in velt-sod, vi in a farfleytsung
 S'blaybt a boym shtok-elnt mit meshuge-grine oygn,
 Vos derkenen nit di tsayt, di alt bakante landshaft.
 Vegn-shtegn, zangenfeld antkegn, nit benimtse.

The concept of devouring is, as we have seen, a recurring motif of great emotional force in Sutzkever's poetry of the ghetto. Here the normally positive connotations have been transformed into ideas of despair. The neologism which Sutzkever uses to describe the suns ('opgeveltikte'), gives a double sense of annihilation to this imagery: the suns which have devoured his past have themselves disappeared from existence. The tree which appears as the only feature in this universe is not a real tree, but a metaphor of the poet's aloneness and disorientation. In this landscape all normal points of reference are confused or non-existent; summed up by the word 'kapoyerkeyt' in the next line. The motif of the flood is used to link the suns ('fleytsn funem hartskval') and the tree ('vi in a farfleytsung'); an echo of the biblical Flood with its connotations of guilt and punishment. The tree, which only exists in the poet's imagination, has attributes of *human* madness, ('Meshuge-grine oygn'); it is a projection of the distress and self-disgust of the *ikh*. In the previous image of the suns, the features of the real world of his past, by which he could have been a normal human being with a history, were annihilated: in this tree and flood imagery, which denote his present state, all the features of the world of the present are obliterated and the only reality is his own face.

The motif of 'kapoyerkeyt' is developed in the third image, that of the reflection in the water: an anti-Narcissus, he sees

an image causing self-horror rather than self-love. Within the motif of the reflection, Sutzkever again creates a negative image of the sun which is not there: the sun which would have symbolised his hope or purpose:

Gornisht ze ikh, ovnttsayt in opglants
 Fun tsekvaltn zufargang mayn eygenem, bashertn.
 Gornisht ze ikh. Bloyz in der kapoyerkeyt, pavoliye,
 Runtslt kadmendik mayn ponim, elehey in urtroym
 Volt ikh im gezen shoyn vi a maske fun mayn shpeter:

The word 'bashert' suggests that for humanity in general there is the possibility of a pre-ordained purpose (one's own sunset), which has, however, disappeared. Instead he sees in the reflection an image of a face aging before his eyes, 'A maske fun mayn shpeter'. This is not purely an imaginative preview of his face as an old man: the words 'kadmendik' and 'urtroym' give the vision a dimension of nightmare and mythological significance which adds to the hallucinatory tone of this first section.

In the first section of the poem, therefore, the poet evokes, by means of this surrealistic inner landscape, his isolation from all humanity and from the outer world: his past is obliterated, his present is a flooded landscape without any recognisable topographical or human feature, and the ancient wrinkled face of a future without hope already exists within him.

The pivot of the poem is the colon at the end of line 15, which separates the first from the second section. The function of a colon is to suggest that what will follow it is intimately linked to what has gone before, and will elaborate or illustrate the point which has just been made. The message given by the colon in this poem is that the hopelessness which is evoked in the opening section is to be *explained* by the event which is about to be described. It seems that as he writes it, the poet expects that this will be the case, and thus he arouses the

expectation of a nihilistic ending. His achievement, however, is that within the poem itself, and by the act of creating it, the poet reaches a resolution of the conflict.

The poet moves from the inner landscape of his mind to the dramatic recreation of the incident. The urgent 'ot' at the beginning of the second section calls the reader's attention to the scene which the poet feels an inner compulsion to conjure up once more. As in 'Der tsirk', his reluctance to confront the central incident makes him use retarding techniques: in this case a description of nature, the real external environment this time, which begins as a serene evocation of an autumn evening, combining gentle Romantic melancholy with the image of 'kinderoygn' suggesting innocence and beauty:

Ot - a bloer harbst. Geshpunen fun di zelbe shtofn
 Vos fun zey, mistame, shpint un heklt di bashafung
 Blo geblits fun kinderoygn - ful mit tsar un tsartkeyt.

This is a world full of beauty, created by a transcendental presence ('di bashafung'); his own emotions however make it impossible for him to sustain this description of an ordered universe, and elements of surrealism and disturbance creep in, until gradually, as in the first section, nature is a projection of his own distressed self, into which the reader is gradually, unsuspectingly, led:

Un di feygl patshn haynt pamelekh mit di fligl,
 Az me zet vi yeder foygl patsht mit tsvey por fligl.
 Pust di gas. Vi zangen voltn vaksn fun di shteyner
 Un a kose volt zey nor-vos opgeshnitn ale.
 Gleker klingen, un zey lozn in der luftn pastkes
 Far di shvimendike feygl mit di tsvey por fligl.

Birds are a frequent attribute of such a Romantic description of autumn, but the image of the four-winged birds has a visionary quality, reminiscent, perhaps, of the first chapter of Ezekiel:

[...] out of the midst of the fire [...] came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.'⁶

The evening bells, normally associated with peace and harmony, are a malignant force, setting traps in the air for these birds. The central image of the empty street is one of masterly complexity. First there is the simple statement of fact ('Pust di gas'). This neutral statement quickly assumes a different colouring by the metaphor with which the poet extends it; cornstalks, elsewhere in Sutzkever's poetry, a symbol of life, are, when growing between the paving stones of a town, a sign of emptiness and death: only in a town where there is no regular coming and going of human beings do grasses grow between the paving stones.⁷ In a further negative image however, the poet imagines these cornstalks themselves as having been obliterated by the scythe, an image inescapably linked with Death the Reaper. In this complex image, (whose negative quality is reinforced by the mood of unreal condition - 'vi zangen voltn vaksn [...] / Un a kose volt zey nor vos opgeshnitn ale'), Sutzkever suggests annihilation of all life.

Having unavoidably reached this nightmare landscape, the poet must confront the central episode, which he does with a further moment of hesitation reminiscent of 'Der tsirk':

'Un haynt - erev nakht [...]' ('Der tsirk')

'Un - me firt undz [...]' ('Erev mayn farbreunung')

6. Ezekiel 1.4-6.

7. The same transformation of a normally positive metapoetic image in order to strengthen the despair of the situation is seen in the use of grass in the sixth poem of 'Ode tsu der toyb' (PV2, p.170):

'Unter di trit iz mayn heymland, bashimlt mit groz - mayn medine.'

In the depiction of the central incident there are significant differences between the two poems. The malice of the neighbours, dwelt on in painful dramatic detail in the earlier poem, is here reduced to two lines, and the poet's scornful attitude is conveyed merely by the inverted commas round 'shkheynim':

Naket. Naket. Naket. Un antkegn oyf di vilde
 Ekldike eplbeymer zitsn mayne 'shkheynim',
 Baysn epl, yogn op di fliyendike funken.

The anguish of the poet's humiliation is eloquently presented here in the threefold 'Naket', in contrast to the more direct description of the neighbours' taunts in 'Der tsirk', and the message of the ironic 'shkheynim' is further hammered home by the transference of his feelings about them to the realm of nature: it is the apple trees, not their occupants which he describes as 'vild' and 'ekldik' and in an extension of this metaphor, rather than commenting on the onlookers' heartlessness, he merely describes them as eating apples from the tree which he has just invested with the attribute 'ekldik'. The economy in these images enables the poet to focus all attention on the central issue which forms the material of the climactic final section.

For this reason too the figure of the boy has been omitted: the essence of the poem is the dialogue between the *ikh* and the old man, and the symbolic importance of the parchment. The poem concentrates on the conflict between good and evil. This explains also the devil on the church spire, ringing the malevolent bells: he is there as the counterpoint to the old man, who has been mythologised into a God-like figure of wisdom. We have seen that in the earlier poem he was essentially a human figure, albeit with an aura of holiness: the difference here is that Sutzkever raises him above the human sphere, and he becomes almost divine.

As in 'Der tsirk', the poet asks questions: in the earlier poem he asked the whole Jewish people questions relating to his doubts about the sense of their existence. Now he asks the questions of the old man, and they relate to his own personal anguish, the issue which was not resolved at the end of 'Der tsirk':

- 'Zeyde, sheptshen mayne lipn, dos iz di baloynung
Far mayn nit derlebten lebn? Hot es alts a zinen?
Zeyde entfere!'... [...]

The poet is asking for a solution, not from an old man, but from a figure with a 'leybn-grive', whose answer is described as a 'geshank fun Sinay'. This mythical figure, half Moses, half God, can walk on the glowing coals without pain, and his body is transformed into a 'blendndikn guf'. The answer he gives to the poet has therefore absolute authority. By the nature of his answer this poem rejoins 'Der tsirk', for the answer, in the form of another question which the *ikh* must resolve within himself, draws him out of his own private agony into the *goldene keyt*, into the collective *ikh* of the good victims, who have an ethical framework for their actions, in contrast to the evil oppressors:

'[...] Voltstu veln zayn vi yene
Oyfn eplboym antkegn, oder vi di shleger?
Zayn a yid batayt: zayn shtendik greyt oyf a nisoyen,
Oyf nisoyen un oyf nes.' [...]

The answer stresses the overcoming of the temptation to despair and the belief in the miracle: one can interpret this as the miracle of the ever regenerating *goldene keyt*. In this answer the doubt of the earlier poem is annihilated, and the *ikh* is shown the way by which he can 'zayn a yid'.

This resolution of his conflict is achieved through the symbolism of the scroll. The scroll was also a central motif in 'Der tsirk', but there the deepest guilt of the *ikh* consisted in his

destruction of the *Torah* scroll which represents the Law and tradition of the Jewish people, and is venerated as a holy object in Judaism. In 'Erev mayn farbrenung' the moral damage is *repaired* and the way is shown towards the redemption of the *ikh*: it is through the scroll that the key motif of the poet's word is introduced as the essential factor in the resolution of his conflict.

As the mythical figure of the old man is consumed by fire, the word 'onoykhi' leaps from the parchment and gives the poet the moment of illumination he needs to complete the resolution of his own dilemma:

'Mit a funk tsuzamen yogt fun parmet der *onoykhi*, -
 Ober inem zokns layb un lebn iz tsu zen im.
 Vil ikh fangen *mayn* onoykhi, az er zol batsvingen
 Ale paynen - fal ikh unter im in same flaker,
 Vayl bashafn iz mayn vort in umbayt fun die *hayntn*,
 Un a narish fleml hot im oysgebrent fun tsung mir.
 Nem ikh mit di lipn di tsebisene fun veytik
 Iberzogn traf nokh traf di psukim funem zokn,
 Psukim alt geboyrene in eybike *amoln*,
 Un mayn layb vert ongeton in zingendikn pantser.'

'On ykhi' is undoubtedly here the 'I' of the God of the *Tanakh*, and is therefore invested with deep symbolic significance. It is the first word of the Decalogue which constitutes the very foundation of Judaism. Furthermore, in the Judaic tradition the holy words of the Bible have immanent power and reality beyond their function as signs. It was suggested in the introduction to this study that this aspect of Jewish religious tradition has immense significance for the way in which Sutzkever regards his poetic word, which for him is invested with a similar power and reality. Through the revelatory word 'onoykhi', and in the final image of Elijah and Elisha, Sutzkever achieves a resolution of his ethical conflict which marks this poem as a crucial turning point; it reaches the goal towards which 'Der tsirk' was striving.

The 'onoykhi' of the sacred verse, which seems to spring from the old rabbi's parchment as it flares up in the blaze is, for the poet, embodied in the old man himself: at this point the old man becomes identified with the 'I' of the *Tanakh*. This leads the poet to analyse the difference between *his* word, and the word of the old man, or God. The 'hayntn' of the poet's word represents relativity, subjectivity and above all the situation of the individual cut off from the *goldene keyt*, as was the poet's inner situation at the end of the poem 'Der tsirk'. The poet equates *his* word up to this point with the transience of the concept 'umbayt fun di hayntn' in contrast to the 'eybike amoln' of the words of the *Tanakh*, embodied in the rabbi.

The transformation of his word into something eternal and sacred is the way by which he can become part of that continuity which eluded him in 'Der tsirk'. This is why, in a characteristic physical metaphor, he speaks of falling under the rabbi who embodies the 'onoykhi', into the fire: in the image of being physically covered by the rabbi we can see a mystical union with the Deity and a purification by fire. The transfiguration of the *ikh* is achieved by his reciting the words of the 'eybike amoln' in the *Torah* verses, and it is significant that his final triumph is conveyed by what is clearly a continuation of the armour metaphor of the earlier poem: there the symbol of his guilt was the loss of his shield, and the end of the poem was a question to himself:

Farsholtener! vu iz dayn alte shild
 Vos hot tseboygn felkerlekhe shpizn?

which was answered with the judgment that he was not to be granted integration into the *goldene keyt* of death and resurrection. Here the question is answered through the holy word

'onoykhi'.⁸ The poet's word is now elevated to the status of eternity and continuity which the sacred verses embody, thus enabling him to achieve integration into the *goldene keyt* of the Jewish people through the poetic word, and he is protected by a 'zingendikn pantser'. The attribute 'zingendik' is an allusion to the poetic word, for throughout Sutzkever's work the verb 'zingen' is used in the context of poetry. This assurance is the armour which protects him from destruction by the fire of the Nazis.

In the final lines of the poem Sutzkever seals his newly won confidence in his poetic mission with the image which is central to the whole collection:

[...] Tsu di shterndlekh di frische
 Shvebt er in a fayer-vogn, shvebt vi Eliohtu,
 Un ikh heyb zayn shotn-mantl vi a mol Elishe.

Several points emerge from these lines. The transformation of the historical figure of the old man epitomises the thematic development between the two poems, and raises fascinating questions about the poetic treatment of biographical fact. In the prose account, it will be remembered, the old man is a purely human victim, though with a certain inspirational quality in his stoicism, who goes off to pray after his ordeal. In 'Der tsirk', where the historical events were essentially as in the prose account (though made more vivid by the dramatic treatment in the poem), the old man's death heightened the pathos and the poet's sense of personal failure, but did not have overt metaphysical

⁸. It is interesting that the words of God to Abraham, (Genesis 15.1), read like an answer to Sutzkever's question in 'Der tsirk' ('[...] Vu iz dayn alte shild [...] ?') and a bridge to the 'onoykhi' of 'Erev mayn farbrenung': " 'al-tira' 'abram anokhi magen lakh skharkha harbeh me'od" ('Fear not, Abraham: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward'). The 'onoykhi' which springs from the parchment could well be from this verse, answering the question of 'Der tsirk'.

significance. Here however, the elevation of the poet's search to the realm of the transcendental and the resolution of the conflict through a new definition of the poetic word are achieved by the transformation of the old man into a symbolic figure, incorporating the religious connotations of Moses, God and Elijah.

The fire motif is also transformed: the Nazi bonfire of the earlier poem becomes a holy purifying fire, and fire retains this symbolism from now on in Sutzkever's work: striking examples of this are the central 'fayer-vogn' image itself, and the poem 'Geule' (PV2, p.13), which ends with the idea that the individual must purify himself in the fire of the wounds caused by the Holocaust. Thus fire and snow have become two poles of purity in Sutzkever's work, and the transformation of the evil fire of his biographical experience into a symbol of purification in the poem 'Erev mayn farbrengung' exemplifies Sutzkever's belief, expressed in 'Geheymshot', that a central function of poetry is to transform pain into light or beauty:

Ikh leb! Mir iz bashert geven tsu zayn
 A groyzik-shtiler lebediker eydes
 Fun payn, vos muz farvandlen zikh in shayn. (PV1, p.443)

The poem illustrates Sutzkever's turning to imagery of Jewish religious and historical tradition, which is a central feature of 'In fayer-vogn'. The motif of the fiery chariot, and the fusion of the religious and the poetic in this image will be considered in more detail in chapter 7. The image of the poet as servant of divinity, and inheritor of a sacred task, embodied here in the image of Elisha receiving the cloak of Elijah, is the climax of similar ideas and images in 'Di festung', for example 'Der dikhter' (PV1, p.324), where the resurrected poet becomes eternal when he and his 'melody' (the girl) are encircled by a

'vint fun breyshes', and 'Der novi' (PV1, p.370), in which a sparrow-hawk takes the eye of the dead prophet and drops it into the poet's eye, a complex image which signifies the poet's consciousness of his mission to carry on the ideals which the prophet embodied.

The images used in this last section of the poem are indeed daring. The equation of himself with Elisha, one of the prophets transmitting the great tradition of Jewish religion and culture, reveals the importance of the poem 'Erev mayn farbreung' in Sutzkever's *oeuvre*: through these images, he achieves a climactic resolution of his conflict. His poetic word has been transformed from the 'umbayt fun di hayntn' into the embodiment of the 'eybike amoln'; he is integrated into the *goldene keyt*, of which Elisha was an important link, by his poetic mission. More meaningfully even than in the poetry of the war years, Sutzkever now views the poet as a seer, as the carrier of a mission, and throughout his life, this conviction lies at the root of his inspiration.

Perhaps most important of all, 'Erev mayn farbreung' itself is a confirmation of the power of poetry; the imagery of despair at the beginning of the poem refers to the present, the *now* of the poem as the poet starts to write it, and his bleak view of the future is conveyed by the image of the wrinkled face as a 'maske fun mayn shpeter'. The reader expects that what follows will illustrate the reasons for this nihilistic view, and that the outcome of the poem will also be in accordance with this conception of the world. But through the act of creating the poem, the poet achieves the resolution of the conflict, so that the poem demonstrates something different from the vision which was

indicated at the beginning. As well as being about the power of the creative word, the poem itself *demonstrates* this power.

As Sheyntukh asserts, the poem 'Der tsirk' is of central importance in Sutzkever's work. It must be seen, however, as a stage on the way to 'Erev mayn farbrening', in which in place of isolation from the collective, the *ikh* achieves integration. In 'Der tsirk' he asked anguished questions about the 'zin' of life for the Jewish people: a possible solution was given in the idea of *kidesh-ha-shem*, but his own problem of integration and guilt remained unanswered. In the later poem the questioning is about that unanswered dilemma of the 'zin' of his own life, and the answer gives him a sacred mission, thus making of him a link in the *goldene keyt* of continuity and renewal. The other poems of 'In fayer-vogn' which look back to the Holocaust period also reveal Sutzkever's ability to sublimate these events and to integrate them into his poetry.

CHAPTER 7

In fayer-vogn: the first poetry in Israel.

The poems of In fayer-vogn were written between 1947 and 1951; the earliest, 'Di neshome fun yam', was, like 'Shturem oyf di vasern bay Krete', written on the *Patria* in September 1947, and all the others were written in Israel. Some of the poems appeared for the first time in the volume In fayer-vogn, but many had already appeared, singly or in small groups, in journals, for example Oyf der vakh, and Der morgn, (Munich), Undzers and Nayvelt, (Tel-Aviv), Yidishe vokh, (Paris), Dorem Afrike, and of course Sutzkever's own journal Di goldene keyt. The poems were not presented in chronological order, either in the first edition of In fayer-vogn or in the Poetische verk, but, reverting to the practice of the pre-war years, Sutzkever grouped them in seven sections with titles which relate broadly to their overall themes.

During the years in the ghetto, the fundamental aestheticism of Sutzkever's poetic conception was deepened by a sense of mission; thereafter, during the poet's three year period of wandering, his work reflected the oscillations and rootlessness which that situation brought with it. This insecurity did not cease with the poet's arrival in Israel. The immigrant has the traumatic experience of being uprooted from a familiar world, and having to find a new identity in a foreign country with an unfamiliar language. For Sutzkever the added dimension was his identity as a poet in an environment where all the frames of reference were yet to be created, and where he himself was, as he expressed it, 'a naketer' (PV2, p.8). An important aspect of this nakedness was the new problem of the word, that is, the position

of Yiddish as a language in Israel at that time. Yiddish was seen as the language of the Diaspora, with all the connotations of humiliation and suffering which had been the fate of the Jewish people from the Middle Ages to the recent cataclysm. Modern Hebrew was seen as the language to bind together people from many disparate backgrounds into a nation, and the desire to start afresh and cast out Yiddish was very strong in the younger people. To Sutzkever the *word* was essential to his identity, and for him the poetic word could only be Yiddish. That this contributed to his existential problems is clear from two poems in the collection, 'Di kvitlekh oyfn keyver fun Reb Shimen ben Yokhay' (PV2, p.31) and 'Yidish', (PV2, p.33).

The poems of the collection reflect these interconnected dilemmas, and four main thematic areas can be discerned. First there is the theme of remembrance - the problem of how to come to terms with the Holocaust and integrate it into poetry (seen most clearly in the section 'Di karsh fun dermonung') - a continuation of the inner struggle of 'Di festung' and 'Yidishe gas', with the additional problem of integrating his past with his new life and identity in Israel. Second there is the theme of Israel itself, which provides new inspiration and confirms the ideas of continuity and renewal which underlie his whole poetic quest. Third, nature re-emerges as an important theme. Fourth, the theme of poetry and the word, which is never absent from Sutzkever's work, is interwoven with the other themes and receives new sustenance from the imagery arising out of the land of Israel. The resolution of the conflicts is achieved through a new network of imagery derived from the land of Israel, the Bible and Jewish mythology. Further, the already established images are enriched by this new imagery.

Although there are no clear-cut divisions between the sections of the collection, and the main themes interweave throughout, nevertheless, very broadly, a different aspect tends to dominate each section. The poems of 'Shehekhionu' combine themes of Israel with the spectre of the past which lives on, and in this section the struggle to achieve reconciliation with the past through the inspiration of Israel is vividly represented. The poems of 'Shehekhionu' cannot be seen as a cycle, but as a series of separate poems, of differing lengths and metrical forms.

The short section 'Vu shtilkeyt ranglt zikh mit shvaygn' moves onto a more abstract plane, being mainly concerned with the essence of poetry. The key motifs of *shtilkeyt* and the sea dominate these poems. The past is not in evidence in this section; the new experiences in Israel are celebrated for their own sake, rather than being used as means to solve the problems of the past. Several poems in this section do relate overtly to the past, but in general themes of nature and poetry dominate.

The 'Lider fun Negev' should be seen as a unified poetic cycle, consisting of fifteen poems of identical form - three four-line stanzas, in dactylic metre. The poems are inspired by the Negev and the Red Sea, and here, as in the next group of poems, biblical elements play a very important role, as do images of nature, often with mystical or surreal overtones. Here too, the poet seems freed from the past, and able to become absorbed in the environment of Israel.

The section 'Yerusholayim', should also be considered as a cycle, in that the poems are all inspired by the city of Jerusalem and the landscape around it; again there are many biblical motifs. Apart from two poems dealing with the War of Liber-

ation and the fall of the Old City, the poems are unpolitical, showing Jerusalem as a manifestation of the eternal. The forms of the poems vary and they were written at different times between 1947 and 1950, whereas the whole cycle 'Lider fun Negev' bears the date 1948.

In the next two sections Sutzkever forsakes the present and the theme of Israel, and it is clear that the inner struggle with the events of his past is by no means resolved: 'Di karsh fun dermonung' focusses on the events of the Holocaust, and their effect on the poet, and apart from 'Shehekhionu', it is the longest section in the collection. It consists, on the whole, of longer poems, one significant aspect of which is the increasing importance of surreal elements as a means of evoking and coming to terms with the past.

Also drawing on the past, 'Akordn fun shtoltsn vald' are poems about the partisans in the woods near Vilna. The rhetorical tone, often approaching bathos, makes them poetically the weakest poems in the collection.

The final section 'A briv tsu di grozn' is one longer poem in fourteen parts. It gathers together themes from the other sections, and affirms the power of poetry, through which the poet transcends the recent traumas, to achieve harmony with nature and his poetic word.

The arrangement of these sections reflects therefore the oscillation between past and present, and the struggle to unite the two which is an essential theme of all the poetry of the years immediately following the liberation. The intensity of this struggle may perhaps account for the rhetorical aspects of some of the poems which gave rise to a less than favourable reception

from some contemporary critics. Novershtern alludes to the rhetorical tone of the poems with Israel themes:

Di ershte opteylungen bashteyen fun lider oyf Erets-Yisroel-temes, vu der retorisher ton iz gor boylet.

and he goes on to single out the 'Lider fun Negev' for their poetic quality, thus by implication dismissing the others rather less favourably. He also mentions the selectivity of Sutzkever's points of reference in Israel, in that he builds up his imagery around people and places with a historical or mythical aura, focussing particularly on the 'oriental' aspect of the characters who occur in the poems. Novershtern himself does not criticise these aspects negatively, but concludes:

Meglekh az do hot zikh gefodert a naye poetishe leksik un gram-oysgefins tsu velkher di kritikers hobn zikh bederekh-klal batsoygn negativ.¹

A. Tabatshnik, in a letter to Sutzkever which is on the whole appreciative of the poems, nevertheless adds, in somewhat schoolmasterly fashion:

Avade zenen in bukh, vi oykh in ayere friyerdike bikher, faran khisroynes: teyl organishe, teyl dervorbene [...] Ikh kon tsu mol nit farshteyn far vos ir darft onkumen tsu gekintstlte vort-kombinatiyes, tsu vort-shpalndike un moyekh-shpalndike gramen, tsu oysgebrayete imazhn. Vos far a mum vilt ir in zikh kompensirn mit beryeshaftn? Tsu vos di kuntsn, ven ayer kunst iz azoy raykh?'²

The validity of these judgments will be more easily assessed after an examination of the poems, but it is illuminating to see Sutzkever's own opinion. A poet may not always be the best judge of his work, but his views enable the reader to see what his intent is, and what he estimates to be most important in his

¹. Novershtern, Catalogue, p.175.

². Letter from A. Tabatshnik to A. Sutzkever, (28 March 1952), quoted by Novershtern, Catalogue, p.177.

work. In a letter to Shmuel Niger after the latter's review of the book, Sutzkever complains:

S'hot mir fardrosn vos ir hot nit derzen in mayn letstn bukh azoy e lider vi 'Di karsh fun dermonung', 'An oks in gelatetn karshnroyt', 'Der zilberner shlisl'. Vedlik mayn farshteyn un filn dikhtung zenen dos di beste lider funem bukh.³

Although there is a strong element of melodrama in these poems which makes it difficult to concur with Sutzkever's assessment of them, it is most interesting that he draws special attention to three of the longer poems which deal with incidents from the past, using gruesome surreal imagery. In all the depicted incidents, the *ikh* is personally involved, and his singling out these poems does suggest that for him the essential aspect of the collection is coming to terms with the past, a view which seems to be corroborated by the importance of 'Erev mayn farbrening'.

'Erev mayn farbrening' stands out in the section 'Di karsh fun dermonung' because of the biblical imagery, which is the outstanding feature of the collection 'In fayer-vogn' as a whole, but which hardly recurs in the other poems of this section; instead we see interesting variants and developments of images from the earlier poetry.

Two main themes emerge in the poems which contemplate the past: the poet's guilt, and his sorrow. 'Oytoportret', written in 1951, (PV2, p.95) unites these themes, through the motif of the mirror. Variations of the mirror image occur throughout Sutzkever's work, as we have seen. 'Oytoportret' begins with a dramatic variation of this image: the town is described as a lake standing upright:

³. Letter from Sutzkever to Shmuel Niger, (20 November 1952). Quoted by Novershtern, Catalogue. pp.175-176.

Di shtot -
 Vi an ozyere volt zikht geshtelt
 Oyf di hintershte fis
 Un geblibn in eyne
 Batsoygn mit ayzike shupn -
 Hot a tsiter geton mit di grayz-fioletene kneytshn
 Ven kh'hob mit di finger
 Tseruntslt ir glozikn ponem.

Here is a combination of the water/mirror image and of the motif of *kapoyerkeyt*, both of which gave dramatic force to the flooded landscape of 'Erev mayn farbrenung'. This image is striking in its unexpectedness: the combination of irreconcilable elements, town/lake/hind feet/ standing upright/, and the 'grayz-fioletene kneytshn' (reminiscent of the phrase '[...] runtslt kadmendik mayn ponem' in the earlier poem) imbue the image with a surreal quality which is indeed an important aspect of many of the poems in this section.

This dream landscape leads into the poet's experience of walking through the deserted town, and the first section of the poem evokes his sorrow at the devastation and emptiness. There are three time levels in the poem: the *Erzählzeit* when the poem is being written, in which the poet is remembering or imagining a walk through his old town, the *erzählte Zeit* of that walk, which ends with his encounter with his face in the mirror in his old home. Within the course of that walk there are two incidents remembered from a second level of *erzählte Zeit*, a time further back when he was in the ghetto. By moving ever further into the past, the poet peels back the protective layers and reaches the heart of his guilt.

The isolation of his walk in the town is evoked by images of emptiness combining different senses in an eerie synaesthesia:

Ekho fun shotns.
 Gekreytsikte klangen.

Un ikh bin gegangen.

Zayln fun likht,
Vi ts+brokhene zangen.

Un ikh bin gegangen.

The use of 'zangen' here is reminiscent of its occurrence in 'Erev mayn farbreung': both images underline the abnormality of the deserted town, and the repetition throughout the first half of the poem of 'un ikh bin gegangen' shows the monotony of the walk. The focal point of his loneliness is the non-existence of human beings; finding contact would mean that '[...] es krikhn nit mer fun di arbl keyn shlangen.'

This image, suggesting perhaps a decomposing corpse invaded by worms, contains the kind of baroque elements of horror which reach their climax in the poem 'An oks in gelatetn karshnroyt'.

The atmosphere of emptiness leads into the second section of the poem in which the two incidents which represent the poet's guilt are evoked: when he ate a swallow to satisfy his hunger, and when he wrote a poem with charcoal upon a corpse. Both incidents illustrate different aspects of a moral problem arising for countless writers out of the Holocaust: the question of the legitimacy of beauty and art in circumstances of despair and degradation. The swallow, like almost all birds in Sutzkever's poetry, represents beauty, which the poet has destroyed to satisfy his physical hunger: the swallow's revenge is fitting, and the image has that idiosyncratic element of surprise by which Sutzkever often plays with his reader:

Atsind, zikh dermont, hot di shvalb oysgetsvitshert
Fun mayne shvartsaplen ir shvalbn-nekome.
Nito mer in zey mayne trern,
Der foygl
Hot oysgepikt ale
In duln getsvitsher.

Instead of pecking out the poet's eyes, the swallow pecks out the tears. Because the poet became guilty of inhumanity and

deseccration of beauty, the swallow now robs him of his ability to express emotion through the human attribute of tears, thus setting him in a certain sense outside humanity.

The second incident represents a counterpoint to the first: instead of destroying a thing of beauty, the poet is guilty of being obsessively absorbed by the idea of aesthetic beauty, without regard to moral criteria, in the midst of human tragedy. This is symbolised by his act of writing a poem upon a corpse:

A mol, ven ikh bin in a keler gelegn,
 Bayband mit a mes vi a boygn papir,
 Baloykhtn mit fosfornem shney funem balkn -
 Farshribn hob ikh mit a shtikele koyl
 A lid oyf papirenem layb fun mayn shokn.

The last lines of this section create an image of emptiness:

Atsind iz afile keyn toyter nito mer,-
 Baleydikte vayskayt
 Mit sazhe bahangen.

The corpse from the past, on which he wrote with charcoal has become the nebulous, abstract 'vayskayt/ mit sazhe behangen' but the attribute 'baleydikt' shows that his guilt remains active in the present situation. The empty abstraction of the phrase 'baleydikte vayskayt' intensifies the feeling of isolation.⁴

The idea of whiteness leads into the snow of the final part of the poem. The home he reaches seems to be an amalgamation of Vilna and Siberia. The latter is always accompanied by imagery of

 4. Sutzkever had already tried to come to terms with this poem writing incident in an earlier poem, 'Shuldik iz der guf', written in Moscow in 1946 (PV1, p.556):

'Shuldik iz der guf mit kalter hoyt un krumen moyl.
 Neyn, der guf iz gornit shuldik, nor derbay der koyl.
 Nit der koyl - ikh shver atsinder
 Az aley n bin ikh der zinder:

Ikh hob oyfn glatn guf gekritslt mitn koyl.'

In this earlier poem a kind of resolution is reached in that the body is freed by the poem inscribed upon it; it may be that the poet later felt this to be an unsatisfactory skirting round the problem, to which the pessimism of the later poem is a counter-balance.

snow, and by the aura of reverence which is suggested here by the word 'templ'; the phrase 'Kholem fun kindheyt' also supports this interpretation. This idea of home is contrasted with the desolation of the 'ayzerne shtumkeyt' through which the poem reaches its climax. The three questions which the poet asks the 'other' in the mirror probe into his own consciousness. They are distillations of what he has been seeking in his wandering round the town: a search for identity ('- Ver bistu?'), for recognition by another human being ('- Derkenst mikh?'), and for assurance that he has a soul ('- Neshome?'). They are questions which require answers from that other who is in fact himself, but there is no answer, only an animal-like howling repetition of the question from his unrecognised self. This final scene has elements of Gothic horror or nineteenth century Romanticism: the *Doppelgänger* figure of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Dr Jekyll becoming Mr Hyde, or the ageing picture of Dorian Gray revealing his true self. As when the *ikh* saw his wrinkled face in 'Erev mayn farbrenung', the poet is forced to discard his self-image, as the mirror brings him face to face with the ugliness of his guilt. The mirror is a revealer and a destroyer: it reveals his true self, but at the same time it is a 'grenets' preventing union with that self, or, in this poem, destruction of its baser aspects:

Nor ven kh'hob gezen oyf zayn ponem di karbn,
 Derlangt zikh ahin mit nitsokhn a loz, -
 Hot emets a smoliye geton mir in sharbn,
 Un ikh bin gefal'n baym grenets fun gloz.

This poem, in its exploration of unresolved guilt, acts as a counterbalance to 'Erev mayn farbrenung', showing that these problems had repeatedly to be explored anew in Sutzkever's poetry.

The poet's dependence on the past in the poems of the section 'Di karsh fun dermonung' raises questions about the nature of reality: the vanished past is more real to the poet than his present time: this theme is seen in the first poem of the little cycle 'Komentarn tsu a ponem in shpigl' (PV2, p.98). The mirror motif is here used as the starting point for a series of short poems which question the poet's relationship with the past, and his attempt to integrate the past into his present existence; the dubious justification of poetry in the circumstances of the ghetto years is further examined. Looking in the mirror, the poet sees, not the present, but the past, and the image in the first poem is a vivid evocation of the power of the past to obliterate the present:

Un vestu farmoln dos bild fun der yidisher gas,
 Mit pendzl getunkt in dayn zuniken, nayem paleter,-
 Zay visn: die farbn di itsike veln zikh sheyln.
 Dos gevezene bild mit a hak vet bafaln dikh shpeter,
 Farvundn azoy, az dos naye vet keyn mol nit heyln.

The bright present, seen in terms of a new palette of paints, is unable to cover the dark canvas of the past, epitomised by the symbolic 'yidishe gas'. The importance of this concept can be seen in the fact that Sutzkever called the first book of poetry published after the war by this title. In the poem from which the collection took its name, the 'yidishe gas' stands for all that has been destroyed, but at the same time for the indestructibility and continuity of Jewish experience:

Bist nit fargangen. Dayn pustkeyt iz ful.
 Ful mitn folk vi mayn oyg mit der mamen.

These connotations resound in the use of the concept in 'Komentarn tsu a ponem in shpigl', heightening the impact of the idea that the past overcomes the present, and inflicts an unhealable wound on the poet.

The attempt to reconcile the past with the poet's new life in Israel is one of the the main themes of the collection 'In fayer-vogn'. Two further poems in the section 'Di karsh fun dermonung' have a bearing on the theme: 'A mantl oyfn dil' (PV2, p.123), and 'Eybike bgodim' (PV2, p.110).

The motif of clothes unites the two poems. We have already seen that the idea of the essential unchanging *ikh* being clothed by some outer garment which hides his inner being, is one of the permanent concepts in Sutzkever's work. These two poems from 'Di karsh fun dermonung' are based on this idea.

'A mantl oyfn dil' is a dialogue between the *ikh* and a mysterious voice which calls him to be a poet. The voice urges him to leave his coat lying on the floor and join his friend by the sea, before it is too late; the poet hesitates and gives excuses. The dramatic opening lines evoke a desperate situation: lightning, rain and a chain tightening round the poet's neck: the repetition of this motif gives urgency to the words of the voice:

'Loyf poet,
S'kon vern shpet,
Oyfn haldz di keyt vert enger.

The poet's objection is that the coat lying on the floor holds him back from running to his friend by the sea. In the second stanza the voice becomes more urgent, and a hint as to a possible interpretation of the meaning of the 'fraynd baym yam' is given:

S'kon vern shpet,
Un dayn fraynd vet tsegeyn fun regn.
Dayn fraynd iz a benkshaft in tsore fun mentsh,
In verter
Me kon im nit shatsn.
Vestu nit kumen vet platsn zayn harts,
Azoy vi a duner - platsn!

The voice seems to suggest that the friend is the poet's muse, whereas the poet's demurring in the next stanza suggests that he is more drawn to the comfort of the coat:

Der mantl vos ligt oyf der erd iz a shlak
Mit vareme, heylike toybn.

The equation of the coat with the dove-cot, one of the key images of his childhood in 'Sibir', shows that the coat represents all that is familiar and protective. It is this which holds him back from venturing to the sea, which in this poem seems to incorporate the connotation of man's longing for the infinite, but also the attributes of a sinister seductive force: the same duality which is found, for example, in the work of Thomas Mann. It is clear that the friend is an image of yearning and poetic inspiration connected with the new land - a step into the unknown which initially frightens the *ikh*. In the third stanza, however, comes the poet's dawning realisation, conveyed by the 'toytn shtof' of the coat which has fallen off the hanger, that the past is dead as a source of poetic inspiration, and that he must leave it behind and go out into the new realm which is represented by the sea:

- Az a mantl falt,
Heyb zikh nit on mit kleyder.
Nit vek fun shlof
Dem toytn shtof
Un vestu vekn - vey dir!

In the final stanza the poet follows the advice of the inner voice,

Naket,
Bashlogn mit ayzikn angst
Loyf ikh dem yam antkegn,
Tsu mayn eyntsikn fraynd in regn.

The conflict, however, is not resolved, for the final lines lift the 'mantl'-image into the surreal: in 'Erev mayn far-brenung', Sutzkever had endowed the tree of his isolation with

'meshuge-grine oygn', and here the buttons of the coat become 'oygn fun got' reproaching him with deserting his real friend, his true self, which is *after all* embodied in the old abandoned coat:

Vuhin? Dayn fraynd iz a mantl-geshtalt
Un ligt oyfn dil vi gelegn....

The poem begins and ends with 'vuhin?'- the dilemma has not been resolved, but the fact that the final statement about the 'mantl' connects it with divine authority, gives greater weight to the idea that by leaving the coat he is guilty of abandoning his roots, and the voice which has been calling him to the sea assumes the role rather of the tempter. The fascination of the poem lies in the subtle ambiguity of its imagery: it echoes the contrasts between the secluded indoors and the wild panorama of nature and the infinite which underlie 'Sibir', and it can therefore be read as an allegory of growing up, of casting off childhood to pursue the unknown for which the child has yearned (as in the poem 'Derkentenish' in 'Sibir'); it can also be interpreted as the conflict between the protected world of the safe 'normal' life and the leap into the dangerous sea of the artist. In view, however, of its position in this particular collection of poetry it is clear that the dominant theme is that of the conflict between his allegiance to the past and the challenge of the future, presented in subtly ambiguous imagery.

'Eybike bgodim' is one of Sutzkever's many poems about his mother's death and his relationship to her, before and after her death, and it is illuminating to compare and contrast it with the poem 'Mayn mame', from 1942: the differences in the treatment of this deeply felt theme in the two poems exemplify the process of gradual internalisation and sublimation of the past which enables

Sutzkever to turn to the new themes of 'In fayer-vogn'. 'Mayn mame' was a poem of raw suffering where the poet's anguish and guilt about his mother's death shortly before were conveyed by violent self-castigating animal imagery. It anticipates this later poem in its use of the clothes motif: in 'Mayn mame', the poet in his agony had tried to *become* his mother by putting on her 'ofenem naketn hemd', but in vain. The poem ended in a sort of resolution, through the idea of continuity: the mother lived on in her son.

'Eybike bgodim' consists of three twenty-four line sections, with alternately rhyming lines in the unusual amphibrachic pentameter. The overall result is a combination of epic style and form with an oddly jarring, uneasy rhythm. This creates a mysterious atmosphere which emerges in the first section, where the poet remembers an attic of his childhood home, where he loved to withdraw from the world and be alone with his imagination. In his memory the room was full of mystery, almost of sinister magic; the jumbled memory of the child's perception is conveyed throughout the section by a confusion of surreal images:

Di vent hobn shtume gevoyet mit hintishe shvemlekh
 In fintsternish bobedik blinder, farknipt in a koltn.
 Un plutsem - es flegn a fleyts gebn zilberne flemlekh,
 Vi tropns fun hiltserne emers vos zenen tsheshpoltn.
 Dos flegt di levone araynfaln ven durkhn koymen,
 Aroysgeyn fun oylvn un glaykh - in di katsoygn grine
 Vos hengen derbay vi aleyn, vi umtsaytike floymen.

Thus he sets the central incident of the second section - his accidentally seeing his mother trying on her own shroud in this attic - in the context of his childhood memory. Looking back, the poet is now able to see his mother as she was then, a young woman grieving for her dead husband, and to interpret her action - which at that time had shocked the child - as stemming from her longing to be united with him:

Un do hot mayn mame bahaltn di eybike bgodim, -
 A bintele vaystsayg vi blend fun malokhishe fligl.
 A yunge almone, tsu draysik - hot zi shoy'n batsaytns
 Gekoyft zey in heyliker benkshaft tsum tatn. Zayn ponem
 In tayge sibirer, hot loyter gebenkt fun der vaytns.
 Mit eybike bgodim iz milder tsu lebn do on im.

Interpreting the incident, the poet now sees the figure of his mother wearing the shrouds, and her reflected images in the mirror as

Fir kales mit zelibike penemer gliklekh tsereytlt...
 Fir kales mit gildene ringen in zaydene flamen...

He uses the beauty and pathos of this remembered incident as a basis for a poetic transformation of his mother's death at the hands of the Nazis. In the third section the murderers come to the door of the room - 'A mabl tsveyfisike mentshn vos fleytst oyfn tsimer'⁵ - and the poet's mother drapes herself in her shroud:

Geshvind hot di mame in oyvn a hant ayngetunken,
 Genishtert in fintsternish-fidl tsevishn di klangen
 Un bald iz dos bintele vaystsayg bakisheft mit funken
 In mite fun tsimer oyf kleyninke akslen gehangen.

The 'fidl' and 'klangen' motifs reintroduce the idea of the dead father, the shroud is transfigured by 'funken', and the room has symbolically become the *mite*, or stretcher, on which in Jewish burials the corpse is laid.

The symbolism of sacrifice and transfiguration comes to a climax in the concluding lines of the poem:

Geloykhtn in zunikn shney hot derbay di almone -
 A karshnboym unter a zeg in a tsvitikn igl.
 Nor vi a finfekiker thom iz geblibn baym hartsn
 S'gemel fun di eygene sazhe-getunkene finger.
 Gekvalt hot di shvartskeyt in zuniker shayn fun ir hartsn,
 Un glaykhtsaytik hobn di oygn gefinklt zikh yinger.
 Azoy iz mayn mame gegangen tsum likht fun akeyde.
 Tsum tatn dem shneymentsh mit roytinker fidl - gegangen.
 A shneyshturem-benkshaft tsuzamengetsundn hot beyde,

⁵. This is a fine example of Sutzkever's unwavering habit of describing the Nazi persecutors through metaphor (often with synecdoche or metonymy) rather than referring to them directly.

Un demolt iz oykh inem shturem dos tsimer fargangen.'

All these elements - the fusion of sun and snow, the cherry-tree, the father/snowman figure and the fiddle, - are recurrent metapoetic images in Sutzkever's work: thus all these images symbolising aspects of poetic creation are linked to the figure of the mother.

The term 'akeyde' is always used of the binding of Isaac, which in Jewish thought is connected, not with death, but with God's *salvation* of His people. Thus the mother's death has been transformed into a religious experience, and a *Liebestod*: the ecstatic reunion with her husband is evoked in the snow/fire fusion image of 'A shneyshturem-benkshaft tsuzamengetsundn hot beyde'.

In the conclusion of 'Mayn mame' the assurance of continuity had given the poet a reason for continuing to live; here the connection between the death of the mother and the poetic mission is triumphantly established:

Un ikh, eyn-aleyn, fun gehenem fartribener Odem,⁶
Bin alts untertenik dem bas-kol tsu zayn a bazinger.
Mayn fleysh iz batsoygn mit ire, di eybike bgodim,
Un s'harts iz farziglt mit sazhe-getunkene finger.

Her eternal presence within him is signified by his being covered by her shrouds; he has become one with her, and shares her immortality. The eternal presence of his mother is linked with the 'baskol', the oracular voice, which calls him to be a poet. He has achieved the union with his mother which he could not do in the earlier poem by the vain attempt to creep into her clothes. Now, by *accepting* her death he is able to wear her

⁶. This unexpected reversal of a familiar image is typical of Sutzkever. This Adam has been driven, not from Paradise, but from the hell of his anguish about his mother's death, into new hope.

shrouds, that is, truly to share in her life and her death and sublimate it through poetry.

In the same way that 'Erev mayn farbrengung' was the *tikn* of the unresolved moral problem of 'Der tsirk' so the pain and guilt connected with his mother's death, expressed in 'Mayn mame', are resolved in the later poem, 'Eybike b'godim'. This typifies the important function and poetic character of the poems of 'Di karsh fun dermonung': through a process of internalising, and mythologising the events of the past, the poet invests them with a symbolic character, through which they are sublimated, so that the poet is free for the next stage of his poetic development. These events are not exorcised from his poetry, but can be absorbed and integrated within the new experiences.

While the poems of 'Di karsh fun dermonung' dwell almost exclusively on the experiences of the past, many other poems fuse the two time-levels. Several of the poems of the section 'Shehekhionu' achieve this fusion. In the opening poem of the section, 'Ven kh'volt nit zayn mit dir banand' (PV2, p.7), already established images of death and rebirth, and the underlying image of the *goldene keyt* are given a new sharpness through fusion with images which arise out of Sutzkever's encounter with the land of Israel. These images reflect two main spheres of inspiration: the Bible and Jewish history, which Sutzkever sees embodied in the ancient Holy Land, and renewed joy in nature.

The *ikh* addresses the land of Israel,⁷ which is both the

7. This poem, written in 1947, was first published in 'Oyf der vakh' 50, (Munich, November 25, 1948), as 'Ven kh'volt nit zayn mit *aykh baynand*' (my italics). By the publication of *In fayer-vogn* in 1952, the line had been changed to its final version. In the first version the poet is addressing the people of Israel, in the second the land itself, which represents an intensification of his feelings and a deep intimacy with the land.

woman giving birth, *and* the child being born, a double image which conveys the idea of the land of the ancestors and at the same time the birth of the post-Holocaust state. He identifies with the land in its birth pangs, and at the same time he is born with it:

Ven kh'volt nit zayn mit dir banand,
 Nit otemen dos glik un vey do,-
 Ven kh'volt nit brenen mitn land,
 Vulkanish land in khevle-leyde;
 Ven kh'volt atsind, nokh mayn akeyde
 Nit mitgeboyrn mitn land,
 Vu yeder shteyndl iz mayn zeyde -
 Gezetikt volt mikh nit dos broyt,
 Dos vaser nit geshtilt mayn gumen.
 Biz oysgegangen kh'volt fargoy't,
 Un bloyz mayn benkshaft volt gekumen...

By using the symbol of the *akeyde* to describe his escape from death, the poet places himself in the line of the ancestors, *and* of all the survivors who, like Isaac, have escaped death by a hair's breadth; the term is also inseparable from some idea of divine purpose and intervention. The poet's participation in the continuity of the *goldene keyt* is evoked by the anthropomorphic 'Vu yeder shteyndl iz mayn zeyde' - this image, and that of the land giving birth and being born, evokes the poet's feeling of affinity with inanimate nature, which is imbued with the same life as human beings.

The second poem of the section, 'Bist gekumen a naketer' (PV2, p.8), treats the theme of finding a new identity in Israel. Apostrophising himself, the poet states the theme in two introductory lines which incorporate two key images:

Bist gekumen a naketer
 In gantsn in fayer.

Nakedness signifies the vulnerability of the poet stripped of his past, who has taken the step into the unknown, whereas, as

in the poem 'Eybike b'godim', clothes signify protection, and are associated with his mother. The first line also epitomises the tendency towards biblical reference which characterised the central image of 'Ven kh'volt nit zayn mit dir banand', for it is surely an allusion to Job's words 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'.⁸ Thus the image is enhanced by a further dimension: the idea of patient acceptance of misfortune. In Jewish mysticism, nakedness has also, as Gershom Scholem points out, the connotation of absolute Exile:

The horrors of Exile were mirrored in the Kabbalistic doctrine of metempsychosis, which [...] won immense popularity by stressing the various stages of the soul's exile. The most terrible fate that could befall any soul - far more ghastly than the torments of hell - was to be 'outcast' or 'naked', a state precluding either rebirth or even admission to hell.⁹

Though the absolutism of the Kabbalistic doctrine does not apply to Sutzkever's view, since he did see the possibility of redemption, his nakedness is symbolic both of the physical exile he has suffered, and of the exile of the soul signified by his naked dance round the fire, and the desecration of the scrolls. The image of nakedness thus fuses his own biography with these ancient mystical and biblical ideas.

The fire of the second line signifies the positive aspect of the image: the *ikh*, like the mythical salamander, is on fire with life and inspiration; the image suggests purification by fire akin to the final climactic moment of 'Erev mayn farbreung'.

⁸. Job 1.21.

⁹. Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, first paperback edition (New York, 1961), p.250.

After the introductory statement, the next four stanzas elaborate the poet's situation, gradually developing and making more concrete the figurative statements about his nakedness. In the lines

Dayne bgodim -
 Fun mamishe finger genodlt,
 Vi shpilndik pyane oyf samet un zaydns -
 Farsmolyete zenen gefaln in shotn,

the loss of his mother and his identity are united in the image of the clothes his mother sewed for him (representing her love and protection) being destroyed in the Nazi fire (the death of his mother, and loss of his identity leading to his nakedness and vulnerability).¹⁰

In the second stanza the poet places his situation in the context of all those who have suffered, emphasising again his relationship to the fate and history of the people:

S'iz dayn aleynkeyt
 Koylel di gantskeyt fun kame-vekame.

His emotional struggle is evoked through two important symbols:

In eyn oyg - a volf
 Inem tsveytn - dayn mame.

The wolf has already occurred with metapoetic significance in 'Sibir' and in the poem 'A horde muzik'. As in the poetry of Kulbak and Halpern, it has become a metapoetic symbol for Sutzkever also. Here, as elsewhere in his work, the soul is reflected in the eye: thus the wolf, (symbol of the more savage aspects of the poetic self, and linked for Sutzkever with his earlier life in Siberia and Lithuania), and his love for his mother are the two strands of his own private emotions.

¹⁰. Shoes as a similar metonymic image of the dead mother have already been seen in 'A vogn shikh'.

In 'Bist gekumen a naketer' Sutzkever unites his own emotions with the collective grief and disorientation of the uprooted survivors. These are explored in the next two stanzas. Those coming to Israel feel not only that their ordeals in Europe cannot possibly be fully understood by people in Israel who have not experienced them, but also that 'di mentshn fun danen' do not give the Holocaust survivors credit for their part in preserving, by their struggles, the continuity of the Jewish people: they have also contributed to the emergence of the state of Israel:

Vi konen di mentshn fun danen dir gleybn,
 Az du host in Varshe
 Farteydikt dem kastel?
 Az du host in toytn-medine gefuremt
 Di lebedik heymishe
 Yunge medine?

To introduce this problem, Sutzkever develops the imagery of nakedness and clothes:

Ver kon bakleydn
 Dayn gvaldike hoylkeyt?

and in order to intensify this concept of 'aleykeyt' and 'hoylkeyt' he uses the figure of Isaiah: facing the poet, as a representative of the Holocaust survivors, the prophet would have had to cast down his eyes and utter his triumphant messianic prophecy with 'lipn farshemte'.¹¹

 11. Post-Holocaust Yiddish poetry has many examples of criticism of God. A similar motif of rejection of God by His *tsadikim* is dramatically used by Itsik Manger in his poem 'Di "ohovey Yisroel" baym toytlager Belshets', where three famous Hassidic Rabbis of the region, Reb Moyshe Leyb of Sossov, Reb Volf of Zborosh, and Reb Meirl of Przemyslan, upon examining the remains of the death-camp decide to condemn God for not looking well to His vineyard, with the words:

'Bashafer fun di veltn du bist makhtik, moyredik un groys
 Nor mir di Galitsiyaner mekn dikh oyf eybik oys
 Fun der eyde emeser "ohovey Yisroel" '.

Penguin Book of Modern Yiddish Verse, ed. by Irving Howe, Ruth Wisse, Khone Shmeruk (New York, 1987), p.595.

The problem is resolved in the final stanza: not in relationships with human beings but in identity with the land itself can the future be welcomed. Sutzkever characterises this in anthropomorphic imagery which signifies the strength of his emotional commitment to Israel, but also his reawakening nature-empathy:

Nor gleybn dir vet der vulkanisher hartsklap
 Fun land,
 Yener hartsklap, vos du host derhert
 Ven dayn harts hot oyfgehert klapn a vayle.

It is clear from the last two lines that the idea of Israel was able to sustain him through terror. The poem ends in triumphant affirmation of unity between the *ikh* and the land, transmitted by the voice which personifies the spirit of the land:

Mit aza min akhzor~~e~~yes vi du host geshosn fun biks
 Mit der zelibiker tsertlekhkeyt flants do dayn
 vayngortn.

The image is a kind of oxymoron: in juxtaposing the irreconcilable ideas of 'akhzor~~e~~yes/ tsertlekhkeyt', and 'biks/vayngortn' he is able to suggest that the cruelty and the gun are still an inextinguishable part of his experience and therefore of his *ikh*, but that they can be transformed into a creative experience in the new land. The concept of the vineyard has many connotations. Very many of the precepts or warnings given to the Israelites by God either directly or through Moses featured the vineyard as an image of fortune or misfortune, diligence or indolence. This biblical connection of the vineyard with the fate and history of the Jews makes it a powerful image of the continuity of Jewish existence in Israel. The majestic serenity of the last line contrasts with the unease of the previous stanzas. The metrical pattern is mainly of dactyls and anapaests, but the end of the lines are almost always a strong

beat or a trochee. The last two lines however consist of anapaests, and the ear expects the five feet of the penultimate line to be echoed in the last line, so that it should end on a strong beat: it stops short however, with two weak beats, and this gives an element of surprise to the last word; the 'vayngortn' echoes the 'dayn gortn' of the third last line: these two acoustic features give a curious feeling to the final word 'vayngortn'.

Both in theme and imagery this poem is seminal to the development of Sutzkever's ideas in the collection 'In fayer-vogn' as a whole: nature, the mainspring of his inspiration before 1940, thereafter hardly in evidence except as a reminder of man's destruction of its holiness,¹² now becomes again a central influence. It is invested with a mystical significance which owes its origins to the anthropomorphism of 'Blonder baginen' and 'Valdiks', but the new nature vision is inspired by the land of Israel: the anthropomorphism of the 'vulkanisher hartsklap' grows out of Sutzkever's profound awareness of the idea of Israel as a *living* reality for the Jewish people throughout their history, and the significance of this land as a symbol of life and rebirth is deepened and invested with an ethical dimension by the experience of the Holocaust. Nature is a force of reconciliation and healing; and in other poems of the section 'Shehekhiana' Sutzkever continues to explore the way in which the spirit of the land of Israel can heal the wounds of the Holocaust and create a new *ikh* for him as a poet.

¹². For example in 'Penemer in zumpn', PV1, p.246, or 'Zangen', PV1, p. 339.

In 'A zezung' (PV2, p.21), nature vision and biblical imagery are united. This poem carries the central image of the fiery chariot which gives the collection its title. Written in 1951, 'A zezung' centres on the figure of Elijah, the symbolic figure of redemption in 'Erev mayn farbrengung'. Here Sutzkever unites two motifs from the life of the prophet: Mount Carmel, and Elijah's assumption into heaven in the chariot of fire. On Mount Carmel the prophet demonstrated the power of God over the false God Baal, God causing Elijah's sacrifice to burn, as a result of which the people of Israel came back to the true God (1 Kings 18). After this incident, Elijah's prayer to God brought rain to the land struck by famine. Mount Carmel therefore is associated with the two ideas of fire and water which are permanent symbols for Sutzkever, and it is a place of revelation. The fire demonstrating the power of God recurs in the motif of the fiery chariot by which Elijah ascended into heaven (2 Kings 2).

The poem 'A zezung' is a mystical vision in which the poet sees a storm burst out from the cliffs of Mount Carmel:

Fun vanen kumt der shturem oyfn Carmel? Fun a feldz.
 lkh hob gezen:
 A volkn-hamer hot dem feldz tseshpaltn
 Un s'hot fun zayne shteyngeveyd aroysgeplatst a shturem -
 A fayer-vogn, vos di reder zayne - fir mazoles,
 Oyf bloe, dimentene aksn,
 Hobn unter volkns
 Geakert iber mayn gebeyn.

The image is typical of Sutzkever in its element of the unexpected: rather than, as in a more conventional image, the storm splitting the rock and allowing the mysterious chariot to emerge from the rock, it is the storm itself which is born inside the rock and emerges from it¹³ - part of the imagery of bursting

¹³. The neologism 'shteyngeveyd' (a fusion of 'shteyn' and 'ingeveyd' - the intestine) is also typical of Sutzkever's inventive poetic vocabulary.

forth which is a frequent metapoetic concept - and the storm is the fiery chariot. Within the concept too the idea of ploughing reappears. This had symbolised the release of poetic creativity in the poet in the early poem 'Erd un aker' (PV1, p.40), and in the ghetto period there was the similar image of digging out treasure in the poem 'Di sharfe lipn' (PV1, p.365). It is legitimate, therefore, to see these images of bursting forth and of the chariot wheels ploughing his body as signifying rebirth and creativity. It is significant too that the chariot, which in the rest of the poem reconciles the two parts of his life, past and present, emerges from *inside* the land of Israel, and out of the rock, which is equated with the life-force of the land, as in the phrase 'vulkanisher hartsklap fun land' of 'Bist gekumen a naketer'.

Sutzkever does not confine the chariot to the context of the Elijah story, but invests the image with a further dimension, for in the chariot is a 'Geshtalt, vos in ir ponem iz farknotn/ Di penemer fun ale mentshn, khayes un geviksn.' This figure is the personification of all creation: in Sutzkever's eyes all nature, animate and inanimate, is endowed with the same spirit, a conviction which finds expression more and more in his later poetry .

With the *ikh* caught in its wheels, the chariot flies 'tsevishn yam un volkn'. There are echoes here of the poet's flight over the landscape of Siberia, in the *poeme* 'Sibir'. Here, the chariot of his poetic vision takes him to the buried town of Vilna, 'di shtot fun ale mayne libste', and all the dead who people his memory are gathered up into the chariot. It brings all these elements of his other life, which still inhabit his consciousness, back to Mount Carmel, where they are blessed by the figure which represents all creation:

Un di geshtalt mit penemer fun mentshn, khayes, beymer,-
 Bentsht di aynvoyner fun shtot
 Vi Yankev zayne kinder.

Sutzkever adds a further religious-historical dimension to this experience by adding the image of the Patriarch Jacob and his children. The victims of the Holocaust are sanctified and integrated into the history of Israel by being equated with the twelve tribes of Israel.

The poem is therefore the completion of 'Bist gekumen a naketer': it raises the union of the *ikh* with the land of Israel onto a collective, mystical plane. In the former poem the poet was able to find a new identity with the land; here he shows how the past with its pain can be sublimated and integrated into the *goldene keyt* which is the continuity of Israel, and how the victims can live on through his poetry.

Not only does Sutzkever come to see the possibility of reconciling the past with the new life, but he sees the pain of the past as an essential, enriching component of the *ikh*. In 'Geule' (PV2, p.13) he uses an old legend to explore the pain which still torments him. The legend says that in the moment of salvation the people's wounds will be revealed, because the chains which been hiding them have been removed. Sutzkever applies this legend to his own experience: Israel represents 'Geule'- and the continuing pain of past wounds is therefore necessary to the completeness of the experience:

Kentik di geule *eksistirt* shoyt, - ven du shteyst
 Oyf a barg, tsi kenstu mestn, zen im?
 Kentik az in *dem* bashteyt di nogndike treyst,
 Vos di vundn, - shtifkinder fun gegnem,
 Hobn zikh tseefnt mit a shpiglendikn vey
 Say in guf un say a pitsl vayter.

The wounds are the means of purification. The image Sutzkever uses for this purification is again that of the

'shayter' as in 'Erev mayn farbrengung': 'Du aleybn muzt oystiglen dayn ikh in zeyer shayter.'

The subtlest exploration of this theme of enrichment of the present through the continuing presence of the past is found in the nature imagery of the poem 'Der shney oyfn Khermon' (PV2, p.30), in which snow and fire are perfectly fused. Here Sutzkever goes back beyond the immediate past, into his vanished childhood:

May ko mashme lan der shney, vos oyfn Khermon oybn?
 Er antplekt mir a bashneyte, ovntike khate,
 Ven bagartlt mit a zeg es kumt arayn mayn tate,
 Un di zun, vos blondzshet inem veldl oyf di shoybn,
 Finklt in zayn bord zayn ongeayzikte, in khate.

The images are those of 'Sibir': the hut, the father as woodcutter, the sun, the wood, and the sparkling windowpanes. The snow on Mount Hermon brings these deeply significant memories back as a reality. The second time-level conjured up by the Israel snow is that of the Holocaust:

Er dermont mir on di yidn, vos vi shneyen kloze,
 Zenen zey gefal'n shtumerheyt a gantsn vinter
 Un zey lign hinter mayne shvartsaplen, - ahinter,
 Benken az a friling zol zey makhn a hagkore.
 Nor iz den faran aza min friling a tsegrinter?

The first two lines constitute one of those memorable images which almost defy analysis. Its mysterious and deeply moving effect comes, perhaps, from a combination of several factors: there is the predominant elegaic falling rhythm of the trochee (which applies to the first two stanzas in general); the idea of the victims falling like snow gives them an ethereal lightness. At the same time, however, the emphasis put on 'gefal'n', gives the word a ponderous quality which superimposes the image of a body falling heavily upon the light image of the Jews falling like gentle snow flakes, so that the two aspects of the image are in poignant tension. Behind this image also, as throughout the

poem, the already established metapoetic connotations of snow and 'shtumkeyt' resonate.

'Shvartsaplen'¹⁴ were established early in Sutzkever's work as a permanent image: the pupil of the eye perceives truth, receives poetic impressions, and in a later poem can leave the body and fly away to gather in the essence of poetry.¹⁵ The Holocaust victims lying behind the poet's 'shvartsaplen' signify their continued presence in his consciousness. The final question of the poem contrasts the winter of their dying with the possibility of a spring green enough to accord them a fitting *haz-kore* - the Jewish memorial service for the dead. The question raises doubts which, though not specifically answered, seem to dissolve in the harmony of the final stanza.

The moment of resolution comes with the bird which, in various guises, is a constant image in Sutzkever's poetry, invariably as the vehicle of an insight into poetic creativity. Here it is the same little bird which appeared to Bialik in his famous poem 'El hatsipur' ('Tsum feygele').¹⁶ In Bialik's poem the *ikh*, exiled in a northern land, begs the little bird to bring him news from the longed-for land of Zion:

 14. The concept, literally meaning the pupil of the eye, has been aptly translated as 'the inner eye' by Ruth Wisse, in her edition of a selection of Sutzkever's short stories, Di nevue fun shvartsaplen ('Prophecy of the Inner Eye', Jerusalem 1989).

15. 'Ikh loz aroys fun oygnshlak tsvey vareme shvartsaplen,
 Zey zoln fliyen biz ek velt un brengen mir a dritn,
 Aza vos hot gezen dos oysgementshlekhe, dos vore,
 Un zol der driter oysvorken in oygnshlak zayn zeyung'.

(Ts-b, p.178)

The word-play 'toybnshlak'/'oygnshlak' produces an extraordinary fusion of the dove/muse with the 'shvartsaplen'.

by y.y. Shvarts

16. Yiddish version in Musterverk fun der yidisher literatur, 20, ed. by Shmuel Rozhanski, (Buenos Aires, 1964), pp.127-129. The poem first appeared in Hebrew in 1891, when Bialik was 18 years old, was set to music and was very popular throughout Jewish communities in Poland and Russia.

Un tol fun dem Sharon un barg fun Levanon,
 Tsi shteyen zey alts nokh in prakht?
 Tsi hot der Levanon, der zokn fun velder,
 Fun eybikn shlof shoy n dervakht?

Tsi falt nokh der toy oyfn Khermon vi perl,
 Tsi falt er vi trern tsu mol?
 Un vos makht der likhtiker Yarn der klorer,
 Un yetveder barg, yeder tol?

In Sutzkever's poem the dew on Mount Hermon is transformed into snow, but the bird is Bialik's 'feygele':

Foygl funem Khermon! Vos ikh hob geshlosn kantshaft
 Nokh in *El hatsipur* mit dayn hartsiker negine, -
 Breng a shney a kindishn oyf dayne fligl dine
 Fun mayn heym, der *yir* voeym -, vet liber zayn di land
shaft.

Onem shney vet kalt zayn in der flamiker medine.

Bialik, in the 'tsofn-land', speaks to the bird which has flown there from Zion, and longs for union with it through the bird's depiction of it. Sutzkever, who has reached Zion, asks the same bird to bring to *him* a trace of the 'tsofn-land' of his youth. Bialik's longing remains unfulfilled: he sends the bird away lest it should be infected by his melancholy, and the poem ends on a note of resignation, with no prospect of the bird's happiness flowing into him and ending his misery:

Kh'hob mer nisht keyn trern, a sof nemt tsu alem,
 Nor s'nemt nit keyn sof tsu mayn leyd -
 Gut lib dir dayn kumen, du, feygele tayers,
 Tsezing zikh, tsekling zikh in freyd!

Sutzkever's poem ends on an upward note: the bird's bringing the snow from Vilna¹⁷ will unite past and present: the three significant stages in his life, the childhood during which he became

 17. The term '*yir* voeym b'Yisroel' occurs in 2 Samuel 20.19, when the wise woman accuses Joab: 'thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel'. The shortened version of the term ('*yir* voeym') is widely used for any town with a substantial Jewish population which has played an important social and above all spiritual and intellectual role in Jewish history, as Vilna did. Though this phrase identifies the place from which the bird should bring the snow as Vilna, the adjective applied to the snow, 'a kindishn', links the image also to the first phase of the poet's life in the Siberian snow.

a poet, and the traumatic experience of the Holocaust, - both symbolised by the snow of the past -, and the present, represented by the snow on Mount Hermon, which has reawakened his consciousness of the other snow.

The way in which Bialik's poem title appears in the final stanza is, according to Litvine, 'eyner fun yene Sutzkeverishe geniyale blitsn, vos inem tekst fun eyn lid git er dem titl funem lid 'El hatsipur' nit in gendznfislekh nor bloyz espasirt. In gendznfislekh volt es geven a poshete referents, a dermonung. On dem vert es a simbol, neyn, mer nokh, a naye dikhterishe realitet, vu der foygl fun Khermon un der foygl fun hundert yor friyer un der yir voem^y_λ b'Yisroel Vilne vern eyn gantskeyt'¹⁸. Litvine expresses precisely the way in which past and present fuse in the poem, which gains additional resonance from the incorporation of Bialik's poem. Not only do the two birds fuse into a new poetic reality, as Litvine has said, but the reference to Bialik's bird evokes the contrast between Bialik's unfulfilled longing for the spiritual home of Israel, and the fulfilment hoped for in Sutzkever's poem. Furthermore, through the Bialik reference this poem becomes the climax and fulfilment of a whole tradition of Jewish literature of longing for Zion, which can be traced from the Babylonian exile through Jehuda Halevy, - also a recurring figure in Sutzkever's work -, to the above mentioned poem of Bialik. In this way 'Der shney oyfn Khermon' is one of the poems which most effectively express the sense of being part of a historical process which permeates the collection 'In fayer-vogn'.

¹⁸. Private letter to the present writer from M. Litvine.

The final line with its petrarchist paradox fuses the symbols of snow and fire. The snow of Siberia and of the Holocaust winter symbolises the past which has to be integrated, and the poetic inspiration arising from the figure of the father and the Siberian childhood, and therefore, paradoxically, it represents the 'warm', life-giving force. The adjective 'flamik' characterises the heat of Israel, but also suggests the purifying fire of 'Erev mayn farbrenung', neither of which would be sufficient to sustain the *whole* personality without the integration of the formative past which is an essential component of the poet's *ikh*. As in 'Bist gekumen a naketer' and 'A zezung', the ethical dimension is very strong: the guilt, the destruction, and the constant remembrance of the dead, must form an integral part of the new life in Israel.

Three years after writing 'Der shney oyfn Khermon' Sutzkever was still probing the shifting relationship between past and present in the cycle of eight short poems 'Shvartse toybn' (PV2, p.127), written in 1951. Here the doves, symbol of the muse, are black: this ambiguity echoes the unease with which the poet treats the theme of reconciliation in these poems. The dominant theme of the ambivalent relationship with the past places the cycle in the section 'Di karsh fun dermonung'.

The first six poems in the cycle show increasing anguish in the poet's review of aspects of his past. The first three deal with relationships with people now dead. In the first, the harmony between cold and heat which was achieved in 'Der shney oyfn Khermon' is undone. The poet addresses his father, lamenting the passing of childhood:

Du host mikh bashafn azoy vi a kind

Bashaft zikh a shneymentsh lekoved zayn kholem.¹⁹
 Nito mer dos kind.
 Un ikh bin atsind
 Elter fun dir, mayn bashafer.

The longing he feels for the vanished father and childhood is encapsulated in the warmth of the sun, whereas the deadness of the present is the frozen cold within him:

Vos kelter di ayzikeyt shmidt mayn gebeyn -
 Alts royzik tsegliter di zun in zikorn.

Thus in paradoxical fashion the past/snow and present/'flamike medine' equation is reversed, in order to give dramatic expression to the complex emotions warring within him:

Di zun kon dem ayz nit tshemeltsn,
 Der ayz kon di zun nit farleshn, -
 A tsviling fun layblekhe sonim.

Zey firn a shlakht oyf mayn ponem.

The battle is resolved to a certain extent in the second poem, where, presumably addressing his parents, the *ikh* feels that together they freed his 'nign' which was imprisoned 'vi a blits in keytn'; the third poem also speaks of union in death with a 'zi' who has died before him.²⁰ The fourth poem, however, evokes alienation from another human being: the wall between them is not of copper which could be destroyed with hammer and chisel, but of air, more insubstantial but also impossible to dislodge - a subtle image of estrangement between human beings.

 19. This image echoes the use of the snowman as a symbol of longing and inspiration, as in 'Sibir', : the relation of father to child is therefore like that of child to snowman: part playful, part fulfilment of a dream.

20. This is probably an allusion to his older sister who died at the age of thirteen, and who appears in several poems as an inspirational figure to the poet: for example in 'Shtern in shney', and in the cycle 'Der krayz fun di noentste' (PV2, p.295). The sister is fused with the muse-figure in 'Ikh lig in an orn' (PV1, p.249).

The fifth and sixth poems intensify the poet's despair. The mysterious voice which speaks of possessing the poet is the voice of all the dead:

'Dikh hobn nit geboyrn tate-mame,
Nor mir, di roykh-legyonen, vos mir voglen
Gelodene mit blitzn un mit hoglen...
O mir, di toyte, vos in toyt mir lebn,
Geboyrn hobn dikh mit undzer libe.'

Here the conviction is expressed that the poet's *ikh* really belongs to the dead - they, not his parents, had truly given him birth, are more alive in him than the living. This idea had been a positive source of faith in his poetic mission in the poems of 'Di festung',²¹ but here it acquires a nightmare quality, reminiscent of the atmosphere of 'Oytoportret'. The dead pursue him like locusts and, before dissolving in 'a funkenish-gekleter', they leave him *their* time as a legacy. But it is a book with uncut pages, which, even after he has cut them, remain incomprehensible to him:

Host oyfgeshnitn undzer tsayt un veyst nit.
Mir zenen der gedank vos du farshteyst nit.

The mysterious voices make no attempt to explain, but tell him that all facets of his being belong to the dead: his joy, his poetry, his beloved and his tears.

In the sixth poem this theme of the power of the dead over his life is made more specific, and the train of thought which arises out of an everyday incident (cutting his finger while

21. cf. the poem 'Far nakht' (PV1, p.277):
'Zey tsiyen zikh, sharn in reyen, in polkn,
Ikh ze mer nit keynem, nor fil zeyer gang.
Vi feygl in flater fun hinter a volkn -
Geshtalt nokh geshtalt mit bazundern klang.

Durkh mir, durkh mayn dimyen zey tsiyen zikh ale,
Un yeder gefint dort zayn kholem un - zikh.
Es vert mir in likht fun mayn blindkeyt nisgale
Fun vifl neshomes geklept iz mayn ikh.'

slicing bread), illustrates precisely what the 'roykh-legyonen' were asserting in the fifth poem. The poet's child recoils from her father's bleeding finger:

Loz arayn dos blut tsurik,
Ikh kon oyf dem nit kukn.

The natural simplicity of the child's words seems to the poet to epitomise the essence of poetry, which cannot be achieved by the adult:

Deriber fleg ikh veynen in di nekht,
Zikh shlogn kop on kholem,
Kop on klangen
On kolirn.

This is one of the few instances where Sutzkever seems to doubt the sufficiency of his poetic word. But, borrowing the words of the child, he is able to express his anguish:

Vi lozt men take s'blut arayn tsurik
In ale tayere?

Each of these poems is complete in itself, with its own particular metre and rhyme scheme, but taken together they rise to a crescendo of despair, in the question provoked by the simple eloquence of the child's words. Then in the seventh poem there is a complete break in the mood. Sutzkever moves from the past to the beauty of his present life in Israel, and in the sunflowers on his balcony he sees an image of serene perfection:

Zunroyzn baym fentster, mit di bleterkroynen gele,
Penemer vos zenen bloyz gehekl't fun shvartsaplen -
Voser vunder hot zey do geboyrn, voser pele?

In these lines Sutzkever again moves close to the *Dinggedicht* of Rilke: the flowers seem to have an immanent significance, which cannot be explained, but only sensed.

This autotelic image is however immediately transformed into a symbol by the intervention of Sutzkever's ever present tendency to analyse: 'Neyn, dos zenen heym-gilgulim vos in trern tsaplen'.

The way in which this strange concept is to be understood is indicated by the second stanza:

Kh'hob di zunroyzn gelozn hefker bay mayn ganik,
Eyninker aleyn in gel-septemberdikn tsanken.
Kinder lozt men azoy iber in a duler panik,
Ven a sreyfe shpiglt holoveshkes fun gedanken.

The sunflowers are symbols ('heym-gilgulim') of his home *here in Israel*, to which he has been untrue in his anguish about the past. The horrendous image of the abandoned children which evokes this betrayal awakens echoes of extreme situations which occurred during the Holocaust: of parents losing their children, being forced to choose between two children, even having to kill their own babies to save others from discovery, so that it is an immensely effective image of guilt and anguish. Sutzkever has linked it with his particular situation by the final words of the image: the sparks of the fire are '*holoveshkes fun gedanken*' (my italics): this suggests that he now sees his obsessive brooding on the past as having been a betrayal of his present life, epitomised by the immanent reality and perfection of the sunflowers.

Reconciliation and harmony are achieved in the final couplet, which stands alone, and which, in its serenity, is reminiscent of the final couplet of 'Bist gekumen a naketer':

Zunroyzn eynfisike mit shtern oyf di kroynen,
Kh'vel in ayer shotn itster voynen.

This would form a fitting, harmonious ending for the cycle, but in the final poem Sutzkever returns to ambivalence, developing the imagery of the title, and the serenity of the seventh poem is disturbed. His premonitions are evoked, first, by black doves pecking at him (as the swallow pecked out his tears in 'Oytoportret'); the message of these premonitions is the imminent destruction of his 'gerateveten gloybn' of the previous poem. In

the second image describing the 'forgefiln', that of the mask, we find a further example of Sutzkever's propensity to create images which are not quite what the reader expects:

Forgefiln sheyln op di maskes
 Un bavayzn
 Penemer fun ayzn...

Instead of the mask being removed to reveal the expected face underneath, Sutzkever confronts us with a sort of negative image: the 'forgefiln'- an abstract concept- remove their masks and reveal faces of iron. The final command given by the 'forgefiln' show that the dominant mood in the cycle is that of the fifth poem:

Leb, vi es voltn dikh shtendik bavakht
 Oygn fun toyte bay tog un bay nakht.

We cannot therefore speak of a steady progress towards inner harmony and integration of past and present: this poem-cycle shows that even after the bright optimism of 'Bist gekumen a naketer' and 'Der shney oyfn Khermon', the inner conflict had to be approached again and again, by means of already established images which continually change and evolve, with new images emerging all the time to express the complex inner process of reconciliation.

One further poem in which the main theme is the integration of past and present is 'Di mirmelne statue', (PV2, p.114). By placing it in the section 'Di karsh fun dermonung', like 'Shvartse toybn', Sutzkever is emphasising the theme of the unresolved past, but both poems have a bridging function. Here a physical object, the statue, is a symbol of continuity. There are four time levels in the poem: the 'now' of Israel, with which the poem begins and ends, the time of King David, the Vilna of the Nazi occupation, and the time of Sutzkever's return there in

1944. The motif of David links all four periods. The first two stanzas describe the poet's present distress, because of the overwhelming reality of the past: in the first stanza this is expressed by the image of the plant in the vase which still has the earth of its previous 'home' clinging to its roots; Sutzkever quite specifically compares his own rootedness in the past to the situation of this plant:

Ikh bin geglikhn tsum vazon, mayn fraynd,
Un otem oys di geto-blut fun Lite.

This initial statement leads into painful visions of the past:

O zeungen, ver shindt aykh pas nokh pas
Fun mayne regn-boygndike glider?

The implication of the line is made clear through the attribute 'regn-boygik' with its established metapoetic connotation: the visions of the past are disturbing the poetic creativity of the *ikh*. The surreal images ('moyern geleymt fun meshugas', and the 'koymen-kerer fun Tanakh'²²) then become more specific, as the poet remembers the particular day when he hid a statue of David by Antokolsky²³ in a cellar in Vilna. In the fourth stanza, the *ikh* elaborates the significance which the figure of David has for him: David, embodied in the statue, represents continuity, the *goldene keyt*. David had fought for the people of Israel three thousand years ago, and passed on the seed which gave rise to the poet himself:

Gefirt hot Dovid shlakhtn far dem zomen,
Bashtimt mikh tsu geboyrn dem o dor,
Un ayngeshtelt zayn lebn far mayn nomen.

22. The image of the chimney sweeps who rescue little children recurs in the poem 'Di koymen-kerer' of 1959 (PV2, p.382).

23. As far as I have been able to establish, the sculptor Antokolsky did not create a statue of King David - the sculpture appears to be a creation of Sutzkever's imagination.

The continuity consists in the *ikh* now being called upon to preserve David, in the form of the statue, from destruction.

The fifth and sixth stanzas move to the desolation of post-war Vilna; the poet's despair is evoked by a powerful image of the death of God:

Azoy vi zelvstmord volt bagangen got
 Un ligt tseglidert iber berg un toln.
 Zayn layb iz yeder tsi gl fun a kloyz,
 A shalikh fartshpet oyf a tliye;
 Un s'iz di gele ovntzun, dukht oys,
 Der kop zayner, vos shvimt in der Viliye.

This image draws on the archetypal dead God myth, but without its implied corollary of resurrection. The particles of the dead God's body are in all the stones, earth, rooftiles and scraps of clothing which characterise the murdered victims and the devastated city; nature is also death, the sun being the dead God's head.

The despair of the *ikh* brings him to the point where, Oedipus like, 'kh'vil di oygn oysstekhn on dorn', but now the memory of the hidden David revives the will to live in the *ikh*, and resurrects the dead God²⁴:

Klingt oyf a mirml-nign in zikorn,
 Vi s'voltn oyfgerirt a klavyatur
 Tsvey tsoyberhent in eydlkeyt in heler.
 Un got vert lebedik in der natur.

For the second time David has given life to the *ikh*, and now, for the second time the *ikh* saves David, and brings him to Israel. The last line of the stanza suggests a rebirth of nature inspiration, which again becomes a fundamental theme in Sutzkever's poetry from the early years in Israel onward.

²⁴. It is interesting to see that the pre-war mystic egocentricity of Sutzkever's universe returns in this imagery: the god lives again when the *ikh* wills it, that is, when his hope revives.

In the last two stanzas the poem moves again to the present; and as in 'Erev mayn farbreitung', the poem has been a vehicle for the resolution of the mood of despair which the poet expressed in the first stanzas. Through the poetic word, the mood of sadness is transformed into hope, represented by the figure of David: as progenitor, as symbol of the Jewish people in the old Jerusalem, in Vilna, and now as a living presence in the new Jerusalem; the poet has been the means of achieving this continuity, and is thus a link in the *goldene keyt*:

Der kinig shpant...un ikh bin vi der bruk
Vos iber im tut shpanen di nevue.

The image of the marble statue has other important aspects. Apart from the significance of the figure of David, the idea of the marble statue, - as in the earlier metapoetic poem cycle 'Firmatones' (PV1, p.143) - symbolises the work of art by means of which existential problems are resolved. The concreteness of the image signifying continuity and resurrection links this poem with 'Kerndlekh vayts', from 'Di festung' (PV1, p.289). Just as the statue of David, through its burial and 'resurrection' represents the future of the Jewish people, so the digging up of the buried manuscripts would enable them to blossom like the grains of wheat, and carry on the Jewish tradition.

From the poems studied so far in this chapter it has emerged that through images which are either developments of his already established poetic vocabulary, or new images strongly influenced by the experience of Jewish tradition and the land of Israel, Sutzkever reaches the insight that only by accepting the living reality of *all* aspects of his past, and bringing them into his

new life can he achieve wholeness and continuity²⁵. The new life is deepened and enhanced by the fusion of both realms of experience.

The liberation which the experience of Israel brought to the poet is exemplified in various poems in which Sutzkever takes Israel as his theme. One important characteristic of these poems is, as already indicated, the proliferation of figures and images from the Bible and from Jewish history²⁶. As well as Elijah and Elisha, King David, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sutzkever draws on the stories of Solomon and his magic ring (PV2, p.89), Saul and the witch of Endor (PV2, p.14), Cain and Abel (PV2, p.34), and the legend of the bones of Joseph which were taken by Moses from Egypt to be buried in Canaan, (PV2, p.68). Figures important in Jewish history include Jehuda Halevy (PV2, p.39), the second century teacher Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai (PV2, p.31), and Solomon Molcho (PV2, p.23).

The place names which occur in the poems are almost all scenes of some significant event in Jewish history, or from the Bible. Through the resonance which they produce, Sutzkever is able to link his own fate with that of the ancestors, reinforcing the idea of the golden chain. The poem 'Zunfargang in Tsfas' (PV2, p.23) can be taken as an example of this symbolic use of personal and place names.

⁵. This conviction had previously been reached in the poem 'Gesang fun a yidishn dikhter in 1943' (PV1, p.318), written in the Vilna ghetto.

⁶. The role of biblical themes, aspects of Jewish history and legend, and the use of Hebrew and Aramaic in Sutzkever's poetry is a huge topic to which justice could be done only in a separate study. Here certain salient factors will be indicated as a point of departure for further research.

Safed ('Tsfat' in modern Hebrew, 'Tsfas' in Yiddish) evokes a whole strand of the history of Jewish mystical thought. It became a centre of religious scholarship in the fifteenth century, when Joseph Karo composed his *Shulkhan Arukh* there. In the sixteenth century, after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Safed became the centre of a great mystical movement. The place was revered as the site of the tomb of Simeon ben Yohai, and his person and teachings were a central element of the thirteenth century *Zohar*, which became the key text in the new Kabbalism which began to flourish in Safed under the leadership of Isaac ben Solomon Luria. Jews throughout the world were horrified by persecutions in Europe culminating in the destruction of the ancient community of the Jews of Spain, and by the occupation of the Holy Land by the Turks. In this emotional climate, mysticism, with its promise of redemption, attracted a great following. The mystical teachings of Safed spread throughout the Jewish world.

Solomon Molcho was a young Portuguese Marrano, who in the early sixteenth century was deeply influenced by the self-styled prophet David Reubeni who planned to expel the Turks from Palestine and set up a Jewish kingdom there. Molcho went to Salonika, Adrianople and Safed, preaching the coming of the Messianic age. In 1532 he went with Reubeni to try to enlist the support of the Emperor Charles V. A contemporary diary records the events:

At this time a foreign proselyte named Solomon Molcho has appeared, with strange notions to rouse the Emperor so that he will summon all Jews to battle against Turkey. When I heard what he had in mind, I warned him against stirring up the Emperor's heart, lest the great fire consume him [...] Solomon Molcho was [...] placed in iron chains, taken to

Bologna, and there burned for the sanctity of God and the religion of Israel.²⁷

The names of Safed and Solomon Molcho resonate therefore with ideas of Jewish mysticism, with the longing in exile for a Messianic redemption, for a homeland in Israel; Molcho's death is an example of *kidesh-ha-shem*. Sutzkever uses all these resonances to give symbolic expression to the links between recent Jewish history and the ancient fate of the Jews, and also to illuminate his own suffering and redemption:

In dayne fentster flakert Shloyme Molkho oyfn shayter, -
 Kh'hob oykh a mol geflakert ot azoy in mitn gas.
 Atsinder bin ikh opgeshpiglt inem blo fun Tsfas,
 Oyf a dakh mit goldik-royte krayter.
 Atsinder, ven ikh shveb mit oygn nas
 Tsum zohardikn Etsmun-barg, vu s'kvaln
 Kabole-brunems - vil ikh faln, faln,
 Un oystrinken fun zey dayn ponem, Tsfas!

All the images are linked by the motif of flickering reflections: the sunset reflected in the windows (a motif from 'Sibir') suggests Solomon Molcho's death-fire and the poet's experience with the Nazis, explored more fully later in 'Erev mayn far-brenung'. Here, however, he already suggests redemption through the identification of his experience with Solomon Molcho's *kidesh-ha-shem*, and also through the motif of his face being reflected in the blue of Safed: here he sees not the monstrous vision of 'Oytoportret' or the wrinkled face of 'Erev mayn far-brenung', but a reflection of the pure blue of the sky over Safed, and the red of the death-fire is transformed into the golden-red of the plants in this holy place. The image of the face recurs in the last line: drinking from the 'kabole-brunems' he will absorb into himself the face of Safed - the purity of the

²⁷. Diary of Rabbi Josel of Rosenheim, quoted by Werner Keller, Diaspora. The Post-Biblical History of the Jews (London, 1971), p.283.

place and the ancient wisdom which it embodies. Here the images which contain all the resonance of Jewish history and belief are used in conjunction with motifs which are part of Sutzkever's private net of imagery, and which reflect his own inner struggle: the 'shayter', the face reflected in the mirror (here the sky is the mirror), and the image of eating or drinking as a symbol of absorbing the truth or perpetuating the *goldene keyt*.

Though certainly some of the personal or place-names which are used in the poems have a predominantly atmospheric or even at times decorative function as part of the 'orientalism' to which Novershtern alludes,²⁸ they have on the whole this tight symbolic function, and the poem 'Zunfargang in Tsfas' can be seen as a paradigm of the integration of the *ikh* into the land and its history, using specific symbolic motifs from the historical and religious tradition.

A similar assertion can be made about the proliferation of Hebrew words and direct quotation from the *Tanakh* which is a distinctive characteristic of 'In fayer-vogn'. It is self-evident that Sutzkever, to whom the word was of paramount importance, should, on being exposed for the first time to a permanent *lingua franca* other than Yiddish, be fascinated by the medium and wish to weave it into his Yiddish idiom. The Hebrew within the poems has thus an atmospheric quality, as well as the symbolic function of seeking integration through language. The latter aspect is especially true of the direct quotations from or allusions to the holy writings, either in Hebrew or in Yiddish, which help to reinforce the idea of the ancient tradition with which the poet was seeking to reconcile the events of the recent past. One can

²⁸. Novershtern, Catalogue, p.175.

even assert that through the inclusion of words of the *Tanakh* in these poems Sutzkever makes symbolic restitution for their destruction in the Nazi 'circus', thus furthering the process of redemption.

A further manifestation of the poet's liberation through Israel is, as we have already seen in 'Bist gekumen a naketer', and 'Der shney oyfn Khermon', the renewal of the nature theme of the pre-war poetry. The poet's fascination with the landscape, vegetation and animals of Israel pervades the poetry of 'Vu shtilkayt ranglt zikh mit shvaygn', 'Lider fun Negev' and 'Yerusholayim': apart from the constant presence of the bucolic landscape of the Negev, the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, there are poems devoted to the palm tree, (PV2, p.46), the carob-tree, (PV2, p.54), the olive tree (PV2, p.55), to Mount Sinai (PV2, p.75), and Eilat (PV2, p.73), as well as to Jerusalem and the countryside around it. The animals occurring in the poems include the stork, (PV2, p.49), the eagle (PV2, p.65), the donkey (PV2, p.28), the deer (PV2, p.71), and the camel (PV2, p.57).

Face to face with the new landscape, the poet expresses his wonder. In 'Der bokserboym', (PV2, p.54), for example, he extols the carob tree for its tenacity: the tree manages to grow on stony ground, is totally independent of outside help, and like an ox it has

[...] geshlogn zayne herner inem shteyn.
 A hundert yor in payn gerevet un geton im shpaltn.
 Vayl untn, in di royte leyman, shprudlt zunik rayn
 A lebedike kvelkhele bahaltn.

Here the poet is moved by the tree's endurance and eternity. Whereas in the ghetto period aspects of nature were only used as vehicles or metaphors for particular ethical problems, the most

striking feature of the nature poems in this collection is that nature for its own sake, in all its beauty and mystery, becomes again a central theme. At the same time it is a vehicle for the sense of renewal and eternity which Sutzkever has gleaned in Israel. Not only wild untamed nature, but also everyday scenes, or the silhouette of the city of Jerusalem can evoke the poet's awareness of the significance of Israel for him. Jerusalem is a visible manifestation of eternity (PV2, p.80):

Oyb zen vilstu eyn mol di eybikeyt
 Ponem al ponem,
 Un, efsher, nit shtarbn -
 Di oygn bahalt,
 Drey arop zey
 Vi knoytn in sharbn.
 Un demolt
 An in zikh getsundener,
 Gey, vu adayem
 Dayn vandershaft iz nit mesugl geven zi tsu trefn -

Un gib zikh an efn
 An(kegn di feldzene shpiglen fun Yerushalayim.

In the mirrors of rock the *ikh* can see eternity but also his own face, not distorted as in the reflection in the water in 'Erev mayn farbreung' but in its true form, illuminated by his own internal vision.

In the short poem which describes women coming to draw water at the well (PV2, p.43) - a scene which has significant biblical resonance - the landscape also conveys the sense of eternity. The women are themselves part of the harmonious landscape:

Va'er-sheperins baym brunem, - shlanke, shvartse zangen,
 Trogn in di royte krugn kvalike gezangen.

Shvartse zangen, royte krugn, - gildene menoyres,
 Trinkstu - filn dayne lipn kumendike doyres.

Tsu di falndike tropns oyf der erd tsebrenter
 Bin ikh tsugefaln dorshtik. Nenter. Nenter. Nenter.

The everyday scene evoked in the first phrase is transformed into an abstract painting of red, black and gold, where the

activity of the women is given symbolic meaning by the images of water as 'gezangen', of 'zangen' (a permanent symbol of poetic inspiration), and *menorahs* (signifying the Jewish spiritual life, history and continuity).

The new element in the poems of 'In fayer-vogn' is the nature-centredness rather than the *ikh*-centredness of the nature experience. No longer, as in the poetry of the early years, is nature a reflection of the psyche of the *ikh*, nor is the *ikh* struggling to fuse with nature or to reconcile aesthetic pleasure in the natural world with the demands of the ethical. Instead the poet achieves a calm *contemplation* of nature and the outside world; Sutzkever manifests a new aestheticism in which he is free to contemplate beauty for its own sake, which foreshadows 'Ode tsu der toyb'.

Side by side with the serene contemplation of aesthetic perfection, but not by any means at odds with it, there is delight in the exotic, and a renewed sensuality in Sutzkever's perception of nature. These aspects emerge most clearly in 'Gleklekh fun kemlen', (PV2, p.57). The three stanzas, each followed by a hypnotic refrain, suggest rest after a camel ride through the desert. As in the earlier nature poetry, the earth - this time the warm earth of Israel which he refers to as 'heymishe grozn'- induces imagery of fusion and of poetry:

Lomir zikh leygn in heymishe grozn,
Lomir, tsehalbte, zikh gantsenen fort!
Ikh vel mit vintike lipn tseblozn
Gliyike koyl funem yidishn vort.

Perfect completeness is to be found in harmony with the earth; but this is no longer a frenzied desire to *become* part of the earth, as in some of the poems of 'Blonder baginen'. Poetic creativity is also expressed in a sensual image, the lips fanning the glowing coal into flame.

The camel fascinates the poet. In bizarre imagery he evokes the melancholy of the animal and the human being in the vast landscape:

Yetveder keml anthoykert zayn vaynshtok:
 -Ze, vi mayn peyre iz groylik-batamt.
 M'yner tsetsvaygt bizn himl zayn paynshtok-
 Vareme trern bafaykhtn dem zamd... [...]
 Tseyner zikh ayn in di shturmische zaftn,
 Blitsiker yoder tsegeyn zol in moyl,
 Untern hemd, unter laynenem kaftn -
 Umet der zelber, vi gliyike koyl.

Within the surreal imagery there are the symbols of the fruit and the kernel, both established as metapoetic images. The impression of these two stanzas is of the *harmony of man, the animal and nature*, but also of acceptance of its bitter, melancholy, even cruel elements, which becomes a central theme of 'Helfandn bay nakht'.

The stormy emotions of human being and animal are counter-balanced by a hypnotic refrain, which seems like a lullaby:

Gleklekh fun kemlen
 Klingen in dremlen:
 Ru.
 Shtern milyardn
 Dekn dem Yardn
 Tsu.

The calm of these lines draws the reader back from temporal pain and melancholy, and focusses on the wonder of the universe. Their sensuous beauty is achieved by the hypnotic rhythm, and the predominance of front vowels and the soft 'l' sound.

The two strands of the nature poetry which have been discerned here, the contemplation of nature as beauty and harmony, and the sensuous elements embodied in 'Gleklekh fun kemlen', continue as dynamic forces in Sutzkever's poetry, the tension between them being of seminal significance in 'Ode tsu der toyb'. The latter aspect develops powerfully in 'Helfandn bay nakht', the cycle of poems which follows 'In fayer-vogn'.

In the poems of this collection so far considered, the metapoetic theme is not in the forefront. The trauma of the past years coupled with the emotional impact of Israel are the dominant material of his creativity at this time. But the theme of poetry is a constant underlying concern of all his work; in every poem of 'In fayer-vogn' the poet is implicitly asking himself about his poetic identity in his new life.

Several poems of these years do take poetry as their central theme, and an important new metapoetic image is that of the sea. We have seen²⁹ that the poem 'A shturem oyf di vasern bay Krete', written during Sutzkever's sea voyage to Israel, marked the physical and spiritual transition between the old and the new life. The section 'Vu shtilkayt ranglt zikh mit shvaygn' which combines metapoetic and nature themes, begins with three poems of the sea. The first of these, 'Di neshome fun yam', (PV2, p.37), when first published in Naye Presse, 27 March 1948, was also dated 'Shif Patria, September 1947'. It is clear that of the two poems written in the same month and under the same circumstances, the 'Shturem' poem dealt in general with the passage from one phase of the poet's life to another, and with his hope of salvation in Israel. It was therefore placed at the end of the section of transitional poems called 'Yidishe gas' in the Poetishe verk, vol.1. 'Di neshome fun yam' marks a new use of the sea-imagery as a vehicle for the metapoetic theme, and rightly belongs in the later collection, where the poet is able to liberate himself from the past, and turn his vision inward again, to the source of the poetic.

²⁹. Chapter 5.

The sea can perhaps be distinguished from many of Sutzkever's other metapoetic images. Snow, fire, earth, trees, grasses and many other concepts seem initially to stem from his spontaneous response to the world, and arising out of this, they gradually are invested with symbolic significance which grows throughout his work, until they assume a meaning specific to Sutzkever's poetry and become part of his private metapoetic vocabulary. The sea, however, seems from the very beginning to be a consciously perceived symbol, and is almost always used as a simile or a metaphor of poetry. This is not surprising as the poet's first real encounter with the sea was on this voyage whose symbolic significance could not be ignored.

'Di neshome fun yam' is a cycle of four short poems linked by the motif of the sea and the metapoetic theme. The first poem also takes the storm as its point of departure. It draws a parallel between the seagull spying its prey under the stormy waters, and the poet:

Di meve shert dem shturem,
 Het, fun oybn -
 In yams medine zet zi, vi durkh shoybn,
 Bashupt mit gold, ir lebedikn fang.

Der dikhter tukt in verter-yam in toybn,
 Ayntsushlingen roygn fun gezang.

The sea is here consciously used as a metaphor, this quality being underlined by the concept of the 'verter yam'. Two aspects of the previous metapoetic imagery are developed here, the concept of the primordial word and that of swallowing: the words exist already but they are 'toyb'- this concept is a variation of the 'shtumkayt' idea. These 'deaf' words are characterised in this metaphor as the food of the poet - 'the spawn of song'- which he swallows as the seagull does its fish; by being swallowed,

these undeveloped words will become part of him, and develop into poetry.

The parallel imagery of seagull and poet continues in the second part of the poem, and rests on a significant paradox:

In same shturem, oyf a khvaliyes pleytse
Rut op di meve.
A gezang
Derfreyt zi.

Un lang un bang
Zukht der dikhter oyfn yam di shtilkayt,
Un s'vert zayn kop tseshmetert on a klang!

The seagull can rest in the midst of the storm and take pleasure in its melody, the poet is searching for *stillness*, and cannot find it; instead he is deafened by the 'klang', a word usually reserved for poetic creation. Once before, however, the concept of 'klang' in conjunction with the sea was used to denote confusion, namely in the ghetto poem 'Di sharfe lipn' where the final line states that without the inspiration given by the 'du', characterised in terms of her digging buried treasures out of the *ikh*, he would be 'a shtume fidl/ In a klangen-yam, an umbakantn'. Here too the 'klang' of the last line is the *toye voye* out of which the poet seeks to find the stillness which represents the essence of poetry, beyond mere words and sounds.

The metapoetic symbolism of the words 'shtil' and 'shtilkayt' has gradually evolved from earlier uses of the terms. In almost all cases, 'shtil' is used in a positive context, in close proximity to the idea of poetry: 'Shtil. Dos shpilt der tate', and the parallel 'Shtil - in undzer toybnshlak a teybl/Pikt zikh fun an eyele [...] signifying the birth of the poetic muse, ('Sibir', PV1, p.10), the cherry branch which is 'Vaykh un shtil vi otem oysgebrenter' ('A tsvaygl karshn', PV1, p.118), and the reference to the 'shtiln vald fun griner

lirik'(in 'Fir matones', PV1, p.142). In 'Blonder baginen' (PV1, p.28) the concept is linked for the first time with 'shtumkayt':

Beymer zenen shtume violontsheln.
Un di toyznt shtilkaytn bazunder
Reydn oyf der blonder shprakh fun zangen.

The second version of the Siberian *poeme* establishes even more clearly the metapoetic colouring of the term, when it is explicitly linked with the poet's father: 'Shtilkayt funem shney - oyf zayne hent', and later in the *poeme*, in 'Mayn khaverl Tshanguri', perfection is expressed in the moment when the word is transcended by 'shtilkayt':

Oyf di lipn tanzt dos letste vort.
In a grozn-kholem knit der keml.
Tunkeler. Un bloyz di shtilkayt klort.

Finally, the climax of the poem 'Tsum kind' (PV1, p.278), which we have seen as the sublimation of the child's death through his entering the great cycle of being, and his transformation into poetry, evokes this process through the idea of the child's sinking like a splinter of sunset into the snow's 'shtile tifn'.

It is in the light of these metapoetic uses of the concept that the ideas of 'shtilkayt' and 'shvaygn' in both 'Di neshome fun yam', and the title of the section can be interpreted. 'Shvaygn' has already occurred in 'Ikh hob gezukht dos nit antplekte shvaygn' (PV1, p.551),³⁰ where 'shvaygn' seems to be synonymous with 'shtilkayt' as an evocation of the essence of poetry. The use of the two terms in the title of the section suggests therefore a realm in which the poetic is struggling with itself to reach, so to speak, the essence beyond the essence.

³⁰. See chapter 5.

In the first poem of the cycle the poet's search for stillness remains unfulfilled. The second poem suggests that the stillness he seeks is 'di neshome fun yam':

Di neshome fun yam iz farshtelt far a perl.
 In shtil-tsayt
 A pintl fun shturem - ir kern.
 In shpil-tsayt
 Fun shturem - di kalte muzik fun a shtern.

Me darf ober zayn vi der yam,
 Di neshome fun yam tsu derhern.

Here three images combine: the metamorphosis theme (the true reality hidden by an outer covering) the imagery of the kernel, and the image of poetic reality as a pearl beneath the sea. The poem focusses on the inaccessibility of the poetic essence: only by entering into the very nature of the sea can one perceive it.

The third poem in the cycle refers to a bottle on the waves - linking this thematically with the poem 'A flash mit nemen', which appeared at the end of the volume Yidishe gas, and the importance of which is signalled by Sutzkever's having named the whole section of poems written during the years of wandering with its title. 'A flash mit nemen' describes how the *ikh* has carried with him on his journeyings a bottle containing names of twenty victims. The talisman aspect of the bottle of 'A flash mit nemen' unites the two bottle symbols. In 'Di neshome fun yam' the poet sees the bottle on the waves as a talisman:

Yam, fun dem-o bortn
 Farnem atsind mayn gebet:
 Vi di flash iber khvalyes dortn,
 Gib zikherkayt dem poet
 Tsu shvimen iber shtet.

The fourth poem in the cycle returns to the metapoetic theme: the *ikh*, by drinking the water, will taste its music and have its secrets revealed to him:

Mayne lipn zinken, zinken,
 In same muzikalish-tifstn vaser:

- anthil di khvalyes.
 lo derzen vi s'lign
 Oyfn dek farbriderte milkhomes.
 Kval in mayne odern dem nign
 Mit di letste zeungen fun omes.
 Farlok mikh in dayn opgruntikn vald
 Mit di lange, zaltsik zise tsinger.

Here the water is the source of poetry; underneath the 'muzikalish-tifstn vaser' lies the source of all human experience, signalled by the 'farbriderte milkhomes', the 'letste zeungen fun omes', and also by the primal environment of the forest. The poem ends with the transience of the poetic: the poet must drink deep of it,

Vayl bald, o, bald
 Rinstu oys tsevishn mayne finger.

With this poem the sea is established as a metapoetic symbol, and in most of the sea poems from now on it has this symbolic colouring, and is associated with ideas of 'shtilkayt' and treasure which the poet must recover from the sea bed.³¹

The collection 'In fayer-vogn' ends with 'A briv tsu di grozn', a cycle of fourteen short poems which can be seen as a precursor of the great 'Ode tsu der toyb', because it attempts a *khezbnm hanefesh*, a summing up or spiritual stocktaking, and a reaffirmation of Sutzkever's poetic credo.³² It is significant that Sutzkever ends this collection of by investigating the nature of poetry, using one of his central images, the grasses

³¹. The second of the three sea poems at the beginning of this section, 'Di benkshaft fun Yehuda Halevi' (PV2, p.39) unites the great Hebrew poet who had such significance for Sutzkever with the music of the sea: 'Muzik/ Fun aleyn zikh-bashafener shtilkayt. Muzik/ Iberklangike,/ Bangike.'

³². Space does not permit a detailed analysis of this complex poem-cycle here: this will be the subject of a separate study.

which represent the cycle of death and regeneration, and which become in his later work one of the seminal metapoetic images.

The cycle of poems begins and ends with an address to the grasses. In between, reflections on the nature of poetry are interwoven with speculations about God and longing for the lost past. The poems abound with echoes and allusions, and the key to several of the more hermetic poems is an understanding of some of the permanent metapoetic images: the cherry tree, the sculptor, the 'tentserin' who is a central figure in 'Ode tsu der toyb', the plum and its kernel. The principal image, however, is that of the grasses.

The cycle begins with a problem which typifies the situation of many survivors: the danger of forgetting, and its associated guilt. The *ikh* speaks of his present happy state:

Opgenoplt fun zikorn
Vi a royz in vase,
Kusht zikh mitn zunfargang tsunoyf
Mayn oylem-haze.

In the paradoxical anxiety caused by this state of bliss, the *ikh* deliberately cuts his finger with a piece of glass, and the pain he feels reassures him that the 'goldshmit fun yesurim/ Hot nokh zayn talant'. Here, as so often in Sutzkever's imagery, the physical is equated with the spiritual: the physical anguish stands for the ability to feel the emotional wounds of the past. The *ikh* is infused with happiness on finding that his ability to feel the pain is not blunted, and it is only then that he can again greet the grasses as old friends:

Hot bizn same dno
A zeltn glik batsvungen mayne glider:
- Gut novnt grozn, a gut novnt vider!

This introductory poem establishes in a positive way the insight that past pain must become part of the present, in order

to create wholeness and harmony with the *goldene keyt*; the positive feeling gives way to despair again, as we have seen, in 'Shvartse toybn', written three years later, but is definitively established in 'Ode tsu der toyb' in 1954.

The motif of grasses has constantly been present throughout Sutzkever's poetry. From the early nature poetry onward they were seen as a life force, as in 'Geshrey' where the poet presses his face into the grasses. More and more and more they occur within the context of the metapoetic theme: they are mentioned first in a list of natural phenomena which are worthy of the poet's *jaze* in the poem 'Alts iz verdik far mayn oygs gevogl' (PV1, p.93), they 'plaplen' (in the later version 'trakhtn') about the poet in the poem 'Blonder baginen' (PV1, p.28). The idea of grass begins to assume a clear symbolic colouring during the ghetto period, when the effect of the joy in the ghetto brought by the butterfly is epitomised by the burnt earth magically covering itself with grass ('Es flit arayn a flaterl', PV1, p.303); and when the child in 'Tsum kind' (PV1, p.278) is returned to the snow, which represents the poet's early inspiration, he is asked to greet 'di ayngfroyrene grezlekh'. By the mid-forties onward grasses were being used symbolically in conjunction with 'shtilkayt' and 'shvaygn' in metapoetic poems: in the second version of the Siberian *poeme* - but not in the first - the perfection of poetic 'shtilkayt' is characterised by the 'grozn-kholem' of the camel, in the poem 'Mayn khaverl Tshanguri'.

The poet's greeting to the grasses after he has proved that he can still feel pain, means that he feels in harmony with his poetry again, having accepted the past: 'A gut novnt *vider*' (*ny italics*) suggests a previous alienation when was 'opgenoplt fun zikorn'. It is not too fanciful to interpret this greeting as the

fulfilment of the poem 'Tsum kind'. Then he had to send the greeting to the frozen grasses vicariously, but now, having become part of the great chain himself through his acceptance of the past, he is able to greet them himself.

The end of the cycle is an acknowledgement by the *ikh* that in order to communicate meaningfully with the grasses, he must enter entirely into their sphere, and nourish them:

Az ir zolt konen entfernen,
Az ir zolt konen fregn, -
Mu^z ikh koydm zikh farvandlen in a vildn regn,
Demolt vet ir aynzapn biz veytik mayne tropns.'

Put suing the metaphor of poetry as grasses, and the poet as rain, this is another dedication of himself to his art: his vocation is to give life to it, as rain nourishes the grasses. This interpretation is confirmed by the delightful last lines with their playful neologism ('tsum liderzen'), in which the poet hopes for further rendezvous with the grasses, even at his death:

Tsum viderzen
In tsimerl,
In kholem maynem, grozn.
Tsum liderzen
In shimerl,
Vos ikh hob aykh gelozn -
Un fargest nit oyfbliyen a mol bay mayn tsukopns.

The 'tsveyfisike grozn' which appear to the poet in 1988, and to whom the poet leaves his legacy, are a sign that the grasses have not forgotten this request:

A vayle, a vayle,
Mayn letstinke shayle:
Tsi zol ikh atsind mayn yerushe aykh lozn?
Farneygn zikh frum di tsveyfisike grozn.³³

The revitalised nature imagery of 'In fayer-vogn' assumes extraordinary new dimensions in the African poem-cycle 'Helf idn bay nakht'.

³³. From the cycle 'Inevyeynik', Di goldene keyt 125, (1988), 5-9.

Helfandn bay nakht

After In fayer-vogn, the revised *poeme* 'Sibir' was published in 1953, followed by Fun dray veltn, an anthology to mark the poet's fortieth birthday, containing essays and poems about Sutzkever by fellow poets and scholars, and a selection of Sutzkever's poetry from the pre-war period, from the ghetto, and from In fayer-vogn. The volume Ode tsu der toyb was published in 1955.

Ode tsu der toyb is in three sections: first, the long poem of the same name, written in 1954, second, the poem-cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht', dated 1950-54, which was inspired by Sutzkever's travels in Africa in 1950, and third, the series of fifteen prose poems or 'kurtse bashraybungen', as he called them, entitled 'Griner akvariym' (1953-54). Here Sutzkever uses a new form, poetic prose with surrealistic imagery which often echoes that of his poetry, to probe once again the themes of the Holocaust and his experiences in the ghetto. The themes and images of 'Griner akvariym' have already been investigated by Ruth Wisse,¹ and will not be dealt with here.

The volume Ode tsu der toyb is the important turning point in Sutzkever's work. Its significance has been perceived by Abraham Novershtern:

Ode tsu der toyb, Sutskevers tsveyt bukh gezamlte lider un proze geshribn in Yisroel, antplekt di zukhenishn funem poet in farsheydene thomen - vos sheyekh genre, poetishn ton, tematik. Ot der viln zikh beseyder tsu banayen iz a simen-muvek fun Sutskevers poeziye bizn hayntikn tog, un di shinoyim vos zayn shafung hot durkhgemakht in di yorn zint

¹. Ruth Wisse, 'Green Aquarium - A critical study of fifteen Yiddish prose poems by Abraham Sutzkever', unpublished M.A. thesis, (Columbia University, 1961).

er hot zikh bazetst in Yisroel shteln im avek vi a yokhid-bemine in der yidisher poeziye nokhn khurbm nit nor vedlik zayne dergreykhungen nor oykh vedlik zeyer pnimiyesdikn kharakter.²

In my investigation of 'Helfandn bay nakht', it will be seen that the inspiration Sutzkever drew from Africa did indeed provide the 'banayung' to which Novershtern alludes, but that the adaptation of images and themes to Sutzkever's permanent poetic concerns give inner 'bashtendikeyt' also.

The volume Ode tsu der toyb can be seen as the end of the first period of *ayndruk*, and of the struggle between the aesthetic and the ethical, and the beginning of the second period, which, in Litvine's formulation, is governed by *oysdruk*, the 'shtrom funem ikh tsu der velt'.³ The three sections of the volume Ode tsu der toyb represent the gradual liberation of the poet's imagination for this new period in his work; first, through 'Griner akvariyum' in which he explores once again the events of the Holocaust and, without diminishing their significance for him as an individual, lifts them into the realm of the universal. Here, and elsewhere in his work, this is not a process of exorcism in the sense of driving these events out of his consciousness or his poetry; it is rather, 'zeyer reinkarnatsye oyf an ander strate; nit keyn eksteriyorizirn, ele an integrirn oyf hekhern shtapl'.⁴ Second, a new phase of nature imagery begins, which completes the process of liberation begun in 'In fayer-vogn'. Israel had reawakened the poet's ability to consider nature in its beauty and eternity, for its own sake. This process is continued in Africa where the powerful forces of

². Novershtern, Catalogue, p.185.

³. Litvine, Yikhes, p125.

⁴. *ibid.*, p.125.

the mythical, the erotic, the pagan, and Sutzkever's strong perception of the dark forces of death, decay and resurrection, give deeper intensity and a new perspective to Sutzkever's permanent theme of the *goldene keyt*. Finally, the *poeme* 'Ode tsu der toyb' will be seen as the achievement of harmony between the aesthetic and the ethical, through which the individualism and renewed aestheticism of the later poetry can come into being.

The cycle of forty-two poems 'Helfandn bay nakht' is unique in Sutzkever's poetry. Here all specifically Jewish themes and allusions are absent, poems in which the *ikh* dominates are significantly fewer (often the *ikh* is a fictive self, for example a Zulu warrior or a dying girl), and the poems are instead evocations of themes inspired by the new environment. To express these themes Sutzkever has used or invented legends full of magic, pagan rites of love and religion, and myths of the origin of the world. Ecstatic, but often terrifying nature imagery pervades the poems; this is linked to a strong undercurrent of eroticism. All these elements give unity of theme and mood to the cycle.

Until now, myth has not featured very strongly in Sutzkever's poetry, but in Africa, doubtless exposed to the legends of African society,⁵ the poet shows himself fascinated by the mythical. His feeling of affinity with the realm of mythology is consistent with his poetic personality. A useful definition of 'myth' has been given by W.R.Bascom:

Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as

⁵. Sutzkever has stated, for example, that at this time he read an account of the life of the Zulu Emperor Shaka the Great, around whom many legends have evolved.

authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. Their main characters are [...] animals, deities or culture heroes, whose actions are set in an earlier world, when the earth was different from what it is today, or in another world such as the sky or underworld [...].⁶

Without searching for evidence of every aspect of this definition in Sutzkever's work, the point can be made that the underlying characteristics of the mythic imagination as defined by Bascom - the removal of barriers between one time and another, one culture and another, between the 'real' and the fantastic, the fusion of the realms of the human, the animal and the supernatural - all accord with the lack of boundaries between the corporeal and the spirit world, outer reality and the realm of imagination, the word and the 'thing', and the impetus towards synthesis of these realms which underlies Sutzkever's work.

It is illuminating to consider *how* Sutzkever has incorporated the mythical into these poems. Certain known legendary or historical material can be recognised. For example, 'Dos selbstmordlid fun di Hereros' (PV2, p.210) is based on the Herero uprising in German South West Africa, between 1904 and 1907, when the Hereros perished in the desert. The West African God of thunder, Shango, features as the rain god in the poem 'Regntants' (PV2, p.178), and the name Malandelo (PV2, p.216) was probably gleaned from the story of Shaka.⁷ Where these names or events occur, however, they are used purely in the service of Sutzkever's own ideas, or to provide the exotic atmosphere. The great majority of the names of kings or gods, and the myths which

⁶. W.R. Bascom, 'The forms of folklore: prose narratives', Journal of American Folklore, 78, (1965), quoted in R. Finnegan, Oral Literature in Africa, (Oxford, 1970), p.361.

⁷. Malandela was one of the ancestors of Shaka the Great, cf Mazisi Kunene, Emperor Shaka the Great (London, 1979), p.xxxvi.

Sutzkever relates in the poems, appear to proceed from his imagination; it is an individual poetic mythology through which he enlarges his poetic horizon and expresses the new vision aroused by contact with this environment and culture.

Closely linked to the mythical is the concept of pantheism, and Abraham Novershtern uses the term with respect to the first poem of 'Helfandn bay nakht':

Dos ershte lid fun der serye antplekt dem panteistishn yesod in Sutskevers poezyie un ruft zikh iber mitn onheyblid fun 'Valdiks'.⁸

Novershtern's supposition that Sutzkever's poetry rests on a 'pantheistic basis' must be further investigated. Though the term 'pantheism' is susceptible to many interpretations in different religious and cultural traditions, basic to them all is surely the inherent divinity of all aspects of the visible world, due to the immanence of God in everything. In the poetry of 'Blonder baginen', nature is presented as possessing *human* attributes and emotions: the lines 'Grozn plaplen. Vortslen lakhn. Himlen heln./ Beymer zenen shtume violontsheln', from the poem 'Blonder baginen' (PV1, p.28), can again be quoted in this context. Nature is alive, but the emotions of nature reflect those of the poetic *ikh*, and often nature takes on its identity through the will of the poet, as in 'Kh'hob arayngelozn haynt mayn viln/ In granit...' ('Vayter fun di daled ames' PV1, p.23), or in the ecstatic final lines of 'Bashafung' (PV1, p.25):

Brilyantene shtilkayt. Es gafn
Di oygn in vaytkeyt gevendt:
Hob ikh es aleyn itst bashafn, -
Aleyn, mit di eygene hent?

The poet's view and use of nature is thus anthropomorphic rather than pantheistic in the very early poetry, and this

⁸. Novershtern, Catalogue, p.187.

develops in 'Valdiks' to a perception of the world in which poetry is the central reality and everything takes its identity from the quasi-divine powers of the poetic *ikh*.

There is also, however, a strong feeling of pantheism in some of the poems of 'Valdiks'. It is not quite clear which poem Novershtern is referring to when he speaks of the 'onheyblid fun "Valdiks" '. The 1940 edition of the collection placed the poem of the same name at the beginning, but the emphasis was changed in 1963, when 'Alts iz verdik far mayn oygs gevog'l' introduced the section 'Valdiks' in the Poetishe verk. The change is significant. The poem 'Valdiks' (PV1, p.98) is entirely atmospheric: nature is suffused with vague emotion which reflects the mood and perception of the *ikh*:

Oyf dr'erd tseleygte, shlofn beymer,
 Di shotns vaksn in der heykh.
 Di luft iz kil un vaykh
 Vi trukn vaser.
 Shvaygik, ruik
 Kushn zikh tsunoyf di shtile shtegn.
 Vu-nit-vuik
 Pintlen grine glimerlekh antkegn.

While the imagery here is interesting in the light of the development of particular motifs (the independent life of the object and its shadow⁹), and in Sutzkever's liking for paradox and oxymoron ('trukn vaser'), which develops throughout his work, the predominant emphasis here is on a vague Romantic perception of nature, in which anthropomorphism is evident; again nature reflects *human* emotions, particularly those of the poet, rather than elements of the divine.

⁹. This idea is developed in 'Hirshn baym Yam-sof' (PV2, p.71), in the poem 'Der vald' (PV2, p.16), where the trees which commemorate dead children only acquire their shadows when each mother recognises her child in a particular tree, and in several poems of 'Helfandn bay nakht'.

In the Poetische verk, Sutzkever makes a more definite statement by placing 'Alts iz verdik far mayn oygs gevogl' (PV1, p.93) in the prominent position of introductory poem. There are clear statements of pantheistic belief in the first and second stanzas:

Un in alts bagegn ikh a shpliter
 Fun eynsof. [...]
 Un in alts antplekt zikh mayn gebiter
 Tif un groys.

However, the most significant aspect is that this poem and others in the collection represent a turning point in Sutzkever's perception of the nature of the *poet*. The underlying perception of nature is *ikh*-centred, and it is the poet, and, by extension the poetic word, which gives identity to the world:

Un in alts, in alts iz do a simen
 Fun mayn shpan.

The poem 'Himen tsu feldzn' (PV1, p.146), analysed in chapter 2, was found to be a pantheistic evocation of the mountains, which embody the divine and the idea of eternity - 'Vayl s'lid fun der eybikeyt gaystert oyf ayere shpitsn.' Again, however, the focus of the poem is the *ikh* who calls the mountains 'brider' and feels empowered to climb up and like them pierce the clouds and bathe his head in the cosmic fire:

Ikh vil bloyz vi ir mit di hent
 Durkh di volkns a patsh ton
 Un tsvogn mayn erdishn kop in dem kosmishn fayer.

Here as in the whole 'Valdiks' collection, the presence of the divine in nature has a metaphorical quality, and is a mirror for the Promethean aspirations of the poet-*ikh* which are the dynamic of the poem. It could be called a metaphorical pantheism, rather than the apprehension of the divine in nature for its own sake.

Similar reservations may be made about applying the term 'pantheism' to the first poem of 'Helfandn bay nakht', though for

different reasons. This short introductory poem (PV2, p.175) evokes the deep silence of the African night:

Ale royshn, ale klangen shlofn.
 Unter zibn shtromen shloft di shrek.
 Un der helfand shloft aza min shlofn,
 As men kon im opshnaydn dem ek.
 Ale royshn, ale klangen shlofn.
 Zey nit oyftsuvekn mit keyn hek.
 Ale royshn, ale klangen shlofn
 In di oygn tsvey vos zenen ofn -
 Oygn tsvey fun got vos zenen ofn.

The repetition of the line 'Ale royshn, ale klangen shlofn', evokes a trance-like tranquillity. The word 'shlofn', repeated five times in the nine lines, increases this hypnotic effect. 'Shlofn' pertains to the abstract concepts, 'royshn', 'klangen' and 'shrek', and to one creature whose role in the whole cycle of poems is deeply significant: the elephant. The hypnotic effect is further intensified by the alternation throughout the poem of only two rhyming sounds, in the pattern abababaaa. Only the masculine rhymes of the second, fourth and sixth lines are true rhymes: 'shrek', 'ek', 'hek', whereas the feminine rhymes ('shlofn' four times, and 'ofn' twice) are repetitions, producing an echoing effect. These formal aspects are of essential importance, because through sound and rhyme the peculiar effect of the poem is achieved: on the one hand, trance-like calm, but, underlying this, unease and even fear. The masculine rhymes are harsh and the images they evoke violent and frightening: the peace of the first line is disrupted when the disturbing concept of 'shrek' emerges in the second line: 'Unter zibn shtromen shloft di shrek.' As in other cultural traditions, the number seven has special power in Jewish mysticism and folk superstitions.¹⁰ Sutzkever's image evokes seven rivers with the nameless

¹⁰. see J. Trachtenberg, Jewish Magic and Superstition, (Cleveland and New York, 1961), passim.

nameless 'shrek' lying beneath them, like a monster from the deep - the abstraction of the concept 'shrek' only intensifies the feeling of menace. It has already been noted that the image of things buried is part of Sutzkever's key imagery: normally it is the true reality, the poetic word, conceived often in terms of jewels or pearls, buried under the earth or sea. In this image, however, the depiction of true reality as 'di shrek' is a significant new development which suggests a different perception of reality in the alien environment which inspires these poems.

The underlying dread is intensified through the images which repeat the rhyme of 'shrek': the elephant's sleep is not a normal peaceful sleep but the kind of stupor from which the creature would not even be roused by pain:

Un der helfand shloft aza min shlofn
As men kon im opshnaydn dem ek.

This violent image recurs in the next couplet, where the apparant tranquillity of the sleeping 'royshn' and 'klangen' is seen also as a stupor which violent injury would not waken: 'Zey nit oyftsuvekn mit keyn hek.' The axe, a frequent image in Sutzkever's ghetto poetry, sometimes used metonymously for the enemy, undermines the surface peace of the poem: the fusion and interchanging of the abstract and the concrete (the 'shrek' sleeping like a living being under rivers, the concept of attacking the abstract sounds with hatchets), which is a typical feature of Sutzkever's imagery, here intensifies the atmosphere of mystery and unease, and it is significant that the 'klangen', usually synonymous with the poetic word, are not to be roused - 'nit oyftsuvekn mit keyn hek.'

The last two lines form the climax of the poem: the sounds, the 'shrek' and the elephant, (which, as emerges from the other

poems, is the 'proto-creature' in the mythology Sutzkever weaves throughout the cycle) are sleeping, and have their existence

In die oygn tsvey vos zenen ofn -
Oygn tsvey fun got vos zenen ofn.

The sleeping universe with its uneasy combination of peace and dread seems to have no independent reality, but only exists in the eyes of the creator. Far from being a consoling resolution of the paradoxical picture, the unease is intensified by the repetition of the final line: 'Oygn tsvey fun got vos zenen ofn'. Furthermore, the deliberate delay before the image of the ever watchful God is arrived at - the mystery of the anonymous eyes in the eighth line is followed by a pause of suspense denoted by the dash - heightens the shock of the unexpected 'got', which the rhythm of the line accentuates, so that the poem ends on a feeling of terror, rather than of comfort. The image of God as a pair of ever watchful eyes is a disturbing one.

Several features of this poem provide keys for an analysis of the cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht'. The *ikh* which has permeated Sutzkever's poetry until now and which dominates the first poem of almost every cycle of lyrical poetry, is absent here. This feature characterises the whole cycle: the poet evokes a vision of the world where for the first time the central role is played, not by the *ikh*, but by the elemental forces of nature and the overwhelming power of the divine, often expressed in images of pagan deities. Furthermore, the vision contains, as is suggested in this poem, a warring duality between evil and good, cruelty and beauty, life/love and death, ecstasy and horror - and the underlying impulse of the cycle is the struggle to reach a synthesis between all these paradoxical forces.

This leads to the question of *bashtendikeyt* and *banayung* - that is, whether this cycle is to be seen as a complete thematic

and emotional departure from Sutzkever's poetry up until this point, or whether there is continuity and development within the imagery and *Weltanschauung* of 'Helfandn bay nakht'. Here too, the poem 'Ale royshn, ale klangen shlofn' reveals characteristics typical of the whole cycle: some of the images can be identified as already established images - 'royshn', 'klangen', 'hek', 'oygn', but some are new - 'helfand', 'shrek'. Throughout the cycle Sutzkever finds new images to express the perceptions inspired by the new environment, as he had done in the poems of 'In fayer-vogn', but uses them alongside, and often fused with the key images which throughout his work are the permanent vehicles for his exploration of poetry. The themes expressed through these images also achieve the fusion of permanence and innovation: on the one hand, though there are few poems which are overtly metapoetic, the ever-present search for the essence of poetry nevertheless permeates and gains a new dimension through the new impulses and perceptions - the pagan images of awesome, often cruel divine forces, the strong erotic element, and the poet's fascination with themes of death, decay, and the indifference or cruelty of nature.

Finally, the introductory poem also poses the question of pantheism. I have questioned the unqualified use of the term pantheism to describe Sutzkever's essentially *ikh*-centred vision. Here too there is an uneasy paradox: on the one hand the world seems to gain its reality from being reflected in the eye of God,¹¹ but the deity appears to be separate from the world. This ambiguity in the relationship between the divine and the world

11. The motif of reality being reflected in an eye is a recurring image in the cycle, and can be linked with the permanent imagery of the real self being perceived in a mirror or under water.

permeates the whole cycle, and is the focal point of the poet's struggle for harmony between the divine, nature, and the self.

The process which takes place within the cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht' is that through the new experiences and emotions which are the material for the poetry, the poet struggles towards a vision which for the first time could truly be called pantheistic. The poet appears to be at once fascinated and horrified by his encounter with the darker forces of death and decay in nature, and the apparent indifference of the divine to the fate of living things, together with the unresisting acceptance of their fate by both animals and human beings who are in tune with the great natural cycle. Sutzkever has called this whole experience 'onheybdik' and 'urbreyshesdik',¹² and it is clear that it furnished a new realm of experience and imagery through which to pursue the concept of the *goldene keyt* with its specifically Sutzkeverian dimension, beyond the exclusively Jewish definition: namely the concept of the natural cycle of life, death and resurrection. The biblical and Jewish inspiration of Israel furnished one realm of experience through which he resolved the tension between doubt and belief which permeated the Holocaust poetry. The process of renewal is repeated in his exploration of this new continent, of societies and *mores* devoid of Jewish and European connotations, where the poet stands truly 'a naketer', stripped of all his past and with no familiar contexts to colour his responses. The process goes further than before, for in these poems the poet strives to submit to the elemental forces, and thus achieve a vision which is not *ikh*-centred, but where the self becomes part of the great cycle through which the divine

¹². In a conversation with the present writer.

manifests itself, often terribly, in the universe. So strong does this dynamic become that in the poems which Sutzkever places at the end of the cycle there is a desire for complete annihilation of the self, a death-wish from which at the last minute the *ikh* recoils; the non-fulfilment of this desire for complete absorption causes him to end the cycle on a note of doubt.

At the beginning of the cycle, however, the tension between *ikh* and universe, and the ambivalent position of the divine in relation to the universe is still unresolved, as in 'Ale royshn, ale klangen shlofn', and this tension can be seen clearly in other poems which evoke the elemental forces of nature and the divine.

In four poems which are grouped together in the cycle, the fate of the human being is set strikingly against the cruel indifference of nature. 'Dos zelmordlid fun di Hereros' (PV2, p.210), is a lament by victims dying after the Herero uprising. The mood of the poem is created by the elegaic 'Dem regn-boygn geyt nit on', repeated as a refrain after every stanza, and also within each of the three stanzas. In the first two stanzas the plight of the Hereros is evoked:

Un mir bageyen zelmord in di kneytshn fun der erd,
Es aylt shoyt di hiyene grin vi shiml. [...]
Di biksn-treger mit di vayse shklaferishe hint
Farnarn undz in goldmines mit ale sortn dreydlekh.

In both these couplets an animal is the accomplice of death: the hyena recurs in other poems of the cycle in this sinister role,¹³ and both these creatures contrast with the noble wild animals which are important motifs in the cycle: the tiger and

¹³. For example, in 'Oazis' (PV2, p.182), and 'Besoylem fun helfandn' (PV2, p.188).

elephant, the lion and eagle. These embody the elemental forces, and to them the poet feels drawn by a compelling inner affinity. By contrast the epithets used to describe the dogs and the hyena ('grin vi shiml', 'shklaferishe') emphasise their negative qualities.

In each of the first two stanzas the fate of the Hereros is seen in the light of the indifference of the rainbow, whose sphere of activity the poet sees as being the sky rather than the earth:

Dem regn-boygn geyt nit on. Zayn fil-kolirte shverd
Farhalt dem regn. Zogt im: blayb in himl.

The transformation of the 'regn-boygn' image is significant. In every other period of Sutzkever's poetic creation the rainbow is a positive symbol of hope, and is one of the key images denoting his poetic inspiration. This positive metapoetic symbolism colours the rainbow image in another poem of this cycle, 'In onheyb' (PV2, p.184). Its negative quality here is unique and is a symptom of the unease underlying the poet's perception of the universe in these poems. The fate of the Hereros is seen as an insignificant incident which takes place between the rainbow's preventing the rain in the first two lines, and allowing it to fall, in the final lines of stanza 3:

Dem regn-boygn geyt nit on. Geyt shoyderlekh nit on.
Derloybn vet ongeyn dem regn - shpeter.

The speaker's tone is one of despair: their deaths take place, like the death of Icarus in Brueghel's painting, almost unnoticed in a corner of the vast panorama.

The third stanza introduces a new motif, the little bird Insingizi, messenger to the Gods:

O foygl Insingizi, vos bist klener fun a tson,
Dertseyl fun undzer zelfstmord in dayn kinigreykh di
geter.

This ray of hope that some transcendental being will take notice of their fate is, however, immediately extinguished by the final repetition of the key words 'dem regn-boygn geyt nit on', and the speaker's horror at the indifference of nature and 'di geter' is intensified in the word 'shoyderlekh'. This is an image of a divinity separate from human life, a *deus absconditus*. The divine exists, but in the guise of an indifferent force, or, in other poems of the cycle, of strange pagan Gods.

This indifference of God is shown as impotence in 'Der heysherik' (PV2, p.211). The poem is a surrealist vision of the ravages of the locust, which devours first man, then 'di veykhe oygn fun di eyzlen' then 'ale shotns fun di beymer', then the moon; the climactic final lines of the poem describe the locust lunging at God himself. All the motifs used in this vision of destruction are recurrent images in Sutzkever's work. The locust's biting into the flesh of human beings is combined with the image of 'zangen':

Der heysherik hot shoyrn arumgebisn undzer fleysh.
Er hot gemeynt:
Mir zenen zangen, zangen.

The concept of 'zangen' always implies life, nourishment, or regeneration, and thus also the eternal life of the poetic word: here, in a parallel situation to that of the following poem, 'Nekome trern' (PV2, p.212), human beings become food (conveyed by 'zangen') for the destructive force symbolised by the locust, and the regenerative power associated with the concept of 'zangen' is destroyed.

Eyes in Sutzkever's poetry are a mirror of the truth. Here the eyes which are being devoured are those of donkeys, a creature which Sutzkever invests with a wise gentle innocence, as for

example in the humorously ironic 'Eyzlen in regn' (PV2, p.281), or with attributes of holiness: the donkeys which lived in the stables of King Solomon had heard and retained in their memory the Song of Songs:

Kentik zey hobn gehert shir hashirim -
 Take derfar zenen lang
 Zeyere oyern. Fule mit shirim.
 Ful mit amolikn klang.
 ('In di shtaln fun Shloyme hamelekh', PV2, p.48).

The 'veykhe oygn fun di eyzlen' is therefore an image denoting a particular quality of innocence and spirituality, which is also devoured by the locust.

The other two motifs which Sutzkever uses to epitomise the destruction of all that is good are the trees and the moon:

Er hot shoyn oyfgefresn
 Ale shotns fun di beymer.

 Er hot shoyn oyfgefresn di levone.
 Zi shlogt mit dimentn fun zayne fligl.

From 'Valdiks' onward, trees signify one of the primordial, life-giving forces. It is significant that the locust has eaten, not the tree itself, but its shadow, for the shadow, particularly of the tree, has a particular symbolic significance in Sutzkever's work. We have seen that in the poem 'Valdiks' the trees and their shadows change identities, ('Oyf dr'erd tseleygte shlofn beymer, / Di shotns vaksn in der heykh'), evoking the interchangeability of the physical and the incorporeal. This shadow imagery was developed in the poem 'Der vald' (PV2, p.16). The final lines of 'Der vald' cast light on the use of 'shotns' in 'Der heysherik':

Nor ven di mames hobn bay di nemen ongerufn
 Di nontste, vos di tsayt hot zey farvandlt in a vald,
 Ersht demolt hot fun yeder boym aroysgeplatst a shotn.

The saying of the child's name by the mother is the power which creates the shadow, giving the tree reality. This is a com-

plex image involving the power of the love of the mother, the Jewish belief in the power of the name, and the idea of the life and regeneration embodied in the tree: the shadow represents symbolically the *essence* of the tree. It is justifiable to apply the same symbolic significance to 'di shotns fun di beymer' in the only slightly later poem 'Der heysherik' - thus by destroying the shadows of the trees, the locust is destroying the essence of the life-giving force.

For Sutzkever the moon is always a symbol of beauty or poetry, (as in 'Sibir'), though often imbued with a mysterious, quasi-sinister quality, as in the personification of the moon in the 'Lider tsu a lunatikerin' (PV1, p.233). Thus through the progressive destruction of all that is beautiful and life-giving, the poem mounts to its climax, the attack on God himself; and the mounting tension and unimpeded annihilation which Sutzkever has evoked, - unhindered even by the pleading of the stars ('Di shtern kniyen: mir'n zayn dir shklafn!') - leaves no hint that the Creator will mount a successful defence against his own creature.

It is interesting to note this unusual use in Sutzkever's poetry of the locust as a negative image of annihilation. From 1954 on, with the 'Ode tsum heysherik' from the cycle 'Gedanken fun a hirsh' (PV2, p.285), the locust becomes a key image connected with poetry, but invested with the ambiguity which the wild creatures also have in 'Helfandn bay nakht'; that is, they are awesome and mysterious, yet - *because* of this element - an object of the poet's fascination and longing. 'Ode tsum heysherik' was written in the same year as 'Ode tsu der toyb', and employs the same form (four quatrains) and the same metre as the latter; it is similar in theme and mood to the 'Ode tsu der

toyb'. The locust, though a 'royter mirazh fun nekome', is at the same time a metaphor of the longing of the poet, in that the locust's rapacious appetite is paralleled by the poet's hunger for words:

Royter mirazh fun nekome - fleyshike zangen in himl.
Kh'vil mitn zelibkn hunger shlingn an alef, a giml....

The poet feels himself to be a brother to the locust: both are 'mad' and by implication the poet shares the locust's superior lineage:

Zhomet in mir dayn shigoyen, bin ikh a teyl fun dayn
yomer.
Hot dikh geboyrn a novi tsvishn a horde gazlonim?
Yo, bist aleyen vi der novi, mit a farlengertn ponem...

The equation of the locust with the prophet accentuates the difference between the use of the motif in 'Ode tsum heysherik' and in the earlier poem 'Der heysherik'.

The two poems are linked not only by the locust motif, but by the use of 'zangen': as in the earlier poem, the locust in the 'Ode' hungers for 'zangen', but rather than devouring human flesh it flies in search of 'zangen in himl', which can be seen as the quintessence of the metapoetic 'zang' symbol. The locust's flight in search of the ideal represented by this concept parallels the poet's longing for the nourishment of the word. The poem ends by uniting these two ideas:

Zalts vet nit shtiln mayn hunger, saydn - an alef, a
giml...
Heysherik, loz mikh nit iber, s'bliyen shoyen zangen in
himl.

This fixes the locust and the 'zangen in himl' as images through which Sutzkever explores his relationship with the word. His use of the locust as an image of terror and destruction in 'Der heysherik' remains unique, further evidence of the unusual mood and vision of 'Helfandn bay nakht'.

Human mortality is also the theme of the two poems 'Nekome-trern' (PV2, p.212) and 'Dos groe fayer' (PV2, p.213). In the former poem the supernatural power is a demonic force. In a powerful image, the demons plant human seeds in order to devour them, as human beings plant corn:

Azoy vi korn iz dos broyt far mentshn,
Zenen mentshn broyt far di demonen.

The use of the extended simile is unusual in Sutzkever's work. There is an element of didacticism in the simile, where the poet stands between image and reader, and points, as it were, to the meaning of the image. Sutzkever more normally uses metaphor, drawing the reader into the closed, all encompassing image, so that the reader stands within the imaginative world of the poet. A similar didactic extended simile is used in the poem 'Kerndlekh vayts' in 'Di festung' (PV1, p.289), which also has an interpretative function, pointing to an existential significance beyond the immediate reality of the situation.

In 'Nekome-trern' the parallel between human beings cultivating and eating bread, and the demons cultivating and eating human beings transforms an activity which epitomises a natural aspect of human existence into an image of horror and destruction. The motif of the skeleton, which is developed in the poem 'Dos groe fayer' is here also used surrealistically to intensify the horror: the skeleton of each individual seems to exist *before* the human seed comes to fruition, and in a grotesquely ironic image the demons use the skeletons of the future human beings as spades or ploughs :

Zey akern mit undzere skeletn un farzeyen
Vi a hoyfn zingendikn shtoyb di mentshn-kerner.

The response of human beings is defiance and attempted revenge against the demons. Several of the new images which

abound throughout 'Helfandn bay nakht' are seen here: the lioness, the arrow, poison (here the 'poison' is the 'nekome-trern' of the doomed human beings), and these images help to evoke the savage milieu of this cycle of poems: the universe is a battleground between the human being and hostile or indifferent forces, which are almost interchangeably seen as the destructive elements of nature, or the power of cruel demons or gods. As in the two poems of this group of four already discussed, continuity can be seen in the imagery of this poem, for example in the image of 'mentshn-kerner' growing to provide 'bread' for the demons, which is a grotesque variation on the complex of imagery of burial and resurrection, and on the concept of 'zangen'.¹⁴

Not only is mortality presented in 'Helfandn bay nakht' as a battle between human beings and the demons who have created them to satisfy their hunger, but the seeds of mortality are contained within the human being himself. In a powerful, concise poem 'Dos groe fayer' (PV2, p.213), the poet speaks to his 'bruder'. The use of this term, signifying humanity in general, is further evidence that the dominant voice in this cycle is not the individual *ikh* of the poet but the collective *mir*, as in 'Nekome-trern' and earlier poems like 'Der tsirk': the questions asked are existential ones pertaining to all humanity. The poet asks of his brother: 'Ver bashaft dos gro in dayne hor?' The answer indicates that death is already present during the individual's life,

¹⁴. The imagery of 'Nekome-trern' recurs in the poem 'Akern di luft' of 1983 (Ts-b, p.166), but instead of demons sowing 'human seeds' to be devoured, the *ikh* sows 'otem-kerner' which signify the eternity of the poetic word:

'Kumen vel ikh bentshn
 Di umlebedike mayne,
 Vos tsiyen zikh tsum oyfgang fun di otems
 Kedey tsu lebn.'

The later poem can be seen as a resolution of the earlier one.

hovering above him in the form of his own skeleton spinning the 'groe fayer' which is his mortality and shows itself already during his life in the greyness of his hair. There is a macabre splitting of the self in this image: 'dayn eygener skelet' is the individual himself, but also the death which already exists within him, and it seems to revel in its victory over the human being, and in its power to torture him: 'Vos bloyz dayn gsize iz im tayer'.

In this sinister vision there are unmistakable echoes of the medieval Dance of Death theme, and also of the Fates of Greek mythology, spinning the thread of the human being's life. The difference is that the power of death does not come from outside the defenceless human being, as a supernatural force, but from within him, as one part of his divided self, tormenting him. In the fusion of these ideas and traditions Sutzkever has created a new image of extraordinary power: this ability to take mythological material and weave it into a new network of images to express his vision is one of the significant features of the poem-cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht'.

Poems in which the confrontation between man and the elemental forces is expressed in myths of pagan Gods are 'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns' (PV2, p.208), and 'Regntants' (PV2, p.178). In the former poem, as in 'Dos groe fayer', the central idea is that of death in life. The poet addresses the 'har fun di volkns' who lets little children fall from heaven, together with the rain:

Kleyne kinder faln mitn regn fun di volkns.
 Nit di volkns hobn zey geboyrn.
 Vos vet zayn?
 S'hobn zey geboyrn volknfroyen, -
 Yunge mames, velkhe host farshlungen.

The God figure here seems to be derived at the same time from Zeus, who unleashed a flood on the earth, and from Cronos, who devoured his own children. In the concept of the divine being devouring the creatures (the 'volknfroyen') whom it has created, the poem echoes the central motif of 'Nekome-trern'.

Death does not prevent the mothers from longing for their children,¹⁵ from whom they are separated by the omnipotent God. Although there seems to be a limit to his power, expressed in the defiant first line of the second stanza: 'Di yunge mames zenen dayne. Undzere - di kinder', this claim of independence from the God's jurisdiction is quashed in the third stanza, where the poet acknowledges, in a strange metonymy: '[...] dayne zenen ale mentshnlipn'. The 'mentshnlipn' stand for the human beings themselves, and the God has thus absolute power over all life. His omnipotence is expressed in a paradoxical image embodying that element of the unexpected which is a frequent feature of Sutzkever's imagery:

Derlangst a bloz -
Ot groen shoyt vi zalts di shvartse farbn.

In a more conventional image of death, one would expect *bright* colours to turn to grey at the destructive breath of the God: but Sutzkever's image is more powerful in that even the strong, invincible black is turned into something shadowy and insubstantial. Allusion has already been made¹⁶ to the negative

¹⁵. In this image of dead mothers longing for their children we see an extension and reversal of the image of live mothers longing for their dead children after the Holocaust, in such poems as 'Der vald'. One possible interpretation of 'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns', in fact, is that it is an allegory in which these children who fall from the clouds and 'mishn zikh tsuzamen mit di kinder fun der erd' are the *potential* children of girls and women killed in the Holocaust before they had had a chance to become mothers.

¹⁶. See above, chapters 2 and 4.

connotations of the colour grey in Sutzkever's poetry. The paradoxical image of 'dos groe fayer' in the poem discussed above suggests negation of the normal attributes of fire - aptly conveying the paradox of self-destruction and death-in-life which the poem evokes. A similar use of 'gro' is seen in 'Ode tsu der toyb' where the attempt of the devil to destroy the dove-muse is evoked through imagery reminiscent of 'Nekome-trern' and 'Dos groe fayer', juxtaposing the ideas of the sun and greyness, young children and skeletons:

Gro iz di zun. Ale farbn farshpint er mit groe lishayes,
 Ibergebrent iz der templ, s'antloyfn di zayln vi khayes.
 Kinder, vi goldene feygl, tseleygt er atsind in skeletn
 [...]
 [...]
 [...]

The use of 'gro' as the negation or destruction of life is logical in view of the statement in another poem of the 'Helfandn' cycle, 'Di kunst fun tatuirn' (PV2, p.189): 'Kolirn zenen libshafn'. If colours are equated with love, and thus, by implication, with life, then grey, their opposite, is symbolically linked to sterility and death.

Thus by the use of 'gro' in 'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns', the power of the cruel God is emphasised, and this leads to the final listless statement, separated, for heightened effect, from the other three stanzas:

S'dernentert zikh der sof. Mir ale shtarbn.

This poem is in a sense an anti-creation myth: at the behest of an omnipotent but indifferent God, mothers whom he has destroyed give birth to children who then suffer the same pointless fate as the rest of humanity.

The withdrawal of the divine from the created world and the indifference or hostility of the divine forces means that intercession with the divine is the only possibility of survival: in

'Regnants' (PV2, p.178) Sutzkever evokes the African ritual of dance and sacrifice to the rain god. Sutzkever calls his rain god by the name of Shango, the West African god of thunder, himself a violent and ambiguous figure.¹⁷ The rain god is a *deus*

absconditus:

Der got fun regn Shango
Zet nit,
Vil zikh nit bavayzn.

The people bring the heart of a lion as a sacrifice to the rain god:

Got fun regn!
S'brumt dos harts un blutikt oyfn shpiz,
Derbarem zikh un shik dayn tsung - dem volkn -
Un batsol mit zilbergelt fun vaser.

The lion image is interesting in several respects. The roaring heart is an example of a kind of imagery in which Sutzkever transfers senses or actions to different parts of the body, as in 'Di lipn kniyen far dem vort dem opgezundertn [...]' (PV2, p.157) or 'mayn gafndiker oyer' (PV1, p.601). This intermingling of the faculties is related to the imagery of metamorphosis in this cycle, one of the vehicles of the poet's striving for harmony with the savage universe of 'Helfandn bay nakht'. Furthermore, the lion and tiger are important in other key poems of the collection; they represent immensely powerful elemental forces, by which the *ikh* is both terrified and fascinated. Here, in

17. cf. the Yoruba hymn quoted by Finnegan:
'Si Olukun est immense, Shango également est immense
Il fait brûler le fils d'Olumon dans le feu de Aragunan
Il écrase le talisman de mon chef de maison [...]
Il est très sale comme Eshu et se tient, une jambe tendue et
l'autre pliée
Eléphant qui marche avec dignité
Regardez l'éléphant lever aisément une pate guerrière,
léopard père de Timi
Il menace le mâle, il menace la femelle, [...]'
(Ruth Finnegan, *Literature*, p.178)
It is interesting that Shango is also the elephant, a central image in this cycle.

'Regntants', the strange image of the disembodied, roaring heart of the lion, which the god has demanded as a sacrifice, symbolises the fulfilment of the god's lust for power, epitomised by his demanding the death of the majestic creature. At the same time, the lion's heart has refused to submit to death; there is, throughout the cycle, a blurring of the boundaries between life and death, which was evident also in the image of the dead 'volknfroyen' giving birth to children.

The god's cruelty is evoked in grotesque imagery: through his indifference the sun dries up the water from the roots of the trees, the ostriches lay eggs which are already baked by the fearsome heat, the babies in the women's bodies are shrivelled into skeletons before birth. While the dead lion's roaring heart and the 'volknfroyen' are images of life-in-death, these are powerful images of death-in-life, as is the skeleton image in 'Dos groe fayer'.

Most of the poem 'Regntants' consists of the prophet's prayer for water,¹⁸ and the striking aspect of the poem is that the problem reaches no resolution. Sutzkever does not - as he could have in this vision of the universe where magic and mysterious forces abound - end the poem with a description of rain falling in answer to the prayers and sacrifice, but rather with the prophet's vision of a future time in which the prayer

¹⁸. It is interesting that Sutzkever uses the important concept of the 'novi' in the African context. Earlier the term has been used in a metapoetic context to describe the inspirational figure of Zelig Kalmanovitsh who died in the Vilna ghetto: in the poem 'Der novi' (PV1, p.370), the dead prophet's eye, implanted in the poet, symbolised the giving of a poetic mission. The poems 'Erev mayn farbreunung' and 'A zeyung' from 'In fayer-vogn' also use the figure of the prophet Elijah in a similar metapoetic context. Here he uses the Hebrew term with its strong Jewish connotation to describe the witch doctor who mediates between the people and the god.

may be answered. Again, as with the lion, death is not the end: though the god kill him, still the prophet's tears will continue to importune the god, until eventually he will give way and fall as rain:

Toyterheynt afile vel ikh tantsn.
 Un vest mikh a toytn - teytn,
 Veln mayne trern
 Tantsn arum shpiz aleyn -
 Un brumen:
 Vaser.
 Vaser.

Biz du vest tsuzamen mit di trern,
 Tsuzamen mit di tropens funem leybnharts vos faln,
 In mayne orems faln, faln, faln.

This is a vision in which the human being (symbolised by 'di trern') and nature ('di tropens funem leybnharts') are united in a battle to overcome the resistance of the cruel God, which may lead to the harmonious fusion of the human being, nature, and the divine, as the prophet foresees in his final vision of the falling together of rain, his tears, and the lion's blood: however, it is a struggle to the death, and beyond death, and though there is the hope of fulfilment, there is no certainty.

These themes of death and decay which are omnipresent in 'Helfandn bay nakht' are a manifestation of Sutzkever's sharpened awareness of the inexorable power of the forces of nature over human life. One of the most trenchant images of visible death-in-life, is the figure of the leper, whose body is being eaten alive, and in the eerie 'Gezang fun di kretsike' (PV2, p.209), the lepers offer their poisoned blood to the warrior:

Krigger, tunk in undzer blut di fayln,
 Vet farlirn zayne fis der soyne.

In a series of couplets the lepers describe the destructive possibilities which lie in their diseased blood - not only for the human victims as in the first stanza, but for the infestation of the earth itself:

Az mir shtarbn, zidt di erd vi shvebl,
Undzer blut kon untertsindn vaser.

Even the heavens are not immune to the pestilence caused by them: in an image which fuses birds and lightning, the 'kretsike' state:

Blitsfeygl in hoykher nest fun duner
Zingendike faln toyt in opgrunt.

The flat unemotional tone of this poetic hyperbole renders the grotesque theme even more powerful. Since their disease makes them incapable of wielding a weapon, they see their *raison d'être* in using their life-blood as an instrument of death and destruction:

Mir aleyn, mir hobn nit keyn finger,
Kegn soyne konen mir nit ayn - -

Kriger, tunk in undzer blut di fayln!

Sutzkever gives expression to this horrifying vision of the universe by reversing the notion of the *goldene keyt*, the chain of life and regeneration, which here becomes a chain of destruction: those whose bodies are being eaten by disease use that disease to hand on death and decay. In this poem too, cruel indifference of the divine powers lies at the centre of the universe: the savage fate of the lepers, which leads to the destruction of the universe, is the result of a god's careless whim:

Undzer blut iz nit fun tate-mame,
Nor a shpay fun got in halbe glider.

From the poems so far considered, it seems as though the vision of the universe which Sutzkever creates in this cycle is a dramatic departure from his earlier poetry. In the poems of 'In fayer-vogn' there is harmony between *ikh* and nature, and the poet has achieved a sense of mission as a link in the *goldene keyt*,

seen as a symbol both of the continuity of Jewish tradition and of the eternal cycle of life, death and regeneration. Now it is as if the impression made on the poet by the merciless elemental powers which he senses in the African environment have overturned his previous convictions and forced on him a view of the universe in which man struggles vainly against the forces of destruction. These elements are not human cruelty, as in the Holocaust period, but mysterious, wilful divine forces, remote from man, and manifesting themselves in nature, against which man must also struggle. It is true that the theme of the *deus absconditus* does underlie the bleakest poems of the ghetto period, but on the whole the inaccessibility of God is a symbol of the *man-made* hell of the Holocaust. In 'Helfandn bay nakht' Sutzkever seems to be positing a nihilistic view of the universe as a whole.

This is not, however, the final statement of 'Helfandn bay nakht'. As in the previous periods of his poetry, there is tension and duality in his view of the relationship between man and the universe. To illustrate this, the horror of 'Gezang fun di kretsike' can be contrasted with the depiction of the madman in 'Lakh nit fun meshugenem', (PV2, p.215). Like the 'kretsike' his body is half consumed while *still alive, but he destroys only himself*, and is invested with nobility:

Lakh nit fun meshugenem. Zayn gayst iz a pantere,
 Vos yogt zikh in a brenendikn vald nokh zikh aleyn.
 Esn est er nit keyn khaye -
 Nor zayn eygn layb.
 Trinken trinkt er nit keyn vaser -
 Nor zayn eygn blut.

In this paradoxical image of self-devouring, and of the hunter hunted by himself, there are echoes of other mythical motifs: the pelican which feeds its young from its own blood, the serpent Ouroboros which devours itself (an image of the cyclical

nature of time), and Baudelaire's 'Héotontimorouménos' (the self-executioner). In 'Ode tsu der toyb' there are surrealistic images of self-destruction, ('Hayntikn tog hot a ridl aleyn zikh in keyver farshotn [...] Hayntikn tog hobn shteyner aleyn zikh far-shteynt in di gasn!' PV2, p.172). Sutzkever uses the circular self-devouring image in the poignant short poem from 'Di festung', 'Yeder sho, yeder tog' (PV1, p.302) in which the poet sings even while devouring himself. Self-devouring is a paradoxical variation of Sutzkever's key idea of nourishment and regeneration through 'aynshlingn': the madman depends only upon himself for his survival. Through this motif and through the comparison of his spirit with a panther, - union with the wild creatures being, as we shall see, one of the main vehicles for Sutzkever's striving for harmony in this cycle - the poet approaches the figure of the madman with mingled horror and veneration. The madman is shown to have a child-like innocence which contrasts in a startling way with the self-predator image in the previous lines:

Un zayne oygn zeen oys vi hentelekh fun kinder
 Vos benken nokh a mame,
 Yo, a mame.

This image contains that unexpected element which typifies Sutzkever's imagery: instead of the madman's eyes being like the eyes of children, they are like the *hands* of children. Thus Sutzkever adds an extra dimension of physicality to the idea of the *benkshaft* in the madman's eyes by overlaying it with an image of children's arms outstretched in desperate longing for a mother - an image which surely arises out of the plight of countless real children in the Holocaust.

The association between madness and enhanced perception, even visionary power, is a long tradition with many diverse

manifestations: shamanism, Shakespeare's Fools, Dostoyevsky's The Idiot and R.D.Laing's existential psychiatry. Here the holiness of the madman is emphasised in the second stanza, which justifies the forces of nature for taking their revenge on him who mocks the madman: the latter appears to be favoured, and invested with superhuman powers by the gods, so that he can punish those who deride him:

Umzist vet zayn dayn tfile,
 Un dayn fayln-boygn - shpinvebs.
 Yener vet dikh in di tseyn
 Avektrogn tsum duner,
 Un dortn vet shoyn dayn gelekhter hengen tsvishn beydn
 Un der blits, dem duners hak, vet reydn.

Inseparable therefore from the underlying 'shrek' is the apparantly contrary impulse of the poet's fascination with these cruel elemental forces, which represent a deeper form of justice. This fascination leads to the poet's yearning for union with nature: the *ikh* attempts to overcome the 'shrek' through union with the natural world, with the beloved, and with death. His yearning is expressed through animal myths which Sutzkever either invents or takes as motifs from folk-tales, and invests with his own particular significance. The four main symbols of this impulse are the elephant, the ox, the lion, and the tiger. The image of the forest also regains and develops the symbolic importance it had in Sutzkever's earlier poetry.

The elephant is shown to be not only the first creature but the source of creation and the ancestor of man. The poem 'In onheyb' (PV2, p.184) depicts the creation of man as a fusion of the black elephant-tusk with the rainbow. Like 'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns' this is also a version of the Creation myth, but with an entirely different tone. The poet relates the story of

how the first man sprang from the kiss given by the rainbow to the black ivory tusk which had saved it from drowning in the river. The *ikh* compares himself to the first man:

Un vi der eltster mentsh
Azoy bin ikh:
Shvarts, vi yener helfandbeyn,
Un regn-boygn-likhtik.

In the human being, - product of the kiss between the black elephant tusk and the rainbow, - the fusion of dark and light, of the corporeal and the spirit can be discerned. Taking into account the symbolic connection with poetry which the rainbow normally represents in Sutzkever's work, the image also evokes the duality within the *ikh* of dark forces and the spirit of poetry. The same duality of dark and light within the *ikh* appears in a later poem from the collection Oazis, published in 1960, 'Mit koyl fartseykhnt', (PV2, p.365):

Ganve nit mayn troyer. Zayn farmegn
Toyg nor far an eyntsikn. Er iz
Ongetrunken mit a shvartsn regn
Inevaynik. Droysn - a nartsis.

In the poem 'In onheyb' the poet sees in the elephant a symbol of the source of creation, and uses this powerful myth as an expression of the deep affinity he feels with the first man, and through him, with their common ancestors, the elephant and the rainbow. Through the myth the human being becomes part of the mysterious elemental forces, and a synthesis is achieved. The anti-creation myth, the notion of the gulf between man and the *deus absconditus*, exemplified in 'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns' or 'Zelbstmordlid fun di Hereros' co-exist in the cycle with the fusion of man and nature in this positive myth of creation.

The affinity between *ikh* and elephant is also expressed in 'Besoylem fun helfandn' (PV2, p.188), where Sutzkever does not invest the elephant with the same mythical quality as in the poem

'In onheyb', but takes as the central motif of the poem the notion that an elephant will go away to die in a special place, far from other creatures. Like most of the poems in this cycle, it is in blank verse, in short two, three or four line stanzas, and the falling rhythm of the trochaic metre seems to suggest the ponderous, majestic pace of the elephant walking to its graveyard. The first three stanzas describe the graveyard and the dead elephants, in the fourth an elephant comes to its place of rest, and in the final stanza the poet considers the violation of the corpse which will be perpetrated by hyena and man. The poet's respect for this noble creature emerges in the poem, but also the particular significance it has for his world-picture: it epitomises the fulfilment of the yearning for synthesis with nature which permeates the vision of the cycle. The elephant submits voluntarily to its natural end:

Keyner brengt zey nit aher. Zey shpanen
 Eyntsikvayz durkh veynendike velder
 Khadoshem, yorn, ven es kumt di tsayt fun zeyer shtarbn.

The stanza emphasises the length and single-mindedness of their patient journey towards death: the phrase 'di tsayt fun zeyer shtarbn' suggests a pre-ordained fate to which they submit themselves.

The image in the first stanza fuses several elements of nature:

Vi shif-skeletn oyfn dek fun yam -
 Lign do di helfandn mit breyt tsepralte baykher,
 In velkhe di levone kumt geboyrn ire kinder...

This is a complex image. The simile of the first two lines associates the elephants with the motifs of ships and the sea, which are almost always linked with poetic creation. In the next phase of the stanza the simile is replaced by a hermetic image in which the moon gives birth to its children in the bellies of the

dead elephants. Here the poet fuses imagery of death and decay with the image of the moon - again a symbol of poetry throughout Sutzkever's work - and with the idea of regeneration out of death.¹⁹ This synthesis is the means by which Sutzkever, here and in other poems in the cycle, counteracts the *shrek* of nature.

The elephant is a wholly integrated creature, a voluntary participant in the cycle of life, death and decay: in the final stanza, death, symbolised by the hyena, is already present while the elephant is still alive ('Nor oyfn rukn rayt shoyn di geshtrayfelte hiyene'), and the hyena's devouring the eyes of the elephant is an image of particular force and significance. Eyes are an important image throughout the cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht'. In the initial poem of the universe has its existence in the eyes of God, and in the poem 'Di shenste' (PV2, p. 198) the ideal woman can be discerned within the eye of the tiger. Thus the devouring of the innocent child-like eyes of the elephant²⁰ by the hyena is a particularly stark image of annihilation; but it has its place within the elemental forces which, though cruel, have a compelling fascination. The poem ends, however, on a jarring note:

Un s'veln im aropzegn dem helfandbeyn -
Di zeger.

The violence of man's plundering is conveyed by the breaking of the flowing rhythm in the abrupt, truncated last line. The

19. Sutzkever's image bears a striking similarity to the riddle of Samson concerning the carcass of a lion in which there was a swarm of bees: 'Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.' (Judges, 14.14)

20. The 'eygelekh di kindershe' of the elephant can be compared with the 'vaykhe oygn fun di eyzlen' in 'Der heysherik', (PV2, p.211) which are also devoured, and with the eyes of the madman which are compared with the outstretched hands of children in 'Lakh nit fun meshugenem (PV2, p.215).

poet feels a greater affinity with the elephant than with his fellow men, and his admiration for the harmony of the elephant with its own death is an expression of his own desire to be able to allow himself to be absorbed into the elemental forces of the universe.

In 'Loyblid far an oks' (PV2, p.219), the poet again uses a symbolic animal as the vehicle for evoking synthesis with nature. The ox is a recurrent, rather ambivalent image in Sutzkever's poetry. In earlier poems the ox is usually a symbol of the victims of the Holocaust: in 'Di neshome fun yam', written in 1947, (PV2, p.37), the poet sees the Europe he is leaving as

[...] a mishmash
Fun oksnheldzer in a boyne.

In the same collection, 'In fayer-vogn', in 'An oks in gelatetn karshnroyt', the ox, like the *ikh*, is a victim, and the *ikh* sins against the ox, violently injuring him, so that the ox becomes a symbol of the guilt of the *ikh*. The most dramatic and extended use of the ox image to evoke the butchery of the Holocaust is in the prose-poem 'Der toyt fun an oks', (PV2, p.252) from 'Griner akvariyum', written in 1953, therefore more or less contemporary with 'Loyblid far an oks'; in the prose-poem the agony of the Jews in the ghetto is evoked in a surrealist description of the death throes of a powerful ox with 'brenendike herner'.

In all these poems dealing with the Holocaust the motif of the ox is a positive image, whereas in the later poem 'Fartoybte oksn' (PV2, p.375) in the collection Oazis, oxen are presented as a stampede of dazed or deafened creatures trampling down the poet's garden and threatening to destroy his poetry. ('Dayn fleyt vet er farvandlen in an umfleyt'). The power of poetry is vindi-

cated when the oxen fall on their knees, tamed by the music of this Orpheus. Sutzkever uses the image of the ox, therefore, to present diverse ideas at different periods.

It is perhaps possible to understand the underlying symbolic resonance of the ox motif by linking it to the *shorabor*, the legendary wild ox which will be eaten by the righteous when Messiah comes; this symbol is used by Kadya Molodovsky in her poem 'Onbot', written in 1940,²¹ where she importunes God not to delay in preparing for her the Great Ox and the old wine:

Farbet tsu gast mikh itst un leyg nit op oyf shpeter.
Dayn shorabor farzukhn, dayn altn vayn kh'vil trinken.

Seen against this tradition, the destruction of the ox in Sutzkever's poetry may represent the annihilation of the hope and culture of the Jews during the Holocaust, while in the poem 'Fartoybte oksn', there is the hope of redemption of the Jewish tradition through the power of the poetic word.

The common element in all these poems is the surrealistic treatment of the ox image, and this aspect is central to the image in 'Loyblid far an oks', where the ox is a mythical creature:

Zayn tate iz geven di zun, zayn mame - di levone.

The poem is in the genre of a song in praise of the beloved, resembling in many features the Song of Solomon. Like the latter it makes a public statement in praise of the beloved, conveyed in Sutzkever's poem by the initial invitation: 'Kumt bavundern mayn oks'.

Both poems catalogue the virtues and physical beauties of the beloved, the effect being achieved through hyperbolic comparison of features of the beloved with aspects of the physical

²¹. Howe, Wisse and Shmeruk, Yiddish Verse, p.326.

world which are paradigms of perfection, as for example in the Song of Solomon, 5.12-15:

His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk and fitly set. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh. His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.

Sutzkever's poem achieves its effect by just such a catalogue. Some of the comparisons are concise statements, as in the already quoted first statement, or in the final hyperbole:

Ven er bodt zikh, - vern zis di taykhn.

Other lines, however, develop the comparison into an independent new image:

Vayser fun di shpritsn milkh di ershte
 Bay a froy,
 Ven zi git tsu zeygn, iz di vayskayt fun zayn shtern.
 [...]

Di herner zenen mastn fun a shif,
 Aza vos firt in boykh afile oytsres.²²

These images are particularly reminiscent of the technique in the Song of Solomon, where the actual person of the beloved is overlaid with another totally independent image, as in the verse

Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. (Song of Solomon, 6:6)

Here the comparison was initially prompted, presumably, by the idea of whiteness, but the sheep have developed into an independent image containing all the elements of perfection pertaining to sheep - and so the poet has created an extra dimension to the image of perfection by the two linked, but independent and

²². The image of treasure buried in the belly of the ship echoes the metapoetic image of treasure buried under the sea which has already occurred in earlier poems, such as 'Di sharfe lipn', and which becomes very important in Sutzkever's poetry from the sixties onward.

equally weighted images. So in Sutzkever's poem, the two images quoted above encompass the brow of the ox, and the horns, but alongside those, and with equal prominence, the woman giving suck and the ship with treasure in its hold.

The effect of the imagery in the Song of Solomon is to present an ideal, a paradigm of perfection rather than a real individual, and the same is true of Sutzkever's poem. The poet fuses disparate elements of the universe in this picture of the mythical, idealised creature. Among these are elements of the natural universe - the sun, the moon, the whiteness of mother's milk -, as well as images of powerful sensuality:

Meydlekh vern andersh inem shimer fun zayn prakht.
In zeyer blut -
Di varemkayt fun umbakante mayler.

The ox is an oracle, and awesome like a God:

In zayne oygn kon men zen di tsukunft.
Nor ir zolt
Beser zey nit efenen
In reges ven zey drimlen.

This mythical creature combines the ox-like qualities of physical power and wildness, with imagery of perfection and supernatural qualities, but contains also an element of 'shrek' and an echo of the Jewish tradition of the *shorabor*: it therefore fuses many spheres and is, like the elephant, a symbol of union and harmony with all aspects of creation.

The forest has always been of major importance in Sutzkever's nature imagery - the title and many of the poems in 'Valdiks' bear witness to this - and in this cycle Sutzkever returns to this seminal image in order to give further expression to his desire for fusion with the natural world. The tension between the 'shrek' in nature and the striving for synthesis is

present in the forest image, for example in the 'Himen tsum shvartsn vald' (PV2, p.218). In the 'hymn' concept and in the opening phrase 'mame vald', two aspects of the poet's relationship to the forest are evident: religious awe, but also intimacy - apart from the traditional Mother Earth connotation aroused by the term 'mame vald', there is the particular resonance of the mother image in Sutzkever's work.

Just as the elephant is the primeval creature, so the forest is the primordial environment in which all elements of creation, animals, man, even God, find refuge and are united. This is not a vision of harmony, as in the poems of 'Valdiks', but has a more mysterious, awesome dimension: the shimmering green of the forest of 'Valdiks' has given way to black. The forest, older than night itself, incorporates everything that is:

Mame vald, bist elter fun der nakht.
 Aropgenidert fun di volkns bliyen dayne vasern
 In shvartsn fleysh fun holts
 Azoy vi mentshn.
 Un dokh bist du gefangen bay di khayes in der erd -
 Zey haltn dayne vaserfis
 Farklamert in di tseyner.

The forest is the link between the heavens and the forces under the earth: she is the central point of an eternal motion downward towards the centre of the earth. She draws the water down from the heavens into her 'fleysh', but she herself is pulled down by the 'khayes in der erd'. The image is violent - the forest held captive by the teeth of subterranean animals, - and contains also a powerful anthropomorphic element - the wood of the trees is black flesh, so that the water in the trees' flesh is, by implication, like the blood in the veins of human beings. The idea of the human imprisoned within or metamorphosed into a tree, like the Dryads of classical mythology, is a recurring image in Sutzkever's poetry, for example in 'Der eylibert-

mentsh' (PV2, p.55), and in 'Tsu a boym' (PV2, p.207) in this cycle, where the *ikh* visualises his beloved within the tree, and imagines a child - 'a bey mele' - growing from their union.

In the refrain of the 'Himen tsum shvartsn vald', which occurs twice, Sutzkever develops a pantheistic vision: the rain which enters and nourishes the 'fleysh fun holts' is God:

Nit keyn volkns regen, dos regnt got aleyn,
 Die volkns, mame, zenen bloyz a shotn.
 Veynen veynt in hoyz fun dayne tsvaygn undzer harts,
 Di trern, mame, zenen bloyz a shotn.

In this refrain perfect harmony is achieved by the fusion of God and the human being in the tree: the divine and the human are united by the 'rain' of God and the tears of the human heart mingling within the trees, whereas the clouds - the *apparent* source of the rain- and the *visible* tears of the human being, are 'bloyz a shotn':²³ the reality is the union of the divine and the human spirit within the primeval forest.

As in all the nature imagery in the cycle, the threatening forces are always present. Dominating the second stanza are visions of the gates of hell 'vu neshomes flatern vi motn arum fayer', of the frightening immensity of the forest, of the wild animals which are at home there, and of the presence of death. The forest encompasses and unites all those concepts which are a source of *Angst*: hell, infinity and death, but in this poem there is positive acceptance of these elements:

In dir iz gut tsu lebn, gut tsu shtarbn.

²³. Here the word 'shotn' does not have the particular symbolic meaning with which it is invested in other poems of Sutzkever, where, as we have seen, it signifies the essential reality of the object which casts the shadow; here it appears to have the more usual meaning of the insubstantial appearance of the true reality.

With respect to this poem, therefore, it is justifiable to speak of a pantheistic vision: God and nature fuse in the symbolic 'mame vald'. Through this fusion, the elements of terror and disharmony in the poet's vision of the universe are transcended.

The erotic element in these poems is one of the most remarkable manifestations of the striving for fusion within the wildness of nature. This element is surprising in one sense: these are the only poems by Sutzkever which are permeated with a wild and strong eroticism, in which the physical union of male and female is one of the fundamental impulses of the whole cycle. Sutzkever has written other love poems, in which sensual elements are present, but never as consistently as here. It seems as though the poet's physical freedom from the traumatic experiences of the forties, and the emotional freedom which the new identity in Israel has given him, have unleashed, in this wild environment, forces which for the first time he is free to explore through the poetic word.

A primary motif of these love poems is the hunt. The lover is the hunter, his prey animals or the woman with whom he seeks union. It is no accident that in the poem which gives its name to the whole collection, the motifs of the hunt, of the elephant, of the mask, of metamorphosis, and of sexual union are all united. It is significant too that 'Helfandn bay nakht (PV2, p.186) is one of the relatively few poems in the cycle in which the events are presented from a personal point of view, as if happening to the *ikh*.

In his frequent use of the motif of metamorphosis, Sutzkever follows a long tradition. In Ovid's Metamorphoses the theme is

inseparable from erotic love, and the hunt is a frequent motif. Metamorphosis in legend and fairy-tale is also frequently linked with themes of love and faith: the Loathly Damsel, the Frog Prince, the Beast in 'Beauty and the Beast' and the bear in 'Snow White and Rose Red' are all freed from their metamorphosed state by the true and selfless love of another.

'Helfandn bay nakht' is one of the many poems in this collection where the poet shows his delight in the new sources of myth and legend which his African experience has provided. He uses that legendary material as a vehicle for the erotic impulse which is part of the poet's striving for integration with all the forces of nature. In the bizarre fusion of two radically different creatures, the graceful young girls and the heavy elephants, Sutzkever unites two fundamental ideas. This poem's position after 'In onheyb' means that the identification of the elephant with the origin of the universe has already been established, while the girl represents the sensual, the focus of the poet's striving for fusion with the universe through sexual union. In the elephant/girl image therefore, the erotic impulse and the Creation myth are fused. The combination of these two strands underlies all the erotic poems in the cycle.

By the use of the metamorphosis motif throughout the cycle, Sutzkever also shows the shifting identity of all existence, the tendency of everything to contain or flow into everything else. Many of the poems which explore the striving for oneness through erotic love contain metamorphoses. In the 'Lid fun a kranker meyd1' (PV2, p.196), the dying girl imagines herself experiencing after death that completeness which was denied her in life: her vision is not of spiritual union with the Divine, but of the consummation of perfect physical love. This impulse transcends death

itself. The girl imagines a series of metamorphoses which will lead to this culmination. The first image is one of extraordinary physicality:

Nokhn toyt vet fun mayn boykh
Aroysshvimen a vald,
Un ikh aleyn vel voynen inem vald.

As in 'Himen tsum shvartsn vald', the forest represents the primeval environment. In this cyclical image the girl's dead womb gives birth to 'mame vald' and then she returns to the womb of that mother to which she had given birth. Within this forest she creates a new environment by the metamorphosis of her kisses into birds, an image which again combines and fuses the incorporeal and the real:

Mayne kushn veln vern feygl,
Un ikh aleyn vel zingen
Fun di feygl.

The final metamorphosis contains the same paradoxical cyclical elements as the first. She becomes a gazelle, the hunter's prey, in order to lure the hunter. Then she swiftly changes back into her human form, her eyebrow becoming the bow from which the arrow (which can be construed as a metaphor for the power of her glance) speeds, and thus, like Diana with Artemis, she captures the hunter, her prey:

Kh'vel onton zikh in kleyd fun a gazele,
A yunger yeger vet derzen
Un meynen: a gazele.

Nor eyder er vet ontsiyen zayn fayl,
Vel ikh geshvind zikh oyston oyfn grozikh geleger,
Un di fayl, geshpant in dinem boygn fun mayn brem,
Araynlozn in yeger.

The hackneyed motif of love's arrow is transformed by the originality of the context; it almost becomes a playful parody of a worn out theme. Despite the melancholy implication of the

title, the tone of the poem is light, delicate and playful, the overriding mood one of harmony and pleasure. In contrast to the darker poems of the cycle, death is powerless to prevent the fulfilment of desire: the human being can glide between various metamorphoses, and fuse at will with elements of nature.

Since duality is, however, a fundamental aspect of Sutzkever's vision of the human being and the universe in this cycle, the darker side of the erotic force is seen in several of the poems. 'Kloglid fun a yunger almone' (PV2, p.201) is a counterpart to the 'Lid fun a kranker meyd1'. The speaker is again a woman, but whereas the dying girl looks forward to consummation of her passion after death, the young widow looks back in sorrow at her vanished passion, of which death has robbed her. The power of the images denoting her deprivation emphasises the strength of the erotic impulse. Particularly powerful is the image of the child which has never been conceived:

Undzer kind hot nit bavizn oystsuzingen: mame,
Farblibn iz es halb in dir un halb in mir: oyf shtendik!

Paradoxically, the child's reality is greater through its non-existence, just as the man permeates the woman's being even more strongly since his existence has been extinguished. As in many tragic expressions of love, the pathetic fallacy is used here to express the all-pervasiveness of grief:

Zint bist nit in mayne orems darf ikh nit di shtern,
Leb ikh oyf der umetiker erd mit tsvey neshomes. [...]

Tayerer, s'hot vi di zun in yam
Farklenert zikh di velt. Un bloyz mayn libshaft
Vert in der farklenerung alts greser.

All normal attributes of the outside world become aspects of the beloved: to express this, two of the symbolic animals are used, the ox and the lion:

S'dermont mir in dayn menlekhkayt

Der shturmish-royter oks.

In leybnbrum derfil ikh
Dayne mekhtike bagern.

The all-consuming passion and the despair of lost fulfilment in the poem underline the strength of the erotic impulse.

So overwhelming, in fact, is this primal impulse, that it is expressed in several poems through images of cruelty and of the grotesque. In 'Der malpe-soykher' (PV2, p.195), the young girl sees the approaching oxen, the monkey-dealer's dowry, as a symbol of the lust of her prospective bridegroom, which terrifies her:

Foter, her:
Di oksn klingen mit di shvere glokn
Un der malpe-soykher in der shpits
Vil mit zey tseakern
Di beytn fun mayn layb.

The motif of ploughing, which in the early poem 'Erd un aker' was an image of fusion and fulfilment, now evokes physical violation. Whereas in the earlier poem the equation was between the *spirit* and the earth awaiting the plough, ('Tsegrob mayn gayst - a frilingdike beyt') here the girl perceives the plough as violating her *body*. In this poem the ox is divorced from the positive symbolic attributes with which it was endowed in other poems, and is the instrument of violation - the image is effective through its ferocious violence.

The titles of two poems, 'Libshaft' (PV2, p.194) and 'Libelid' (PV2, p.197) arouse the expectation of conventional love poems, but in fact they reflect two different aspects of the eroticism which pervades this cycle: the concurrent impulses of 'shrek' or alienation on the one hand, and longing for union with the elemental forces of nature on the other. The central image in 'Libshaft' is the familiar Sutzkeverian idea of 'aynshlingen': the image recurs here in the context of integration with the

savage universe through sexual union. In 'Libshaft' the 'eltster fun basutu-sheyyvet' persuades his lord of the rejuvenating powers of wine made from snake-tears: by swallowing the wine the old man will regain his sexual potency. The poem is permeated by images combining the different senses, and fusing the abstract and the concrete, for example in the first stanza:

Un zayne shvartse shmeykhlringen
Fain inem bekher'

- an image which combines in a startling way the visual, (blackness), the imaginative, (rings or ripples of the smile) and the concrete (the wine in the goblet) to form a new sensual reality. The words of the tribesman contain vivid physical imagery - the snake tears are 'royt vi shpitsn brist'- and the effect of the wine is described in a dramatically erotic image:

Vet di libshaft in zayn muskl shpiln vi a meser.

Underlying the poem are the idea of magic (the aphrodisiac made from snake tears), and the anthropomorphic fusion of different realms of nature: for example, the poet attributes sweetness and the human emotion of love to the snake, which is normally associated with poison and death:

Zey veynen zeyer libshaft oys vi meydlekh
In di nekht.

The poem 'Libelid' too contains surprising elements which belie its conventional title. The first stanza uses the idea of love as a link in the chain which joins the individual to the divine: the images at the beginning of the poem place the love of the *ikh* in the context of the powerful forces of the universe, by equating the relationship between the woman he loves and - in a metonymic image - his tears, with that between fire and storm:

Dos fayer iz di froy fun shturem.
Di, vos ikh hob lib, -
Iz di froy fun mayne trern.

The next two lines link the tears with the divine:

Trern, vos farbindn
Mayn neshome mitn got Moari.

Thus through the images of the first stanza, the poet links elements of fire and water ('mayne trern'), linking the fire/storm image of the natural world, the relationship between man and woman, and the divine. The first stanza creates fusion between all these elements, ending, however, with an unexpected simile, in which the concept of the ox features in a bizarre image of love: the fusion with the divine through love is 'Vi di trit fun libe-oksn, vos farbindn mentshn.' The unexpectedness of this image leads into the total shock of the next words, which the poet addresses to the beloved:

Sheyne, hak mir op di hent,
Oyb zey veln toygn dir far oyringen in oyer.

A similar idea of mutilation occurs in an earlier poem about an ox, 'An oks in gelatetn karshnroyt' (PV2, p.152), but there the hand is eaten by the girl who is starving: so that, despite the shock of the macabre, the image conveys a desperate human situation and an intelligible idea of a human being's self-sacrifice for someone he loves. In 'Libelid', the very playfulness of the image adds to its gruesome quality and the bizarre combination of the frivolous (the earrings) with the violent (the idea of mutilation) produces the same atmosphere of 'shrek' which permeates the poetic universe evoked in the cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht'.

The last couplet produces a reconciliatory, loving mood:

Shenk mir, froy, dayn tsukunftiker groykayt,
Un kh'vel zikh freyen vos ikh bin a groyer.

The particular resonance of the term 'gro' as a symbol of mortality gives particular tenderness to the conceit of the lover

giving his beloved an extra share of beauty and vitality by willingly taking her mortality upon himself. It is a playful and touching variant of the idea of love bestowing immortality on the beloved.

Both these poems mirror the two main impulses in the poet's existential vision in this cycle: the 'shrek' inherent in the universe in which the human being is separated from the wild forces of nature and of the divine, and at the same time his striving towards union with these forces, which he is attempting to achieve through the poetic word.

The profoundest expression of synthesis between the human being and the forces of nature is achieved in two poems, 'Di shenste' and 'Dermonung fun a Zulu', by the combination of three motifs which feature in different variations throughout the cycle: the motif of 'aynshlingen' the image of eyes, and the regal wild beast, a tiger in one poem, a lion in the other. In 'Di shenste' (PV2, p.198) the poet seeks perfection in the form of the woman who is the epitome and source of all beauty:

Vilstu zen di froy vos keyner zet nit,
Un vos ir sheynkeyt
Shenkt zi ale froyen -

The path to this perfect woman is through metamorphosis on the part of the man, who must put on the disguise of a tiger, in order to be able to look into the eye of the tiger who has swallowed the woman:

Farshtel zikh far a tiger
Un kuk a mol arayn
In linken oyg fun shvartsn tiger.

Dortn lebt di froy di shenste,
Vos der tiger hot farshlungen.

Here again is the motif of absorption of one being into another: the perfect woman is only visible through the medium of

the tiger, just as in 'Dermonung fun a Zulu' sexual union between the lovers is made possible by their eating the eyes of the lion. Here the culmination of the desire for the perfect woman is described, ironically perhaps, in a very physical image of absorption:

Un zi tantst arayn in leber!

As elsewhere, the fleeting, capricious, desired ideal is expressed in terms of the dancer. We have seen the dance as a powerful image in various poems of Sutzkever: in the early 'Tantslid', in 'Sibir', and in 'Der tsirk'. The image of the dancer occurs as an expression of the longed-for perfect woman in another poem of this cycle, 'Oygnants', (PV2, p.177). In it, all that remains of the elusive woman are the eyes, which lure and tempt the hunter:

Zayn harts, a shvartser odler, tsit im vayter,-
Azoy baym Nilus
Tantsn ire oygn
Zalbe tsveyt...

In 'Ode tsu der toyb' the image of the dancer achieves its fullest and profoundest expression: the figure of the 'tentserin' is fused with the idea of pure poetry.

The image of the dancer therefore is part of Sutzkever's key imagery, and in 'Di shenste', as elsewhere, it symbolises the longed-for ideal: tantalisingly the woman dances in the eye of the tiger, the image of 'a blits in regn' further reinforcing the capricious transience of her appearance. The most important feature of this metamorphosis imagery is its cyclical nature: the ideal can only be attained through disguise, metamorphosis, fusion of the human being with the wild creature of the natural world. Only by disguising himself as a tiger can the *du* perceive the perfect woman, herself only visible through entering the

tiger. Since, furthermore, in looking into the eye of another creature, one sees the reflected image of oneself, the tiger's eye image is a variation of the Narcissus theme: fusion with the ideal is in fact fusion with the self, and this innermost layer of the image is in keeping with the essence of Sutzkever's poetry, the search for the *ikh* through the word.

In this poem the ideal is in the eye of the other. In the earlier poem 'Der novi' the ideal is achieved by the eye of the desired other being implanted in the eye of the *ikh*, and a fascinating variation of this theme is used in 'Dermonung fun a Zulu' (PV2, p.203), which in many ways is a counterpart to 'Di shenste': whereas in 'Di shenste', the human being strives for fusion with the ideal beloved who has entered into the wild creature and is reflected in its eye, in 'Dermonung fun a Zulu' the union of two lovers is achieved by their absorption of the eyes of the wild creature into themselves.

The underlying narrative of 'Dermonung fun a Zulu' is based on typical folk-tale material: central to it is the motif of the 'task', the hero's quest to bring back a particular prize to the bride's father as proof of his devotion and valour, before the father will allow the marriage to take place. A further motif is that of the talisman, consisting, significantly, of the eyes of the beloved which accompany the young man on his quest:

Un ihre oygn, tsvey flamingos
Hobn mikh bagleyt
Inevaynik, in di tseydn fun dzhungl.

The eyes/flamingos image is a further example of the fusion, throughout these erotic poems, of human elements with wild creatures through the flowing of one image into another. Similarly, the killing of the lion is achieved by fusion of man and crea-

ture: the strength of the lion flows into the man, so that he is able to kill the beast:

Biz vanen s'hot der leyb
Antliyen mir zayn makht
Im tsu bazign.

This is the voluntary submission of one elemental nature force (the lion) to another (man): the image is a further manifestation of the idea of creatures and elements flowing into each other.

The climax of the poem is the ceremonial eating of the lion's eyes, followed by the union of the lovers on the lion's pelt; and as the lion had allowed its power to flow into them, now the cycle is completed in the flowing of power from the lovers into the lion: through the energy generated by their union the dead lion is resurrected, and in turn is the source of their continuing passion, symbolised in their eternal ride on the lion's back:

Hobn mir azoy gelibt zikh,- az der toyter leyb
Iz lebedik gevorn un mit beydn oyfn kark
Antlofn in der fintsternish a fayerdik zehitster.
Di froy hot mikh gebisn: halt mikh shtark!
Un s'dakht zikh mir, az oyfn leyb mir raytn nokh biz
itster.

In this poem the characteristics of the erotic poems in the cycle are most powerfully exemplified: the wild paganism which the poet embraces as an intense new inspiration, the erotic as a fundamental element in the struggle for union with the forces of nature, and the achievement of that union through imagery in which metamorphosis of one force into another, and the flowing together of various elements of nature are the key factors.

We have seen that in some of the poems, for example 'Zelbstmordlid fun di Hereros', 'Gezang fun di kretsike', and

'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns', mortality and death are a manifestation of the indifference of the *deus absconditus*. The collection of poems in which death was also a predominant theme before 'Helfandn bay nakht' was of course 'Di festung', together with other poems which Sutzkever wrote during the war years. Whereas in the earlier poems the brutal spectre of death was an evil inflicted by man, here the poet's awareness of death grows out of its omnipresence in nature: it is the organic death and decay which are inseparable from life itself, and represents in 'Helfandn bay nakht' the third aspect of the poet's struggle to find harmony with the natural forces. Union with nature, union between man and woman, and the achievement of willing submission to death and decay are ways by which the human being can become integrated within the elemental forces of the universe. Some poems therefore take yearning for death as their theme. In 'Der eybiker', (PV2, p.192) the poet is fascinated by the figure of the very old man who is unable to die. He sees in him a mythical figure who represents *all* old men:

Zayn ponem -
 Vi ale skeynim, zind es lebn skeynim oyf der erd,
 Voltn im farmashknt erev toyt di kneytshn zeyere
 Tsuzamen mit di letste trern oysgeleyzt fun troyer.

The ancient, mythical quality of the 'eybiker' is evoked through the use here of three of the key-concepts of the cycle, - rain, the locust, and hell -, to describe him: he is '[...] elter funem regn,/ Elter funem heysherik,/ Elter funem genem'. Sutzkever develops the idea of his indestructibility by depicting the impotence of the normally powerful forces of nature: neither the fire nor the snake can help the old man to his desired death:

S'fayer vil im helfn -
 Dergreykht es nit zayn hoyt.
 Di brilnshlang vil helfn -
 Iz oysgevebt ir toyt.

The central image is paradoxical. A mythical human figure has been created who stands outside the natural cycle of life and death, and thus is apart from the whole of humanity. Whereas in other poems of the cycle, the inevitability of death and decay is one of the sources of the unease of the *ikh* in this wild environment, here the poet empathises with the torment of the old man who cannot find death. His empathy with the old man is evoked through the implied contrast between the dignity of the old man and the 'twittering' of the other human beings: 'Di mentshn do, vos tsvitshern vi feygl'.

In his plight the immortal is apart from the rest of humanity, and feared by them - except for the blind people, who are similarly estranged from human society, and are drawn to him, 'Vayl blinde vern zeevdik in roykh fun zayne blikn'.²⁴ This image can suggest magical powers on the part of the 'eybiker', or may be seen as a metaphor of the affinity between two types of outsider: the 'sight' of the blind can be interpreted as their perception of his feelings because like him they stand outside uncomprehending human society.

The idea of the immortal who longs for mortality, peace and oblivion exemplifies the idea of death as union between man and nature. It is significant that the creature who understands the plight of the immortal is '[...] di tigerin, / Vos lebt mit im

²⁴. The line has a biblical resonance entirely appropriate to the tone of the poem; cf. for example Isaiah 29.18: 'And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness' and Isaiah 35.5: 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.'

tsuzamen', because the tiger, like the other wild creatures already mentioned - the elephant and the ox - is a symbol of the elemental forces with which the poet longs to achieve harmony.

In the poem 'Der eybiker', integration with death is not achieved, but 'Oazis' (PV2, p.182) is a celebration of death, in which eternity is achieved through death itself. It is clear why from this point on the image of the oasis is important in Sutzkever's work: the tree, as we have seen, has always been a symbol of life in his poetry, with many biblical and Jungian overtones and the oasis, with its water and trees in the desert, is the most intense image of life and hope which can be imagined. In this poem, therefore, imagery of life and death are fused.

The Bantu tribesman has been bitten by a snake and lies dead at the oasis, the bones of his horse beside him; the creatures which prey on carrion do not touch him because of the poison in his body. At the climax of the poem he is carried off by a flock of golden birds. This tale is a vehicle for a complex poem in which key images from this cycle and from other poems of Sutzkever are brought together to achieve a symbolic resolution of the conflict between man and mortality. The poem is intensely visual, the colours being key points of the symbolism. Often the concrete becomes fused with the abstract, as in the image of the first line: 'A land vu beymer zeen oys bableterte khaloymes...'

The snake is the vehicle of death, and the violence of the man's death is suggested visually by the colour red, the idea of burning, and the motif of the tattoo:

Royte lipn brenen oyf zayn fus.
 Dos hot di shlang
 Tatuirt ir eyferzukht in sheynem Bantu-neger.

The erotic is also suggested here: the snake's deadly kiss is a passionate revenge - the snake (female) is jealous of the

beauty of the male. But as in the other poems in which it occurs, the image of the snake is a paradoxical one; it is the instrument of death, but at the same time the instrument of preservation: by means of its deadly poison the snake immortalises the victim. The poison 'farmirmlt zayne glider', and the man attains the eternity of a statue, 'a man fun shvartsn mirml', in contrast to the image of decay implicit in the 'milkhig-veyse beyner' of the horse. To emphasise the inviolable existence created by the man's death through poison, the poet introduces the crow and the hyena, which feed on carrion, and shows their impotence in the stanza which brings to a climax the first half of the poem:

S'kumt oys: der toyt iz mer keyn balebos nit oyf zayn
korbm
 Mitn pendzl kon er im nit opmoln oyf gro.
 Ver vet zikh farmestn mitn toytn Bantu-neger?
 S'hot moyre farn sam di shvartse kro.

The image in the second line of this quatrain must be seen in conjunction with the 'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns', where the snuffing out of the human beings by the whim of the God-figure is described thus:

Derlangst a bloz -
 Ot groen shoyt vi zalts di shvartse farbn.

The image in 'Oasis' is a triumphant reversal of this idea: the permanence of black marble which the death-bringing snake has created cannot be transformed into the insubstantial grey which represents extinction. The snake therefore is the death-bringer but at the same time the instrument of preservation and the death-destroyer.

The surrealism of the second half of the poem takes the theme beyond that of human life and death into the realm of poetry. Several images link the birds to the net of imagery which evokes poetry in Sutzkever's work, or which emanates from Jewish

tradition: the birds are golden - this, the fourth symbolic colour in the poem, either suggests life, as in the 'Ode tsu der toyb', where the 'Kinder, vi goldene feygl' are turned into skeletons by the devil, (PV2, p.169), or is associated with poetry, as in the motif of the *goldene pave*. The stress which Sutzkever places on the word by isolating it in one line, emphasises its symbolic quality:

Plutsem kumen yontevdike feygl in oasis.
 Goldene!
 Zey fliyen oyf a khasene atsind.
 Ruen op a vayl oyf di bableterte khaloymes,
 Klingen mit di hertselekh in shaynendiker midkayt,
 Shimern mit farbn, vos a mentsh iz zey nit vert,
 Stroyen on di fidelekh...

The full stop after 'oasis' creates a pause after which 'Goldene!' stands on its own, accentuated by the exclamation mark. Furthermore, the word 'yontevdik' is invested with a special significance in Sutzkever's poetry: in the poem 'Tsum kind', he called the snow, a symbol of poetic creativity, 'mayn ershtn yontev', and the word 'yontevdike' here carries echoes of the snow/yontev/poetry configuration from these earlier poems.

The birds are refreshing themselves at the oasis, which can be seen as a symbol of poetic inspiration. The lines describing them and their actions contain images suggestive of poetry. The supernatural colours suggest the poetic rainbow image, and the word 'klingen' in the delightful line: 'Klingen mit di herzelekh in shaynendiker midkeyt', is always associated with the poetic word or sound, as is the image of the fiddle ('Stroyen on di fidelekh...').

The fiddle image suggests, perhaps, the birds preening their tail feathers. In 'Baym shayter' in the *poeme* 'Sibir', a bird rises out of the darkness 'un zayn fidl brent' - both these images suggest the tails of the birds as fiddles, and in both,

the tail/fiddle is linked to the idea of poetry. Thus the climax of the poem - the carrying away of the dead man (who, through the poison of the snake has been transformed into a work of art, a statue, a 'man fun shvartsn mirml') - can be seen as his immortalisation through poetry. The birds take him to a wedding instead of a funeral; death is transformed into life, through poetry.

The poem 'Oazis' evokes through its complex allusive imagery a symbolic triumph of life and poetry over death, and the transformation of death into permanent existence. It is a poem of fusion, in that the transfiguration of the dead man is accomplished by his being united with death: his body has absorbed the snake-poison, which brings death, but through death, immortality. In the poem 'Tsu a tiger', the poet investigates the missed opportunity to achieve just such a transfiguration for himself, through fusion with death.

It has been noted that very few poems in this cycle, compared to both earlier and later poetry of Sutzkever, have the *ikh* at their centre. 'Tsu a tiger' (PV2, p.226) is one of those, and as the final poem in the cycle it must be accorded special attention; this fact, and the central position of the *ikh* in the poem, suggest that it is thematically important within the cycle.

The poem is a retrospective evocation of a meeting between the *ikh* and a tiger in the wilderness, and evokes the moment of recognition between two creatures who are strange to each other:

Mir hobn plutsem zikh derzen. Di tseyt iz nit gevorn.
 Host bavakht dem toyer fun gan-edn.
 Iber dir tsvey vaserfaln -
 Shtromendike fligl.

The first line evokes the extraordinary nature of the experience: it is a moment of mutual recognition²⁵ which annihilates time. The poet equates the tiger with the angel guarding the gates of paradise, the waterfall/wings effecting the transformation of one image into another. The *ikh*, as Adam, is barred from entering paradise by the guardian, a fusion of tiger and angel.

In the second stanza the *ikh* gives expression to his feeling of affinity with the wild animal, in his cry of 'bruder!', but at the same time the angel image still lingers, in the hint of the fiery sword, which is evoked here by the paradoxical 'fayerdike mildkeyt':

Bruder! Host mayn blik fun shvern blay
Tsheshmoltsn in dayn fayerdiker mildkayt.

Here the image of fire is linked to the fiery sword of the angel of Genesis, but also to the contradictory epithet of mildness. The creation of images based on the reconciliation of opposites is a characteristic aspect of Sutzkever's search for fusion, and here the paradoxical union of 'fayerdike mildkeyt' highlights the mingled emotions of terror and tenderness which the tiger inspires in him. This conflict reaches its climax in the next four lines of the poem; fear prevents the *ikh* allowing himself to enter an unknown, unimaginable realm of experience:

Pakhdones hot mir opgeton a shpitsl,-
Nit derlozn dayne lipn zoln mikh farzukhn.

In this vision, the motifs of fusion, of metamorphosis and of 'aynshlingn' are taken to an extreme which they had previously not attained in Sutzkever's poetry: the urge for fusion leads the *ikh* to imagine a metamorphosis of himself into the tiger, even if this fusion means annihilation. In the erotic paganism of this

²⁵. The difference between 'zen' and 'derzen' is the difference between simple sight and recognition or perception.

vision can be seen echoes of the *Liebestod* - climax of the story of Tristan and Isolde, even of the orgasmic death of Achilles by the teeth of Penthesilea, but whereas in these two examples the ecstatic death takes place, here the *ikh* draws back from the final experience:

Tsu shpet. Ikh bin fun dir dervaytert
 Tsen toyznt mayl.
 Tsurik tsum vort dem oysterlish nit-zatn.

Un khotsh mir zenen beyde fray - geyen mir in kratn.

After the ecstatic vision of union, sadness and heaviness can be felt in the slow ponderous accented syllables of the 'Tsu shpet' and 'Tsen toyznt mayl.'

As is so often the case in his metapoetic poems, Sutzkever creates an image, and then applies it to a statement about the *ikh*: in 'Helfandn bay nakht' we have observed this technique in the poem 'In onheyb', where, having described the creation of the first man by the union of elephant tusk and rainbow, he draws a parallel between the first man and himself. Here he equates his word with the tiger: whereas absorption by the tiger/angel would have, by implication, meant entry into the paradise which the tiger guarded, and thus would have signified total fulfilment, and the achievement of perfection, the word is voracious, and demands constant nourishment from him ('dem oysterlish nit-zatn'). The glorious fulfilment through union with the tiger, - the embodiment of the elemental forces in this African experience - is thwarted by the demands of the *word*. At the end of the cycle his feelings about his return to his normal environment are ambivalent: he has rejected the complete *Auflösung* of the self into the universe which could have meant entry into Paradise. Instead he is reclaimed by the word.

The final line of the poem is ambiguous. The *ikh* and the tiger are both prisoners: the tiger held captive, perhaps, by his role of guardian angel at the gates of Paradise, and the *ikh*, though 'free' in the sense of having escaped being devoured by the tiger, is the prisoner of his word, enslaved by the word's demand for nourishment from him.

In this final poem of the cycle, therefore, the poet seems to draw back at a decisive moment from the power of the wild elemental forces of life and death which, throughout the whole cycle, have exerted on him a fascination born of mingled horror and overwhelming attraction, and instead of fusing himself totally with them in a kind of ecstatic *Liebestod*, he withdraws back to the word, by which, however, he feels himself to be imprisoned.

This is a fascinating but puzzling conclusion. Normally Sutzkever's overriding faith in his word is the cornerstone of his poetry and of his very existence, though there are occasions on which he speaks with bitterness or disparagement of the written word (as in 'Farbrente perl' or 'Verter', for example). Before it can be assumed, however, that the conclusion of the cycle is a rejection of the poetic word, it is essential to consider the other poems in 'Helfandn bay nakht' which deal overtly with the poetic experience.

It is significant, but not surprising, that, as in the collection 'In fayer-vogn', there are few poems in this cycle devoted to the theme of poetry in itself, for the poems are an exploration of the often overwhelming new feelings and experiences which leaves little room for the reflective analytical element underlying all Sutzkever's poems on poetry. It is clear however, that each new experience acts very directly upon

Sutzkever's view of the poetic word and his role as a poet. In the poems of this cycle where he does examine the act of creation, it is, as we have seen in the case of 'Oazis', in terms of myths and imagery arising out of the African environment, which give a particular intensity to these poems.

In 'Di kunst fun tatuirn' (PV2, p.189), the *ikh* speaks in the guise of the tattoo-artist, who tattoos with a snake tooth. As in 'Libshaft' and 'Oazis', the ambivalent image of the snake is used in a way which combines its awesome deadly power with ideas of love and the vanquishing of death. Underlying this poem is the idea of metamorphosis. The tattooist's colours have supernatural power:

Kolirn zenen libshaftn. Kolirn
Zenen trern funem got Mazambi.

The colours, the tears of the God, which the tattooist puts into the body of the other person ('Kon in layb araynlozn kolirn/ Di trern funem groysn got Mazambi') have a magical, transforming power. Love for the child tattooed on her body takes away the blind woman's blindness:

A blinder froy, me hot gemuzt zi firn,
Hob ikh oysgetatuirt a kind.
Un mit a mol: - di magiye fun kolirn! -
S'iz di blind-geboyrene nit blind.

In this image the poet's words of stanza two - 'Kolirn zenen libshaftn'- are realised. In the second image the picture of a king tattooed on the shadow of a dead king springs to life - the shadow becomes the reality:

In dem shotn fun a toytn kinig
Hob ikh oysgetatuirt a kinig.
Un der shotn iz gevorn kinig!

The originality of this image is the way in which Sutzkever takes the theme of the artistic creation springing to life (familiar from the Pygmalion myth and the Jewish *golem* theme),

and makes it more paradoxical yet, for the metamorphosis comes about by the fusion of two irreconcilable concepts: the tattooist creates a visual image on something completely insubstantial, the shadow of the dead king - a shadow is in itself insubstantial, the shadow of a person who no longer exists draws the image even further from the physical realm - and the power of the colours is such that the shadow becomes the living, flesh-and-blood king. The tattooist, through the divine power of the colours, can effect metamorphosis and resurrection: the blind become seeing, the shadow becomes physical reality.

It is clear that by substituting the *word* for the colours, the poem becomes an allegory of the power of poetry. The words/colours are divine, in that they are the god's tears. The poet/tattooist is the instrument of creating the image on behalf of that divine force, and of infusing the human being with the divine (by injecting the tears of the god into that person's body). In the creative, transforming power of the word/colour, there is a conception of poetry which is in harmony with the faith in the poetic word which Sutzkever achieved in the poetry of the ghetto years and the early years in Israel. In the new environment the poet finds material with which to create new images to express the metapoetic theme.

In 'Der shvartser kinig' (PV2, p.190) tears are again a central image: here they are not the tears of a God but of a mortal. The king's grief at his own, and humanity's mortality is expressed by his tears and his words. The tears are gathered in a sea shell by his magician,²⁶ and his words are written on a board

²⁶. The 'kishef-makher' recurs as an image of the poet in a later poem:

'Vu zenen zey di liblingen fun zumer: yinglekh, meydlekh,
Mit ziser zind vos hot nit moyre far keyn shum gan-eydn?
Farzigt iz dos retenish, der sod iz umbasheydlekh,
Nor ikh, der kishef-makher, vel dos retenish basheydn.'

by his scribe. When the shell is overflowing, the king dies, but he is survived by the poems which have flowed from his tears:

Der shvartser kinig veynt nit mer.
Itst veynen zayne lider.

As in the previous poem, the power and eternity of the word has not changed; the images are taken from the new environment, and there is internal consistency in the imagery. The feeling remains in these two poems, however, that the images have been used as a conscious metaphorical vehicle for a restatement of Sutzkever's poetic credo. Unlike his greatest metapoetic poems, there is no sense of oneness between image and reality, no feeling that through the image the poet creates a new poetic reality. One poem in the cycle, however, where the fusing of image and perception does occur most effectively is 'A meteor in midber Kalahari' (PV2, p.181). Here the word is described as dead: Sutzkever speaks of 'mayne beynik-toyte verter'. Life is given back to the word in a moment of ecstatic experience, where the boundaries between the *ikh* and the infinite disappear.

The poem should be considered in conjunction with the ninth poem of 'Ode tsu der toyb'.²⁷ In the latter, the climax of the poet's search for harmony with his poetic word is achieved when a 'shteyn-meteor' falls to earth. Just as the trees in the oasis are reified dreams - 'bableterte khaloymes'-, so the meteor is a reified star: in the concept of the meteor the poet is able to touch the star which has always been one of the images of the essence of poetry. The meteor in 'Ode tsu der toyb' is 'Ful mitn

(Ts-b, p.188)

²⁷. The poem 'A meteor in midber Kalahari' probably antedates the ninth poem of 'Ode tsu der toyb'. The former was first published in Di goldene keyt no.12 in 1952, and 'Ode tsu der toyb' in no.19, in 1954.

reyekh fun shtern', and the 'meteor in Midber Kalahari' has 'shternblut' flowing through it.

The same metapoetic significance is attached to both images of the meteor. In the poem in 'Helfandn bay nakht', the meteor, which is synonymous with 'odern fun shtilkeyt', is the poet's pillow:

Mir tsukopns - odern fun shtilkayt. Mir tsukopns -
 A brustik veykher meteor, vos heybt zikh
 In ritem fun der veltbashafung. Heybt zikh, falt un rizlt
 Arayn zayn shternblut in mayne beynik-toyte verter.

Since the concept of *shtilkayt* has been found to denote the realm beyond words which is the essence of poetry, the use of this term immediately signals the metapoetic theme.

In contrast to the 'shteyn-meteor' of 'Ode tsu der toyb', the meteor in this poem is imbued with the sensual qualities which permeate the universe of 'Helfandn bay nakht'; it is in complete harmony with all creation, rising and falling like a breathing body. The poet's words are a dead skeleton into which the meteor breathes new life - 'zayn shternblut'. Here too is an echo of the vision of Ezekiel who witnesses a pile of dry bones brought to life by being breathed on by the spirit of God;²⁸ the poet's dead words are animated by the spirit of poetry.

In the second stanza the poet sees a deep affinity between himself and the meteor: both have wandered into this alien environment, and they warm and give life to each other:

O vunderlekher shteyn, du host farblondzhet
 Azoy vi ikh in midber Kalahari. [...]
 Tsum ershtn mol derfilstu gli fun mentsh
 Un ikh barir tsum ershtn mol di glider fun a geyst.

This paradoxical concept of 'di glider fun a geyst' reflects Sutzkever's characteristic mingling of the abstract and the con-

²⁸. Ezekiel 37.

crete. The poet feels the presence of the essence of poetry, and in the last stanza complete fusion is achieved between the *ikh* and the poetic word. After a humorous image in which the poet knocks on the meteor and a door is opened, he describes

A regn oyf klavishn.
 Mayne lipn tsiyen zikh farlibte -
 Un keyner iz shoyn mer nito tsevishn.

The musical connotations of the 'regn oyf klavishn' accord with the prevalence of musical terms as images of poetry throughout Sutzkever's work. The recurrent metapoetic image of lips here has the particular sensuality which pervades the whole cycle: the image of the *ikh* penetrating and achieving union with the essence of poetry is both sexual and mystical.

In 'Di kunst fun tatuirn', 'Der shvartser kinig', and 'A meteor in midber Kalahari', Sutzkever transposes his search for the essence of poetry to the African milieu. In these three poems, and in 'Oazis' as in the poems on love and death, he achieves a delicate balance between harmony and terror, and a reaffirmation of the transforming power of the poetic word. There is, however, an element of doubt: in 'A meteor in midber Kalahari' fulfilment comes through a kind of mystical union with the spirit of poetry, whereas in the poem 'Tsu a tiger', the final poem in the cycle, the implication of the imagery is different. Ecstatic union is to be achieved through allowing the self to be annihilated by the tiger, in other words through complete and absorption into the savage elemental forces of nature, death and decay - and the poet draws back from this,²⁹ and

²⁹. It will be remembered that in the early poem 'Geshrey' (PV1, p.83), the *ikh* also drew back at the last moment from complete diffusion of the self into nature, and demanded his own form and separate identity.

returns, disappointed, to the demands of his voracious word,
which imprisons him:

Tsurik tsum vort, dem oysterlish nit-zatn.
Un khotsh mir zenen beyde fray - geyen mir in kratn.

It cannot be overlooked that the last words in the cycle express an unresolved conflict between the pull of the primordial forces which demand total submission, and the return to the demands of poetry and the 'normal' world: at the end of the cycle the tension between the *ikh* and the universe which underlies the whole cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht' is still unresolved.

It is also clear that the word 'pantheism' cannot be unreservedly applied to the *Weltanschauung* of these poems; there is duality of vision: on the one hand the divine appears to have estranged itself from creation, and the overwhelming impression which the African environment exerts on the poet is of an indifferent, capricious *deus absconditus*, sporting with human destiny. At the same time the poet perceives the divine in poetry, which can overcome the cruel forces of this universe. This could be seen as a new pantheism, influenced by the poetic mythology which Sutzkever creates on the basis of his impressions of African culture and environment. Within this conception the idea of fluidity and metamorphosis is crucial: all elements flow into each other, and can be transformed into each other - this fluidity of all entities is expressed more and more vividly by Sutzkever in his later poetry.

The cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht' represents a distinct turning point, and should be considered together with 'Ode tsu der

toyb'.³⁰ Together the two represent a turning from the supremacy of *ayndruk*, to an increasing *oysdruk*: in 'Helfandn bay nakht', the impression of the environment on the poet is still predominant, but through the African experience, and the reworking of the past in 'Griner akvariyum' comes freedom from the omnipresence of the past. With this comes liberty to explore more aesthetic concerns, and the transition to a more private mode, the expression of the poet's own inner world.

In this process the poem 'A meteor in Midber Kalahari' is an important landmark; the net of images in this poem is hermetic, with its own internal logic, and proceeds out of the imagination of the poet without apparent reference to external reality. It heralds the beginning of the movement from *ayndruk* to *oysdruk*, that is to say, from the impact of the universe on the poet, to the creation of complex personal myths and images to express inner perceptions - they are the beginning of the new aestheticism in Sutzkever's work. This process of transition can be most clearly seen in 'Ode tsu der toyb'.

³⁰. Some of the poems which formed the collection 'Helfandn bay nakht' were first published in numbers 12, 13 and 14 of *Di goldene keyt*, in 1952, and others in number 21, in 1955. 'Ode tsu der toyb' first appeared in number 19 of the journal, in 1954. It is clear therefore Sutzkever was working on both projects during the same period.

CHAPTER 9

'Ode tsu der toyb': a climax.

From almost the beginning of his poetic creativity Sutzkever showed a strong predilection for longer, usually narrative poems, called in Yiddish *poemes*. Among these, 'Sibir' and 'Ode tsu der toyb' (PV2, pp.165-174) are the only two which have the theme of poetry and the poetic vocation at their core. The other major *poemes*, 'Kol-Nidre', 'Geheymstot', 'Tsu Poyln' and 'Gaystike erd' are inspired by the emotional and moral questions arising out of the Holocaust and the poet's settling in Israel. 'Ode tsu der toyb' brings to a climax the work of Sutzkever's earlier period. It has been called a *khezhbm-hanefesh*, a spiritual account or stocktaking, and a *vegslup*, a signpost pointing in a new direction.¹ The ode looks backward over the stages and problems of the past; it is as if, having attained inner freedom through the two sources of inspiration, Israel and Africa, the poet has to assure himself finally, by asking himself probing questions, that he is morally justified in believing in his poetic vocation, and that he has the right to pursue, untroubled, the aesthetic quest for beauty which has never ceased to underlie his poetic inspiration.

Critics have been unanimous in praising 'Ode tsu der toyb', and many illuminating comments have been made. Most of the emphasis has been on the form of the work: the classical harmony and the beauty of the imagery, and on the theme of the poetic muse. Yudi Mark notes that this work brings out most clearly

¹. Novershtern, Catalogue, p.186, and Litvine, Yikhes, p.124.

Sutzkever's inner affinity with the ideas of the *Inzikhistn*:

Avrom Sutskever, vos me ken mit fuln rekht im onrufn
inzikhist in ale zayne shafung-tkufes, vayl der iker iz
eygntlekh nit dos vos di khushim gibn im, nor vos er git
tsu, vos er iz moysef fun zikh. Do vayter hobn mir verk fun
an inzikhist par-ekselans [...] Di poeme 'Ode tsu der toyb'
iz a min deklarirn zayn inzikhizm.²

This comment applies to Sutzkever's work in general what
Litvine ascribes to the period *beginning with* 'Ode tsu der
toyb', namely the predominance of *oysdruk* rather than *ayndruk*.

Avrom Regelson sees the subject of the *poeme* as 'a shtiler
shmues tsvishn dikhter un zayn muze [...] a shmues un a vide, un
a khezhhm mit der velt',³ but despite his use of the latter two
terms he does not seem to perceive any inner conflict in the
work. The tension and conflict which underlies all poetry is com-
mented on by Mordkhe Litvine, who compares Sutzkever to
Baudelaire, in the manner in which both poets impose order on
chaos:

Avrom Sutskever der poet gehert tsu yene yekhide-zgule, vos
dos farheltenish tsvishn der makhtiker vizionerishkeyt un
dem nit veyniker shtarkn klor-furemdikn seykh, tsvishn der
khaotisher tifenish un der sheynkeyt-geberndiker ordenung iz
bay im in glaykhvog.⁴

This general comment on Sutzkever can be applied particu-
larly to 'Ode tsu der toyb', as Litvine's essay makes clear.

None of the critics, however, has analysed the ode in any
detail in order to examine the structure of the whole, or the
tensions and conflicts and their resolution, which is the inner
dynamic of the work. The general comments and particular insights

2. Yudl Mark, Avrom Sutskevers poetisher veg, (Tel-Aviv, 1974)
p.58.

3. Avrom Regelson 'Ode tsu der toyb', in Yoyvl, pp.105-109,
(p.105).

4. M. Litvine, Yikhes, p.126.

made by Novershtern, Regelson, Litvine and Mark need to be set more specifically against the text of 'Ode tsu der toyb'.

This is true in particular of the interesting essay by Shloyme Bikl,⁵ who talks about the 'plastishkeyt' of the imagery, and, like Regelson, puts the emphasis not on the inner struggle in the *poeme*, but on the aesthetic theme of the muse, and the beauty and harmony of the language:

Di magik fun di vortkolirn un di raykhe muzikalische nyuansirtkeyt fun di fersn makhn farshtendlekh un bazinen di tsen lider fun der poeme 'Ode tsu der toyb', vos zenen gezangvariatsyes oyf dem motiv fun dem dikhters muze tsu zayne fertsik yor.

The most productive aspect of Bikl's essay is his initial very tentative and almost apologetic characterisation of poetic styles:

S'iz haynt efsher nit in der mode tsu kharakterizirn dos gemit fun poeten in di terminen fun Helenizm un Hebreizm.⁶

Whether in fashion or not, these terms open up fruitful lines of research in the case of Sutzkever. Though he does not enlarge on what he understands by 'Hebreizm', it can be surmised that by this term Bikl means poetry in which the predominant inspiration is the poet's Jewish consciousness, his awareness of all the dimensions of Jewish culture and history; poetry in which the underlying dynamic is tension between flesh and spirit, the human and the divine, this world and *yene velt*. In this case it is clear that in his first period, particularly from the war years until 'Ode tsu der toyb', Sutzkever *is* a poet of 'Hebreizm'; his awareness of the *goldene keyt* of Jewish tradition deepens all the time during this period, as does his immersion in

⁵. Shloyme Bikl, Di brokhe fun sheynkeyt, (Tel-Aviv, 1969), pp.13-19.

⁶. Bikl, Brokhe, p.13.

the images of the *Tanakh*, and the symbolism of the land of Israel. At an even deeper level, the intensity of his belief in the word, in his case the poetic word, has already been characterised in this study as part of his essentially Jewish nature; furthermore, the tension between the aesthetic and the ethical demands which he feels within him and expresses in the earlier poetry can also be defined as part of his 'Hebreizm'. Where this study parts company with Bikl is in the assessment of the application of the terms 'Hebreizm' and 'Helenizm' to 'Ode tsu der toyb'. It can be argued that the essential theme of the *poeme* is the struggle between the two impulses - the Jewish past with the ethical demands and the spiritual burdens imposed by the poet's and his people's history - and the impulse towards the aesthetic, towards the realm of pure beauty; the outcome of the ode is the achievement of balance and harmony between these two poetic tendencies.

Bikl, however, concentrates on the relevance of the idea of Hellenism with respect to this work, applying it particularly to the poet's pursuit of beauty which Bikl sees as the core of the *poeme*:

In Avrom Sutskevers poetishn verk 'Ode tsu der toyb', tsu velkhn es iz pasik, vi ikh gleyb, ontsuvendn dem termin Helenizm, kumt dos grikhishe gemit tsum oysdruk in der ode, kh'meyn: in dem shtendikn shir-hashirim tsu der sheynkeyt.⁷

It is important to consider whether the term Hellenism can be used of this poem, especially with respect to the form and the language of the work. Certainly the concept of the ode does evoke the idea of the classical tradition. The origins of this poetic genre can be found in Greek poetry, in the odes of Sappho and Pindar, and in the Latin poetry of Horace.

⁷. *ibid.*

In his book The Ode, John Jump points out the impossibility of arriving at a comprehensive definition of the ode, but he emphasises certain characteristics of the modern use of this classical term:

[...] In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the word has been used to refer to lyrical poems which, originating in personal impulses, rise to the presentation of general ideas of some gravity and substance. Many of these poems are of moderate length and are fairly elaborate in structure and in style. Many of them take the form of addresses, though this is now less common than it was when the Classical influence was more potent. Poems which possess some but not all of these attributes may still be acceptably termed odes.⁸

It is clear that with respect to form and content the term 'ode' is extremely suitable for Sutzkever's work. In modern times Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, Mörike and some of the French Romantic poets have used the ode form, as well as the English Romantics Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth, and in the twentieth century Verlaine and Paul Valéry (a poet greatly admired by Sutzkever). It is to be assumed that by using this form Sutzkever was deliberating associating himself with a long classical tradition.

The use of the dactylic hexameter also reinforces the classical atmosphere of the work. The basic element of each line is the dactyl, the line ends with a trochee, and has a caesura in the middle, which creates a secondary emphasis on a particular word in each line. The predominance of the dactyl and the regularity of the metrical pattern throughout, give a stately rhythm to the *poeme*. Greek and Latin verse was quantitative rather than stress-based, but modern Classicists have used this or similar metrical patterns in a rhythmical fashion, in imitation of Clas-

⁸. John D. Jump, The Ode, (London, 1974), p.59.

sical forms,⁹ and it is doubtless by modern neo-classical verse that Sutzkever has been influenced.

The term 'ode' is derived from the Greek verb meaning 'to sing', and music is an important symbol in the *poeme*. It is not just a symbol, however. The idea of a piece of music is a fruitful starting point for consideration of the structure of the poem. Sutzkever's ode is not a monotonously flowing stream, but has a very clear inner form. In the first four poems the main themes and images are introduced and established. This is the introduction. After this come, in the poems five to seven, three crises, where new motifs are introduced: and each crisis finds a resolution at the end of the poem, so that each of these three poems ends on a note of tranquillity, with the repetition of one or more key motifs: the three poems show a parallel movement, rising to a climax and ebbing to a peaceful close. The third phase encompasses the eighth and ninth poems, where there is a hesitation, a retarding of the overall forward movement of the ode, in the form of an avalanche of questions, encompassing old and new motifs and images, which mounts to a climax, until, at the end there is the finale, a triumphant affirmation of the all-embracing power of poetry.

The last poem has the function of a kind of epilogue. The mood of this poem is one of serene beauty, which can indeed be called Hellenistic, if this term is taken to mean the harmonious, balanced beauty, and the unity of theme and form which classical art strives to achieve.

⁹. Goethe's 'Hermann und Dorothea' (1797), for example, uses exactly the same metre as Sutzkever's 'Ode tsu der toyb':

'Hab ich den Markt und die Straßen doch nie so einsam
gesehen!

Ist doch die Stadt wie gekehrt! Wie ausgestorben! Nicht
fünfzig [...]'

The first poem depicts the poet's earliest encounter with his muse, during his childhood, and it reintroduces several motifs which had great importance in the *poeme* 'Sibir'. In the earlier *poeme* a dove born in the dovecot in the poet's Siberian home evolved into the image of the poet's muse. From then on the dove has been a constant symbol of the muse, and is inseparable from the childhood experiences in Siberia, where- as Sutzkever has said - he became a poet. 'Ode tsu der toyb' begins with the same motifs of childhood, but their transformation is highly significant. Sutzkever's childhood experience has been elevated and given wider significance in the first lines of the poem:

Zeltn, a mol in der kindhayt, bavayzt zikh kolirik un
blendik
 Unter di shtern a malakh, zayn nign vet nokhshpiln shtendik.
 Hot zikh bavizn - antrunen oyf jener zayt veltishn geder,
 Ibern heymishn koymen a simen gelozn - a feder.

The phrase 'mayn kindheyt' of 'Sibir' has become a generalised statement about childhood ('Zeltn, a mol in der kindheyt'), and the 'ikh' of the earlier work here becomes in the second stanza 'a yingl'. The coming of the dove has been elevated to a spiritual, almost magical event: the dove is not an ordinary bird which emerges from an egg, as in 'Sibir' but a transfigured angel, a dove born from the feather of an angel's wing: metamorphosis, which is such an important element of the contemporaneous cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht' is here a key motif in his conception of the birth of his muse. From the beginning the dove/muse is furnished with permanent Sutzkeverian symbols of poetry: it is 'kolirik' and has a 'nign'. The identity of his muse with an angel establishes right at the beginning of the poem the element of holiness in his poetic mission.

This image also embodies a very common folklore motif: the child saves the dove from death, and the dove rewards him with a gift:

Vaser matone farlangstu, nor shlog zikh nit lang mit der
 Efsher dem sod fun mayn vayskayt, an eybikn shney, a kameye?
deye,

In many folk-tales the hero shows mercy towards a dumb animal, which then reveals its power of speech, and rewards its rescuer with a gift, often magic equipment, or wishes.

The boy's answer to the offer of a gift establishes the definite identity of the dove as the poet's muse:

Entfert der yingl biglufn: mayn libinke, bin ikh dir
 Kum, as a mol kh'vel dikh rufn in regn in shney un in
tayer,
fayer.

It is noteworthy first of all that the muse rewards him with her presence because of a good deed which he has done; poetic inspiration is thus seen as being indissolubly connected with moral worth. Second, the word 'biglufn' indicates the Dionysian element in poetic inspiration, the opposite of which, the Apollonian, (the 'seykhl') is an important motif later in the poem. Both elements are constantly present in Sutzkever's poetry, and the tension between them is one of the basic elements of 'Ode tsu der toyb'.

The last line of the first poem brings together the three elements of nature which have an important symbolic function throughout Sutzkever's metapoetic poetry: rain, snow, and fire. Their already established symbolic colouring emphasises the dove's identity as the muse in the first poem of the ode.

The second poem describes the process of poetic creation itself. The poet claims the gift which the dove promised him, her

presence, in order to be able to create a word. The image of creation is very important, because through it Sutzkever expresses a fundamental element of his *Weltanschauung*:

Klangen in lipn gefangen, vi perl in yamike shleser,
Shtumen shoy n toyzenter yorn, un iber der shtumkayt - a
meser.'

The sounds, or inchoate words, already existed *before* the poet was born; this idea of the eternal and quintessential word, which is waiting for the redeeming moment, in order to be born in the form of a human word, is a climactic development of Sutzkever's quasi-mystical belief in the eternity of the word which has already been explored in a variety of images: the grains of wheat which sprout after a thousand years ('Kerndlekh vayts' PV1, p.289) the 'farshotene briliyantn' in his spirit ('Di sharfe lipn' PV1, p.365), the 'blishtshendiker yoder' of the plum (PV2, p.159). The search to express this eternal Word, whose true identity is 'shtilkeyt', by clothing it in human words, intensifies from this point on and becomes one of the main themes of Sutzkever's later poetry.

The simile 'vi perl in yamike shleser' is a fusion of old and new motifs, which provides a very interesting example of Sutzkever's poetic technique: namely, his creation of a net of images which develop or fuse with new motifs, creating a new image, which deepens the concept or explores new ground, but still contains echoes of the original image. As early as the 1940s, pearls were a metaphor for the poetic word. In 'Farbrente perl' (PV1, p.323) for example, the poet's ethical and aesthetic problem of maintaining his faith in the value of the word in the face of the events of the Holocaust is evoked by comparing his word to the charred pearls round the neck of a victim:

[...] dayne klangen glimtsern

Vi farbrente perl
Nokh an oysgetsanktn shayter.

The motif of lips which long for redemption from their dumbness, is a basic element of the poem-cycle 'A briv tsu di grozn' (PV2, p.155). The cycle, as we have seen, is thematically a kind of forerunner of 'Ode tsu der toyb', and includes several of the images which also occur in the ode to explore the nature of poetry, for example the grasses, the crickets, the dancer, snow, the dove, and the lips:

Di lipn kniyen farn vort dem opgezundertn un monen:
Halmay gelozn undz aleybn, mir zoln zingen mer nit
konen? (PV2, p.157)

In this poem of the cycle 'A briv tsu di grozn', the longing remains unfulfilled, but in the second poem of the ode, the lips achieve the object of their desire - the word. The third element of the image is the sea, which by this time has developed into an important metapoetic image, often having a symbolic connection with poetic creation, as for example in the poem 'Di neshome fun yam' (PV2, p.37):

Di neshome fun yam iz farshtelt far a perl
In shtil-tsayt [...]
Men darf ober zayn vi der yam,
Di neshome fun yam tsu derhern.

The pearl (the word) is the outer covering, the 'disguise' of the soul of the sea, which, like the essence of poetry, is stillness. Thus the image in the first two lines of the second poem of 'Ode tsu der toyb' is many faceted, echoing and combining images from other poems, to give the new idea of the true essence of poetry as an entity existing before and independently of the poet, waiting to be released from its imprisonment by the human word through which it can be made perceptible.

The dove's kiss allows the knife to cut through the 'shtumkayt' and release the words. 'Shtumkayt' is the state of

non-being' of poetry, the state of potentiality, before the release of the word; 'di shtumkayt - tseshnitn fun meser' signifies the birth of the word¹⁰. It is a violent birth, and in 'Ode tsu der toyb' there are two further images where the poetic process is described in terms of captive words waiting to burst out of their prison. They are both in the third poem, the image of the volcano where the poetry is 'farziglt in bronzene tifn', and the 'karshn, farmoyert in beymer'- these three images evoke the potential power and enormous energy of the word.

The climax of the second poem comes in the last stanza, where a line of poetry is created: and the fact that Sutzkever chooses this particular line as a paradigm reveals his poetic *credo*; the words embody his belief in the unity of all created entities, in the *goldene keyt* of the generations, and in the vocation of the poet, who contains within himself all past generations:

'Ale vos endikn lebn farzeyen in mir zeyer gvure?'

The question mark here is puzzling, but would make sense if it were placed *outside* the quotation marks: the first two lines of the fourth stanza would then read:

Ver hot farshikert di finger, zey zoln bashafn di
shure:
'Ale vos endikn lebn farzeyen in mir zeyer gvure?'

The question would thus refer to the *origin* of the line, but the statement made in the created line would read, as it should do, not as a matter of doubt but as a triumphant affirmation of the poet's faith.

¹⁰. The origin of this image is surely the father cutting bread with his 'rakhmimdikn meser' in the hut in Siberia; the father and his fiddle-music having been Sutzkever's earliest inspiration, the link between the two knife images seems to add an extra allusive image of the father's influence to this later image of poetic creation.

The cricket here is a negative image of immobility and imprisonment. Later, in the second poem of 'A briv tsu di grozn', this connection between the cricket and the concept of time is used as the starting point for the poet's transcendental questioning:

Nor velkhe hant,
A shteyger,
Hot ongedreyt di griln vi a zeyger nokh a zeyger?

The answer which the mysterious 'umbakanter' gives the questioner raises the cricket into the realm of Sutzkever's metapoetic imagery:

S'iz di zelbe kishefdike hant,
Vos dreyt dir on di verter, di gefiln.
Di zelbe hant far dikhter un far griln.

In 'Ode tsu der toyb', the former negative image has been triumphantly transformed into an image of creativity, which evokes the progress of the *ikh* from despair to hope, and the image is deepened by the history of its evolution.

The crickets here are a metaphorical image, but within this metaphor there is a simile: 'griln, *vi shusterlekh*' (my italics). The second layer creates the comparison: if the crickets are shoemakers, then the grasses are their nails, and the brow of the poet is the shoe. But since 'A briv tsu di grozn', grasses have been established as a permanent symbol of poetry; thus through the double layered imagery of 'griln'/'shusterlekh', 'grozn'(nails) and 'shtern'(shoe) a new dimension is created: the ambivalent nature of poetic creation is evoked. The poetic act is linked to elements of nature, (crickets and grasses), but also to the idea of violence and pain: the nails being hammered into the poet's head. The originality of the image lies also in the fact that it fuses two elements which are entirely opposite in their qualities: from soft, pliable grasses he creates hard nails. This

Another motif which becomes more and more important in later years as a vehicle for existential ideas, is the mirror: ' - taybele, host mir geshonken a bletl papir vi a shpigl [...]'. Here the sheet of paper on which he will write his poem is seen as the mirror of the poet. The mirror began as a positive symbol: the water of the pond in the early poem 'Arum ozyeres' reflected the true *ikh*, but the image took on a traumatic colouring in connection with the Holocaust. The mirror was the horrific central image in 'Oytportret', and was also important in 'Erev mayn far-brenung', when the *ikh* saw his face in the water. In the latter two poems the mirrored self was a grotesque monster, reflecting the guilt which he felt - now, in 'Ode tsu der toyb', the poet seems to see the piece of paper as a mirror which reflects the true self expressed in poetry. Thus the self-horror expressed by the image in the two post-Holocaust poems has been redeemed. The mirror remains a permanent expression of the poet's feelings about the possibility of self-knowledge: much later he is able, though with slight hesitation, to accept the inevitability of seeing his face in the mirror, and to reach a kind of acceptance of his 'tsviling-bruder':

Du bist mayn tsveyter ikh: mayn ershter fraynd,
Mayn ershter soyne. (Ts-b, p.197)

The 'bletl papir' in the last stanza of the second poem is the motif which leads into the third poem, and links the second and third poems thematically. The latter develops the themes of dove/muse, and paper/poetry, by the introduction of two new key-motifs: the temple, and the theme of music. The temple image evolves very naturally during the first two lines of the poem:

Bletl papir, bist a denkmol, a nest boyt di toyb in dayn
khoymer,

Bletl, in dir, nit in marmor, iz eybik dos ponem fun
troymer.

The piece of paper represents the physical product, the poem, and the poem is its own monument: the 'denkmol' motif echoes the last stanza of 'Sibir', where the poet came to a full realisation of his vocation ('Zoln ot di klängen, zol di monung, /Blaybn iber mir a monument.' PV1, p.20). The monument suggests eternity, as of marble; by the negative statement ('in dir, nit in marmor') the poet posits for poetry, represented by the 'bletl papir' an eternity superceding that of marble. The motif of marble leads naturally to the image of the temple in the second stanza.

Not only the sheet of paper, but also the idea of the face of the poet being seen through his poetry connects this poem with the previous one: in this poem the face of the poet, the dreamer, is preserved in the paper, as a face is in a marble statue; in the previous poem the paper was a mirror, whose function is to reflect the face: there has been a progression - out of the (momentary) reflection in the second poem has developed the idea of the eternal preservation of the face, as in marble.

There is a further image in the first stanza which develops certain aspects of the second poem:

Do, tsvishn opklängen roye, farzunkene, leymike formen,
Zaml ikh zilberne zilbn, tsu kenen mayn taybele kormen.

These 'zilberne zilbn' already exist, waiting to be picked up from where they are scattered among the rough sounds or unready forms: again Sutzkever unites the abstract with the concrete in the equation of sounds with buried clay shapes. The poet's role is that of a collector, an orderer of these syllables, in the same way as the sounds in the second poem were waiting to be released from their captivity. The syllables or forms are 'farzunkene'. This quality further relates the image to

klangen, bagosn mit blut mayns'. 'Beyner' become a very important symbol in the final poem of the ode, where they represent the years of his past, which with the help of his muse are turned into something living, into his poetry: this symbol is thus the vehicle for a resolution of the conflict within him at the end of the *poeme*. At this stage the temple here is built from the pain of his past, symbolised by 'beyner' and 'blut'. Only when the conflict is resolved, later in the *poeme*, can he build the temple 'mit zunikn seykh1.'

This stanza is the real turning point of 'Ode tsu der toyb', and of Sutzkever's work, for it is here that the poet categorically rejects Romanticism as the source of inspiration. This rejection can be seen in the way in which the 'zunfargang' symbol is transformed. The sunset, always representing the beauty and serenity of nature, and until now inextricably linked with the realm of the poetic, as in 'Sibir', is here rejected as the ultimate inspiration of poetry. The accentuated 'er' of the third line must refer to the sunset: 'Er hot dos vort nit derzungen, azoy iz dos vort nit-dershlifn'. Instead, poetry erupts from deep under the earth. From this time on the Romantic imagery of woods and fields gives way increasingly to a complex of images of forges, minerals, gems, stones, marble, granite, and the goldsmith. These strands of imagery have been present from the beginning, in 'Himen tsu feldzn' for example, and in the poetry of 'In fayer-vogn', as Moyshe Yungman points out:

Kritikers un bavunderers batseykhenen Sutskevers gemit in shraybn zayne lider vi apolonish gemit. Oyb zikh haltn bay der grikhisher mitologie volt rikhtiker zayn aroystsuheybn dos *vulkanishe* in Sutskevers shafungs-protses [...]. Hephaestos - Vulkanus, der got fun di vulkanen, fun umru, fun shtendikn hamern un oyshamern blitsn, der patron fun fayer; [...] a got mit a khush far humor; er iz oykh der man fun Afrodita, der getin fun sheynkeyt un fun libshaft; [...]

a got, vos mir trefn im shtendik in mitn protses fun shafn,
gliyendik in drang nokh sheynkeyt un shleyms.¹¹

Yungman's observations are extremely apposite and are borne out by the many illustrations which he gives from Sutzkever's poetry. It is more fruitful, however, to consider the Vulcanic and the Apollonian as two complementary elements in Sutzkever's poetic search, which reach harmony in 'Ode tsu der toyb'. They represent a departure from the Romantic, as represented by the woods and meadows of 'Blonder baginen' and 'Valdiks', and the transition to a new inwardness, a new aestheticism, characterised by deep, autotelic imagery. This movement truly begins in the second stanza of the third poem, in the transition from the sunset to the 'bronzene tifn'¹² and the first mention of building the temple.

The volcano-image is another example of the way in which key images develop in Sutzkever's work. The volcano appears as an important image for the first time in 'In fayer-vogn', where the 'vulkanisher hartsklap/ Fun land' (PV2, p.9) expresses life and hope, which the poet connects with the land of Israel. Now, by using the image in the context of poetic activity, he links Israel and all the positive life-giving aspects he found there with the idea of poetry, which becomes even more explicit in the last poem of the ode. In the image we also see the same element

11. Moyshe Yungman, 'Himen tsu feldzn', in Yikhes, pp.94-102, (pp.97-98).

12. It should be noted, however, that this image of poetry originates the early poem, 'Arum di fayern', (1935) where 'a horde poetn' describe their inspiration thus:

'Es tsaytikht a benkshaft, zi brent un bagert,
Vi a geyzer fun unter der bronzener erd.
Un khvalyedik-hel vi fun fayer der flam
Geyt oyf in der nakht undzer mekhtiker shtam...'
(PV1, p.37)

of bursting forth which is present in the 'klangen in lipn gefangen' of the previous poem, and in the 'Karshn, farmoyert in beymer' of stanza three.

In the final two stanzas of the poem, the first doubts about the poetic vocation are expressed in images which become ever more disturbing and surrealist:

Do, mit der pen, dirizhir ikh an eygene, shtile kapelye:
Kumen in regn neshomes un trifn arayn durkh der shtelye.
Karshn, farmoyert in beymer, bafel ikh tsu baytn di erter,
Kumen oyf purpurne fislekh tsu leb'n vi karshn in verter.

Vayzt zikh in templ a vorem. Aza tsoyberay iz im fremdlekh.
Emese karshn in verter tseratsn zayn gumen vi zemdlekh.
Vorket di toyb vi a shvester: bafel, zoln kumen di karshn,
Du bist di mos un der mester, farshvundene zeungen yarshn!

The 'kapelye' develops the musical theme which was already present in the concept of 'klangen'. In the ode music is linked to the darker, more emotionally ambiguous aspects: it could be thought of as the Dionysian element, in contrast to the harmony, beauty and reason which signify the Apollonian. It can be posited that the souls which the music conjures up are spirits from his past,¹³ and with them comes his first doubt about his poetic mission, denoted by the worm in the last stanza, which appears in the temple of poetry; the poetic words (the 'karshn' of stanza three), 'tseratsn zayn gumen vi zemdlekh', they are unpalatable to the worm: this worm which rejects poetry represents perhaps a moment of doubt, because of the vision of the past which has appeared anew. This time the crisis is soon averted, because in the final two lines of the poem the dove persuades the poet that he himself can overcome these visions, by incorporating them into his art.

¹³. Such an interpretation is suggested by the dove's final words that he should accept the 'farshvundene zeyungen'.

This belief in the essential continuity of past and present in poetry, and in the poet's mastery of the past is the faith which Sutzkever reached in the poems of 'In fayer-vogn', and this position is strengthened in this poem: but the doubt introduced here grows and becomes the main theme of poems five to eight.

In 'Ode tsu der toyb', four main images embody the idea of poetry: the dove, the temple, the orchestra, and in the fourth poem the mysterious dancer is introduced. In these four images different aspects of poetry in general are reflected: the dove/muse represents poetic inspiration, or the poet's imagination, the temple form, harmony and balance, and the orchestra ('kapeliye') musicality. The theme of dance has been present since the early 'Tantslid' of 1936 (PV1, p.42), and was an important element of passion and intoxication in the Kirghiz poem in 'Sibir'; in all the poems where dance is a motif, it evokes beauty of movement and passionate sensuality. The 'tentserin' of the ode embodies the sensuous female element, the object of the poet's longing.

The figure of a mysterious, capricious woman appears as early as 1940, in the 'Lider tsu a lunatikerin' (PV1, p.233), where the lover's rival is also the moon:

Ver iz er, der driter, vos bald
Vi kh'tsertl dikh makht er a gvald?
S'iz dokh er - dayn gelibter Levonik.

In the poem 'Der dikhter' (PV1, p.324), the figure of a woman is an image of poetry: 'a meydl ayngvevbt in driml' appears on the hand of the awakening poet, whom he recognises to be 'der nign'. In 'A briv tsu di grozn' the figure of the dancer appears for the first time, and a similar question is asked to that in the fourth poem of the ode: 'Tentserin, vu bistu?' (PV2, p.160),

and the dancer, terrified by the poet's words, flees 'in zunike eynsofn!'. The three figures in 'Lider tsu a lunatikerin', 'Der dikhter', and 'A briv tsu di grozn' are the precursors of the dancer in 'Ode tsu der toyb'.

Here the dancer also flees: she is 'krank', 'lunatish', and when the *ikh* tries to hold on to her, she disappears. Her earlier lover 'Levonik' has become the 'levonedik yingl' who tempts her out of the prison, where the poet has hidden her away:

Tentserin mayne, ver bistu, tsi hot dikh geboyrn a fidl?
 Unter dayn tants vert tsegrobn mayn gortndik layb mit a
ridl.
 Krank iz di kleyne, lunatish, in zilbernem nakhthemd, nit
zeltn
 Shvimt zi avek vi a khvalye in kalte, tseplieskete veltn.

Ful iz mayn kop mit retseptn tsu heyln ir himlishn fiber -
 Hot a levonedik yingl farlibt zikh dervayl in mayn liber.
 Varf in im shpizn vi Shaul - bahalt zikh der yingl in
tsvaygn,
 Vilstu im bindn in lider - bavayst er dir zilberne faygn.

Topele shoybn bashtel ikh tsu shitsn mayn glik fun di
mener..
 Blaybn zey gants vi mayn libe un zoyber un topl, nor yener
 Shlingt zi aroys fun di shoybn, farnart mit a sheyner matone
 Eyder tsu tantsn in templ shoybn tantst zi baym rand fun
levone.

The story told in these three stanzas is a splendid example of the 'khush far humor', one of the qualities which in Yungman's eyes make Sutzkever an heir of Vulcan rather than Apollo: here it is seen in the wry self-irony with which he describes himself jealously throwing spears at his rival, like Saul with David, and the cheeky youth doing the equivalent in Yiddish of blowing raspberries, but 'zilberne'! The double glazing also is not proof against the wiles of the rival, given the fickle nature of the dancer, so easily lured by 'a sheyner matone'.

The image of the dancer is connected by several other key images to earlier metapoetic poems. The *ikh* suggests that she was born of a fiddle, a motif which goes back to the father's

fiddle music in 'Sibir', the first influence on the awakening poetic consciousness of the child.

The image of the spade in the second line brings to mind two earlier poems. In 'Erd un aker' (PV1, p.40) the poet begged the muse

Tsegrob mayn gayst - a frilingdike beyt,
Farzey in mir dem sheferishn flaker,
Vos ikh bin lang shoyn oyftsunemen greyt.

The motif of digging is also central to the poem 'Di sharfe lipn', written in 1943, (PV1, p.365) but in it the metaphor of poetic creation is not the organic growth of the seed, but the digging out of buried treasure:

Di sharfe lipn hobn mikh gegrobn vi a ridl,
Aroysgegrobn fun mayn gayst farshotene brilyantn.
Un voltstu nit geakert, volt ikh zayn a shtume fidl
Mit a klangen-yam, an umbakantn.

In the 1943 poem there are several fascinating parallels to 'Ode tsu der toyb': in the idea that the infliction of pain is a necessary part of poetic inspiration (in the earlier poem by the digging of the sharp lips, in the ode by the hammering in of the grass-nails, or the piercing of the body of the *ikh* by the spade), in the idea of precious gems, in the earlier poem diamonds and in the ode, pearls, which are already there in the mind of the poet, the violence of the digging out (in the ode, cutting out) of the words from the spirit or from the lips (in the earlier poem, with a spade, in the later poem, with a knife), in the concept of the sea as the primal environment of the words: in the 1943 poem a 'klangen-yam' and in the ode 'yamike shleser' - these parallels underline the fact that the dancer in 'Ode tsu der toyb' has a similar function to the 'du' of the earlier poem, but on a more symbolic, mystical level: the 'du' of the 1943 poem could have been a woman who had inspired the poet, the dancer in the ode cannot be considered in purely human dimensions.

stant tension between the Apollonian aspect, the serene harmony towards which the *ikh* is striving - embodied in the temple image and in the 'zunikn seykh1'- and the darker forces which may destroy his word. The latter are expressed through the concept of the devil:

Boyen un boyen dem templ, mit zunikn seykh1 im boyen!
Kumt in a fayer der tayvl tsu brengen mayn toyb
tsum nisoyen.

The devil in this case takes the form of the horrible visions embodying the experiences of the Holocaust, which arouse in the poet doubts about the meaning of his poetry: the doubts are depicted in the almost apocalyptic vision of the darkening of nature, and the destruction of the temple (an idea which of course has particularly powerful symbolic resonance in Jewish culture):

Gro iz di zun. Ale farbn farshpint er mit groe lishayes,
Ibergebrent iz der templ, s'antloyfn di zayln vi khayes.

The strength of these images lies in the transformation of all forms and colours. The colour grey has the same negative connotations as in various earlier poems, for example 'Gro' (PV2, p.305) and 'Lid tsu dem har fun di volkns' (PV2, p.208): the use of the negative concept of greyness is combined with another typically Sutzkeverian technique of transforming nature, a positive image of life, into its opposite, as in the sixth poem, when the poet's homeland is described as 'bashimlt mit groz'. The destruction of the temple is also an image of metamorphosis: in the transformation of the solid, immovable pillars into animals fleeing in panic from the fire, Sutzkever creates an extraordinarily powerful vision reminiscent of the later paintings of Franz Marc. Here, as in so much of Sutzkever's imagery, the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate cease to

exist.

In the visions of the second stanza, with which the devil replaces the destroyed temple of poetry, Sutzkever again takes up images from the Holocaust years: children changed into skeletons, 'shotns fun hek', and swamps:

Kinder, vi goldene feygl, tseleygt er atsind in skeletn,
 Sam oyf di lipn fun klangen, zey zoln farsamen poetr.
 Penemer shtekn oyf heldzer vi shotns fun hek in der nider.
 Gliklekhe zenen di toyte ven ayzn un fleysh zenen brider.

Zumpik di erd un der himl, un ikh bizn haldz bin gezunken.
 Fayer - un mir azoy fintster. A shteyn mit farloshene
 funken.

In the fifth poem of the ode, it is noticeable that the poet now opens up his experience, which began in the third person, with the 'yingl' of the first poem, but then became personalised: 'mayn toyb', 'mayn glik', 'mayn gortndik layb', and so on. Now he speaks of the poisoning of poetry and poets in general through the nightmare events of the Holocaust: 'Sam oyf di lipn fun klangen, zey zoln farsamen poetr'. Later, in the seventh poem, the resolution of this dilemma will be celebrated in a joyous address to all poets: 'Hey, ir poetr, poetr [...]']'.

Fire is usually a positive symbol in Sutzkever's poetry, but here the purifying fire of 'Erev mayn farbrengung' and 'A zeyung' has become the fire of hell. It destroys the true poetic fire, as in the third stanza: 'Fayer - un mir azoy fintster. A shteyn mit farloshene funken'. Confronted with the devilish fire, the poet is a flint without its essential attribute, the spark which creates the fire of poetry.

The turning point of the nightmare vision is reached, however, in the fourth line of the third stanza:

Bloyz in di gleybike finger dos bletl papir dos farhite,
 Muzn di fayern kniyen, zey hobn oyf dem nit keyn shlite.

The power of poetry is victorious - the subjugation of the hell-fire is achieved by the fingers holding the sheet of paper, which symbolises poetry. In the final stanza, the 'bletl papir' fuses with the dove:

Veys ikh: di toyb iz dos bletl, vos lozt nit farglivern
finger.
Verter, vi eyniklekh, zoln gedenken di tsayt fun
batsvinger.

There is a causal link between these two lines: the power of poetry comes again through the poet's recognition that he must remember and absorb into his poetry all these events and experiences. In the phrase 'Verter, vi eyniklekh' resonates Sutzkever's key idea of the *goldene keyt* of the continuity of the generations, which gives his poetry its meaning: this line is a continuation of the central idea in the second poem:

Ale, vos endikn lebn, farzeyen in mir zeyer gvure.

The poem ends with renewed certainty:

Teg on der toyb zaynen milbn, a loyb tsu di loytere formen!
Zaml ikh zilberne zilbn tsu kenen mayn taybele kormen.¹⁴

'Di loytere formen' - a formulation with significant classical resonance - denote the imposition of form on chaos through poetry, which was one of Sutzkever's greatest achievements in the poetry of the war years: the simple ballad form of 'Di lererin Mire', and 'A vogn shikh', through which he tackled the subject matter of the Holocaust, is a striking example of this. In this fifth poem of the ode, poetry has vanquished the destructive

14. The previous occurrence of 'milbn' which seems to give rise to this comparison is the bitter 'Lid tsu di letste' (PV1, p.293) where the poet estimates the passive Jews as lower even than the mites, because '[..]yene hobn mut/Tsu brengen zikh dem fayer far korbones'; the 'milb' can be grouped with the bee and the ant among Sutzkever's animal imagery: the very small creatures by which the poet is fascinated, and which he endows with symbolic significance. Here the mite has negative connotations: days without the presence of his muse are totally insignificant.

ences of the poet, denoted by the eyes of the dead people, have nailed up his soul against creativity, nailed it 'tsum gornit'.¹⁵

The second image of anguish and despair is the destroyed homeland. In this idea grass plays an important part. Grass, as we have seen, is one of Sutzkever's important images of poetry, and even when not used in this connection, is usually a positive nature image, but here, as in the image of cornstalks growing between the paving stones in the poem 'Erev mayn farbreung', grass is transformed into a symbol of decay and destruction.

Sutzkever then takes two things normally considered the essentials of life, bread and salt, and by calling them 'a ruine', links them with the image in the fourth line - that of the destroyed country, where the idea of destruction is evoked by one of Sutzkever's transformations: in the context of a town or an inhabited country falling into decay, grass becomes mould.

In this poem too, the dove gives reassurance that the poet can overcome death: again, poetry is linked with an image of the sea:

Kh'vel mayne fligl dir onton, aroystsiyen vel ikh di negl,
Onblozn vet zikh mit frayhayt a vayser gedank vi a segl.

There are three concepts in these lines describing the freeing of the poet from his anguish: Freedom is symbolised first by the wings of the dove which the poet is allowed to wear, secondly by the drawing out of the nails which the dead had driven into his soul in the previous stanza- in other words, his soul is freed from the burden of the past- and third, by the motif of

15. The use of 'gornit' as a noun makes of it a philosophical concept: it is the idea of 'Nothingness', the negation of meaning or of the divine. This significance of the term is later developed in the poem 'A foygl hot geshpilt in ovnt oyf a Stradivarius' (Ts-b, p.148), when Asmodeus, Prince of the Demons, is ironically addressed as 'Derbaremdiker gornisht'.

voyaging, symbolised in the 'segl' which is his liberated mind, 'a vayser gedank'. The muse frees his soul and transforms the anguish he had felt in his wandering homelessness into inner and outward freedom. The poem ends with renewed faith in the poetic word: 'Eybik iz bloys di legende un zi vet a shmeykhl bavayzn.'

The term 'legende' as a synonym for poetry was established in the pre-war poetry,¹⁶ and in 'Sibir' where 'shney-legendes' are written on the young poet's forehead by the frost; the use of the term here, after a long period in which it does not occur, is a further example of the way in which in 'Ode tsu der toyb', Sutzkever takes up and draws together images and ideas from earlier work, thereby deepening the resonance and significance of the ode's imagery.

In the fifth and sixth poems the poet has expressed, and has succeeded in resolving, certain doubts about the meaning of poetry, in the light of his own experiences. In the seventh poem, where the third crisis occurs, he expands this theme, and the fundamental question is the possibility of poetry altogether after the Holocaust, a question which has been posed by many European writers, and which is for Sutzkever a particularly personal problem.

The two figures around whom the poem revolves are Dante and Jehuda Halevy. The poem begins with the poet's belief in the quasi-physical reality of the word; this is emphasised here in the confrontation of 'velt' and 'nign':

Velt. Vos iz velt? Bloyz ir nign iz khvalik un valdik un
 Yomert ir getlekher nign in odern mayne: geveltik!
veltik,

¹⁶. Chapter 1.

In this vision the most real aspect of the world is the melody, which stands, as do all musical concepts in Sutzkever's work, for poetry: with the concept 'nign' the poet takes up again the musical theme which was already present in the motif of the 'kapeliye' of the third poem. The adjectives used to underline the essential reality of the 'nign' as opposed to the normal 'realities' are neologisms: the first two contain concepts which are often found in poems in which Sutzkever explores essential inner realities: the qualities of 'wave-ness' and 'wood-ness'¹⁷ and the third adjective conveys the essential quality of 'world-ness', that which contains the true reality of the world. By using these concepts, the poet emphasises that the melody, that is, the poetic word, is more real than other aspects of the physical world, and that it is also divine ('ir getlekher nign').

The 'nign' or poetic word, demands that the poet use its power, ('geveltik!'), but the poet tries to flee from it:

Lesh ikh dem yomer mit yamen, s'bagrisn mikh shtet
umbakante.

Through his wanderings he tries to silence the melody, that is, the demands of his poetry, which are difficult and painful to bear; but at this point in the poem the figure of Dante occurs to the poet, as a possible solution for his dilemma. Dante succeeded in overcoming hell 'mit a regn tertsinen', that is, by the force of poetry. Wandering through Dante's hell, the poet realises, however, and expresses through a clever and ironical play on words, that

Du bist nokh alts Alighieri, dayn genem - nokh alts
alegorye.

17. The 'khvalye' has already been used to describe the dancer in the fourth poem, and the adjective 'valdik' is of course firmly fixed in the realm of the poetic.

Implicit here is the contrast between the inner, aesthetic hell of Dante, and the appallingly real hell of the twentieth century. This theme is developed further in the third stanza: the human beings - perhaps one could say, human qualities- have disappeared, and it is better to be dead:

Mentshn... vu zenen zey, mentshn! mekane zayn darf men di
shtoybn, [...].

This line is reminiscent of a similar thought in the nightmare vision of the fifth poem: 'Gliklekhe zenen di toyte ven ayzn un fleysh zenen brider'. The poem has come to a point of crisis. The turning point is reached, however, with the repetition of the 'shtey!' with which the poet had introduced the vision of Dante. This time the figure who will truly solve the problem is the twelfth century Hebrew poet Jehuda Halevy, who had longed all his life for Israel. Renewed faith in the meaning of poetry even after the Holocaust is achieved through the hope, embodied in the figure of Jehuda Halevy, of a new life in the new, but ancient land.¹⁸ For the first time in the ode, the Israel theme is introduced; this will become one of the central motifs in the solution of the conflicts in the final poems. The poet identifies his own longing as being the same as that felt by Jehuda Halevy:

Shtey! Vi a leyb hot Halevi mayn benkshaft gezungen fun
Shpanye.

In contrast to the previous two poems, the last stanza is not merely an avowal of his *own* faith, but an appeal to all poets, and a triumphant affirmation of the power of poetry. The first line of the stanza echoes the theme of the first stanza, that is, that the 'nign' is the true reality: here the same idea

¹⁸. Jehuda Halevy is, as we have seen, a recurring inspirational figure for Sutzkever, having already been a central symbol in 'Shturem oyf di vasern bay Krete' (PV1, p.605), and 'Di benkshaft fun Yehuda Halevi', (PV2, p.39).

whole poem ('Nign'- 'gezungen'- 'fleyt'). It also solves the conflict expressed through the musical theme in the third poem: there, the 'eygene, shtile kapelye' accompanied the spectres from the past and the worm in the temple, whereas here in the seventh poem the flute of the muse accompanies the poet's journey into a new life, and a new poetic identity.

The questioning is however not yet finished. The eighth and ninth poems should be regarded as a unit, and they carry the poet's quest to a mystical level. The eighth poem is an avalanche of questions about the essence of poetry, in which Sutzkever brings together many images which have occurred in this ode and in other metapoetic poems, and which express in symbolic terms many aspects of his experience over the years, thus drawing together all the stages of his poetic development. The dove, his *personal* poetic inspiration, is not able to answer these questions, and the eighth poem, unlike previous ones, ends without a solution.

The first question asked is the identity of the dancer:

Tentserin, zog mir, ver bistu? Di hor mayne filn dayn
flater...
 Entfernen kon mir di toyb nit: avu iz dayn heym, dayn teater?
 S'brengt mir a mol dayne oygn a sarne in zunike toyen,
 Ver iz der tsiter in gortn vu s'bliyen Chagallische bloyen?

The dancer's delicacy and shyness are expressed in the two images of 'a sarne in zunike toyen' and the 'tsiter in gortn vu s'bliyen Chagallische bloyen'.²⁰

²⁰. The art of Chagall, for many years a close friend of Sutzkever, is also used symbolically in two later poems 'Chagallisher gortn' (PV2, p.357), and 'Chagallische verter', (FOM, p.27); as in all Sutzkever's poems about art, the probing into the sources of Chagall's artistic inspiration which is the theme of these two poems, can also be applied to the poetic process.

In the second stanza, the essence of poetry is sought in images from nature: images of movement and of fusion, which evoke the vitality and beauty, but also the transience and fragility of poetic inspiration:

Hintern vald in a regn ver otemt mikh ayn regnboygik?
 Ver iz di nakete khvalye - on glider un dokh azoy boygik?
 Ver iz di shneyen-lavine tseglit iber feldzene randn?
 Kushn di brist vil an odler, bashit zi im bald mit gir-
 landn.

The attributes of the rainbow are colour, brilliance, and transience, and it is a recurrent image of poetry. An example of its use which is contemporary with 'Ode tsu der toyb' is the poem 'In onheyb' (PV2, p.184), from 'Helfandn bay nakht', where the *ikh* describes himself as

Shvarts, vi yener helfandbeyn,
 Un regn-boygn-likhtik.

'Di nakete khvalye' is a motif from the fourth and seventh poems and combines fluidity, transience and grace. The 'shneyen-lavine' is an important motif from 'Sibir': in the poem 'Derkentenish', an important turning point in the *poeme*, the child's first awareness of his identity is characterised by his being separated from his father; at this moment he describes himself as being transformed into an avalanche:

'Tate zet nit, az fun heler hoyt
 Ver ikh fun a yingl - a lavine,
 Vemen likht un vunder hot geboyt.'

The 'shneyen-lavine' image is expanded to include the motif of the eagle, who sets the snow in motion with his kiss. The bird of prey is used several times by Sutzkever to denote the giving of poetic inspiration: in 'Der novi' (PV1, p.370) a sparrow-hawk gives the poet the eye of the dead 'prophet', so that his spirit becomes part of the poet, and in the later poem 'An odler oys-geshmidt fun zalts' (PV2, p.284) the eagle fulfils a similar role

to that of the crickets in the second poem of 'Ode tsu der toyb': he wounds the poet, giving him that Dionysian intoxication mingled with pain which is an essential part of poetic creativity. Here in the eighth poem of the ode, the snow is personified as a woman: as the eagle kisses her breasts, she showers him with garlands of snow. The sensuality of this image echoes the imagery of fusion in 'Helfandn bay nakht'.

In the third stanza the joyful nature images give way to visions of sorrow and death, exploring the darker aspects of the poet's experience:

'Ver iz der shpigl in trern? Ver zenen di penemer naye?
 Ver iz di froy inem orn, di royzn-badekte levaye?
 S'dreyen zikh, dreyen di reder un shlingen un viklen mayn
shotn,
 Hayntikn tog hot a ridl aleyn zikh in keyver farshotn.'

The 'shpigl in trern' of the first line is presumably an image of death, the tears of the mirror being its grief at the absence of the person normally reflected there, while new faces appear in the mirror, perhaps, to take the place of that person. This impression is strengthened in the second line of the stanza, which may well refer to the death of his mother; the motif of 'royzn' would seem to link 'di froy inem oren' with his mother, since roses, suggested by his mother's wounds, often symbolise her death, but also the eternal inspiration which she gives him²¹

In the third stanza, therefore, the poet is again asking about the sense of experiences from his past, and the last two lines of the stanza suggest a nightmare to which he cannot find a solution: in the third line the shadow of the *ikh* is dragged along by the wheels of a chariot, and entangled within the

²¹. For example in 'Mayn mame' (PV1, p.265), and 'Fun der poeme Dray royzn' (EN, p.12).

mechanism. Since the shadow often represents the *essence*, as in 'Der vald' (PV2, p.16) and 'Der heysherik' (PV2, p.211), this is an image of the essential self being mutilated. Here the poet appears to be calling into question the inspirational motif of the 'fayer-vogn': in the poem 'A zeung' (PV2, p.21), the poet's being 'farshlungen' by the wheel leads to his soaring in the chariot with all his loved ones to the land of Israel: it is an image of reconciliation and the new beginning. The presence of the image here among the sombre visions of this stanza would seem to cast doubt on this process of reconciliation with the past.

The surrealist element intensifies in the image of the spade burying itself in the grave, which is akin to several other such circular images which occur in poems of death or madness, for example in 'Lakh nit fun meshugenem' (PV2, p.215), or earlier, in the self-devourer of 'Yeder sho, yeder tog' (PV1, p.302). The nightmare image is paralleled in the final line of the poem by the image of stones stoning themselves in the streets.

At the beginning of the final stanza the poet appears to forsake the sombre visions of the penultimate stanza. Two very significant metapoetic images form the questions in the first two lines of the stanza:

Ver iz di vayse farvandlung, vos kon nit aroys fun
 Ver iz der ophilkh fun shtilkayt, un ver iz di shtilkayt ^{beryoze?}
 di roze?

In both these images the fundamental idea is that the true nature of poetry is held captive in an alien form (the 'beryoze') or hidden behind an echo of itself ('der ophilkh fun shtilkayt'), and waits to be released. We have already seen a similar motif in the 'yamike shleser', in the volcano, and in the

'karshn, farmoyert in beymer', and the idea goes back, in fact, to 'Sibir', where the poet says to the North Star: 'Ikh bin dayn shneymentsh in a kleyd fun hoyt'. The poet is trying to understand the essence of poetry underneath its outer covering, and this search is restated in the second image of the stanza; 'shtilkeyt' is the ultimate reality, but all that the poet can hear is its echo.

All these questions attempt to probe the innermost truths by reconciling all aspects of the poet's experiences of life and poetry. Unlike all the other poems of 'Ode tsu der toyb', no answers are found in the final stanza. Instead the dove remains silent, the nightmare visions reappear, and the *ikh* fears madness:

'Vet mir nit entfernen keyner? Tsi brenen in mir meshugasn?
Hayntikn tog hobn shteyner aleyk zikh farshteynt in di
gasn!'

In the ninth poem the poet finds an answer to all questions. The poem is a mystical vision, in which Sutzkever is trying to describe the indescribable, a meeting between the poet and the essence of poetry. This can only be evoked through metaphors:

Vayl in der velt iz gefaln a shteyn-meteor, un zayn nign
Hot mikh getsoygn durkh dzhungeln, biz eyn mol derze ikh im
lign
Ful mitn reyekh fun shtern. Derbay hot a leyb oyf a skale
Brumendik oysgeshmidsht gleker un flam hot tsheshmoltsn zey
ale.

It seems as if Sutzkever is here surveying his earlier poetic visions in order to try to understand and make sense of it, for all these images take up again seminal motifs from earlier poetry. The 'shteyn-meteor' evokes the poet's earlier mystical experience, described in 'A meteor in midber Kalahari' (PV2,

p.181). The bells and the lion are combined in the powerful ghetto poem 'A shtim fun harts' (PV1, p.248), in which one of the earliest expressions of the chain of the generations is conveyed by the lines:

Un her vi zeydes vekn zin
Vi shturemhek in brondz fun gleker.

In that poem too, the lion represents the proud tradition of the Jewish people, a connotation which it never loses throughout Sutzkever's work, but the image also takes on a particular metapoetic function in the cycle 'Helfandn bay nakht', as we have seen.

The flame evokes the fire of the Kirghiz tribesmen, the *shayter* of 'Der tsirk' but also the purifying fire of 'Erev mayn farbrenung' and of the whole collection 'In fayer-vogn'. These, and all the other images from the previous poem, whose identity the poet was, in his anguish, trying to understand, now come together: the mysterious 'himlkind', which seems to emanate from the meteor, and appears to be the personification of poetry, shows him that *all* manifestations of poetry are really one:

-*Ikh* bin di tentserin, freg nit...a loyb tsu dem leyb mit
zayn brumen!
Ongezogt hot mir der kinig dayn kumen, dayn kumen, dayn
kumen. [...]
Ikh bin di shneyen-lavine, di vayse beryoze, der shpigl,
Ikh bin der ophilkh fun shtilkayt, vos nemt dikh arum in an
igl.

In this ecstatic vision Sutzkever raises all the previous imagery of his poetry onto a new mystical plane. The encounter with the 'himlkind' ends with a command, which emphasises anew the role of the poet:

Zaml di klängen, di bilder, a hunger vet tsindn dayn
gegnt...
Leb zey, baleb zey, un schilder!
Azoy hobn mir zikh gezegnt.

I have compared the structure of 'Ode tsu der toyb' to a piece of music, and the ninth poem is like the triumphant, climax, where all the themes are gathered up and harmoniously resolved. After this, the *poeme* ends with a serene and majestic epilogue. There is a shift in perspective and for the first time the *ikh* is in a real landscape, in Israel. The harmony between the mood of the poet and the landscape is suggested by the slow leisurely pace of the lines, which is achieved both through the short statements with pauses between them, and through the serene tone, in contrast with the exclamatory style of the previous two poems:

Unter a boym lebn Yam-sof. Di khvalyes derklingen mayn
ode.
Shtil. In zayn shotn - a milshteyn, gedreyt fun der zun mit
hasmode,
Otem ikh heysherik-dyunes - di hiter fun tsayt un zikorn.
Do hot dos folk zikh getsoygn durkh fertsik tanakhishe
yorn.

The poet feels in the external environment the history of the people, but he is suddenly assailed by doubts about whether he belongs to this tradition, to the *goldene keyt*: 'Vu zenen *mayne* fir tsendlik, in midber, tsuzamen mit yene?' The poet's forty years in the desert are the years until he arrived, like his ancestors, in Israel, his true home. They coincide with the first forty years of his life - here the actuality coincides with the metaphor. This thought gives rise to the only moment of doubt: his years are 'Beyner geblibn, bloyz beyner [...]'. But at that instant, harmony is restored again through the intervention of the dove, who has accompanied him here. Her words are a summing up of his poetic credo: the bones, his past, with its anguish, can be changed into a living thing:

Vorket di toyb oyf mayn aksl: gut morgn! un ikh vel dikh
fregn -
Yorn dos zenen den beyner? A bloz un zey shpiln antkegn.

Zangen mit kindershe oygn bavegn zikh unter di dyunes,
 Tkhiyes-hameysim fun zangen, un oybn - a volkn mit strunes!

The 'resurrection of the cornstalks' is the apotheosis of the complex imagery of 'zangen' which was fully discussed in chapters 2 and 4, and must be seen particularly in conjunction with the poem 'Zangen' from 1943. The earlier poem also unites the images of bones and cornstalks. Here, however, the ambiguity of the image at the end of the earlier poem: the reaper who 'shnaydt dos nokhmilkhomedike broyt' seems to be resolved: the bones, in the earlier poem the murdered young men, and here, his past years, are not dead, but have given rise to ears of corn, - a symbol of regeneration and of poetry - which have 'kindershe oygn'. With the idea of childhood he returns again to the beginning of the *poeme* - 'Zeltn, a mol in a kindheyt [...]'. Once again Sutzkever uses an earlier image, in order to renew and deepen it: in the earlier poem 'Zangen' the bones were those of the dead victims, but took on symbolic quality in the metaphor of the final lines; now they have lost their concrete starting point, and are a symbol of all that is in his past. The 'zangen', which also started out in the earlier poem as real corn growing in a field, have developed from the realistic starting point and have become a symbol of regeneration and of poetry. The complex image in the tenth poem of 'Ode tsu der toyb', which encompasses all the other 'zangen' imagery, shows therefore that the renewal of the poet's life and poetry must be founded upon, and take nourishment from all that has gone before.

The equation of this regeneration with renewal of his poetic role also is emphasised by the 'volkn mit strunes' which floats overhead. These are the strings of the fiddle on which his father played to him; the fiddle also engendered the dancer, and has

followed him to Israel. It is a sign that he must pursue his poetic vocation in Israel.

The poem ends with the reaffirmation of the aim which in the fifth poem had been threatened with destruction by the devil: now the statement has a serene certainty which has emerged after his doubts and anguish have been vanquished:

'- Boyen un boyen dem templ, mit zunikn seykhil im boyen!'

At the end of the poem Sutzkever truly achieves the Apollonian harmony to which Shloyme Bikl refers. This analysis shows, however, that it is achieved only through the process of inner questioning and the struggle with moral and aesthetic dilemmas, which takes the form of the dialogue with the dove.

CONCLUSION.

The foundations of Sutzkever's later work were laid during the first twenty years of his creativity: themes and images were established, and the internal conflict between the aesthetic and the ethical was resolved. The external forces which shaped his perception were integrated into his work, laying the foundation for a new period of aestheticism and inwardness, a process which reaches a new climax in the series of the 'Lider fun togbukh' (1977), but is still continuing. Sutzkever has moved gradually from a Romantic perception of nature, and an atmospheric use of nature imagery, into a private, personal mysticism, where recurrent images are used to create a world and a language of symbols expressing the poet's own search for the essence of poetry. In the last analysis, this essence is silence, the silence which André Neher calls 'the silence of the cosmos'. Sutzkever himself speaks of this silence, in his 'Togbukh-notitsn' (*Di goldene keyt*, 42, 1962, 164-167), in which he gives a rare insight into his understanding of the poetic act:

Dem toyts kenigraykh iz shoyrn atsind a legende. Toyte lebn dortn oyf der ander zayt fun lebn. Ikh shik tsu zey dikhterishe signaln, vi tsu vezns oyf an ander planet. Ikh zikh bashutfesdike verter, mir zoln zikh farshteyn un lib hobn. Di o verter, oder shotns fun verter, geboyrene fun a geheymer substants, bahaltn zikh ergets in di nestn fun midber. Zeyer otem, zeyer muzik iz *lebedike shtilkayt*.

Implicit in Sutzkever's words is his unquestioning belief in the interrelation of the living and the dead, and the mysterious independent existence of the word - it will be remembered that the word 'shotns' in the phrase 'shotns fun verter' is part of Sutzkever's symbolic language, and signifies the essence. The mystical undertone of the whole conception, expressed particu-

larly in the final sentence of the quotation, seems to approach André Neher's perception of the ultimate truths:

Psalm 62 teaches all those who vibrate before the divine Infinity that there is no chord more vibrant to express the longing of the soul than silence: "Towards God with silence vibrates my soul" (verse 2). Meir Ibn-Gabbai, in the thirteenth century, gave this biblical verse a moving interpretation. When the chords of two instruments are truly in harmony, then it is enough if one vibrates for the other to begin to sing. Hence, seeing that God is Silence, how could the soul's harmony with God express itself otherwise than by silence?'¹

The images Sutzkever uses to *approach* this infinite silence constitute, at their deepest level, the *bashtendikayt* and *banayung* which we have perceived throughout his work. The search for this ultimate *shtilkayt* remains constant through all the vicissitudes of his external circumstances. The path towards it is that of words, and in Sutzkever's case this means a network of images which remain constant but undergo change and renewal: 'di permanents fun bashtimte simboln un zeyere gebitene funktsiyes'.² The private mysticism of Sutzkever's earlier work seems in later years to become increasingly imbued with the idea of an independent transcendental deity, the 'bashefer' of the poem quoted below.

This study has sought to provide a foundation upon which further developments in Sutzkever studies can take place. From a fairly close textual analysis of poems, many important themes have emerged which could only be briefly touched on here, but which must form the basis for further investigation. Among these are the question of Sutzkever's place within modern Yiddish poetry, and the influence of twentieth-century Yiddish poets such

1. Neher, Exile, p.11.

2. Litvine, Yikhes, p.123.

as Kulbak, Leyeles and Halpern upon his work. So, too, Sutzkever's place in European literature must be assessed in a wider context, including an examination of the extent of the influence, which he himself commented upon, of Polish Romanticism. Particularly interesting in the field of comparative studies is the question, raised several times in this study, of the affinity between Sutzkever and Rainer Maria Rilke. The vast and complex area of the role of themes and imagery from the *Tanakh* and from Jewish folklore and mysticism has also been discussed, but requires more detailed investigation. Finally, it is hoped that the present study may provide the impetus for an analysis of Sutzkever's later period, in which, as can be perceived in the following lines, written in 1987, his search for the meaning of poetry, and the ceaseless renewal of his metapoetic imagery, are continuing:

Inderluftike hek hakn unter dem zunfargang-odler,
 Nor untertshakn mayn vort zenen hek nit bekoyekh.
 Mayn malkes nemt lebedik oyfgeyn in zkhus fun a gortn,
 In zkhus fun zayn peyre, vos oykh mayn bashefer
 A mol hot gemakht oyf der peyre a brokhe.
 Mayn malkes nemt lebedik oyfgeyn. Un ikh -
 Tsvishn dermonungen mayne
 Fun andere.
 Tsvishn gekoylete klangen un zeyer mishpokhe.

Ikh aleyn bin mayn folk un ikh trog zikh aleyn oyfn aksl,
 Mir'n onheybn beyde a vidergeboyrene shtilkayt,
 Lekoved a loshn vos tut shoyn a varemen fokhe.
 Tsvishn dermonungen mayne
 Fun andere,
 Tsvishn gekoylete klangen un zeyer mishpokhe.'
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