

# Itzik in Israel:

## Itzik Manger's Yiddish in Hebrew Translation

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### ABSTRACT

*Itzik Manger, the self-anointed “tailor from Wallachian land,” was one of the most popular Yiddish poets in prewar Poland, attracting immense crowds of excited readers. Years later, Manger received similar celebrity treatment as a visiting poet in Israel. Cautiously accepted by Hebrew pre-1948 critics, he was welcomed with unprecedented warmth in Israel in the 1960s by the Israeli public and by a cultural establishment long hostile to Yiddish language and culture. Yet the many translations of Manger’s Yiddish poetry and prose into Hebrew reflect a careful rewriting of Manger and the Yiddish culture that he came to represent. Analyzing Hebrew translations of the imaginative literary history, Noente geshtaltn (Close Figures) and the late poem “Kh’hob zikh yorn gevalgert” (For Years I Rolled About), I argue that Manger’s work and Manger himself are transformed to fit the prevailing norms in Hebrew literature, revealing the distinct space created for Yiddish literature within Israeli culture.*

**R**ehov Itzik Manger, Itzik Manger Street, is a short block near central Tel Aviv, named for the Yiddish poet Itzik Manger shortly after his death in 1969. Although his street is removed from those of fellow Yiddish writers Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz, Manger stands in good, if somewhat strange company. *Rehov Sokolov*, named for Zionist writer and journalist Nahum Sokolov, turns into *Rehov Manger*, which quickly merges into *Rehov Adam Hacohen*, named for a Hebrew poet in Vilna and a leading figure in the early Russian Haskalah. While Tel Aviv cartography is not necessarily the

most accurate representation of literary history, *Rehov Manger* reflects the unique position that Manger occupies as a Yiddish poet in Israel, literally and literarily situated within Israeli society.

Unlike Mendele, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz, whose streets in several Israeli cities commemorate their contributions to Yiddish and Hebrew literature in Eastern Europe, Manger is accorded this cartographic distinction largely because of his popularity in Israel during the 1960s. Heralded as a sign that Yiddish culture had finally “arrived” in Israel,<sup>1</sup> the institutional recognition of Manger’s name and his work, both on a Tel Aviv street and in the establishment of the Manger Prize for Yiddish Culture, indicate a significant shift in the state’s official approach to Yiddish. While these posthumous honors signal a new openness to Yiddish culture in Israel, they also represent a culmination of a long history of Manger’s presence in Hebrew, from translations of his work into Hebrew in the late 1930s to Israeli theatrical performances of his work in the 1960s, and from his trips to Israel in the late 1950s to his death in Gedera in 1969. Manger was, for many, the public face of Yiddish during major changes in Israeli culture in the 1960s, but the contours of that face have been carefully reshaped by his translators and critics. The prominent poet and translator Avraham Shlonsky, influential critic Dov Sadan, and writer and translator Binyamin Tene each crafted Hebrew versions of Manger and his texts, rewriting Manger’s Yiddish work within a Zionist framework. The literary and linguistic choices made by these translators, as well as commentaries that frame their Hebrew translations, demonstrate the ways in which Manger’s work was adapted to fit the prevailing norms in Hebrew literature and the distinct place created for Yiddish literature within Israeli culture. Reading the translation and reception of Manger’s Yiddish work in the context of debates over the place of Yiddish in the Yishuv and later in Israel, I argue that Itzik Manger has been transformed into an exemplary figure for an Israeli Yiddish culture.

Manger is an intriguing example of a Yiddish icon in Israel, in large part because his modernist folk-themed poetry and folksy persona were exceptionally popular among East European, and later, Israeli audiences. Yiddish critic Yudel Mark states, “There is no doubt that the most popular Yiddish poet in prewar Poland was Itzik Manger.”<sup>2</sup> Wary of Manger’s popularity, Melech Ravitch writes in

a similar vein: “Manger wrote—which has never been told because he is too popular—with the help of a three-fold mixture: ink, heart’s blood, and wine.”<sup>3</sup> Manger’s wide appeal, however, has led many Yiddish critics to overlook the complex modernist aspects of his poetry and to dismiss him as merely a folk poet. Yankev Glatstein argues that Manger confounds the conventional authority of literary criticism. Normally, Glatstein writes, the critic mediates between the poem and the reader, guiding the reader’s appreciation and evaluation of the poet and his poetry. But Manger’s poetry speaks directly to the reader, regardless of critical opinion; that unmediated embrace, Glatstein suggests, gives the critic no choice but to accede to the tastes of the folk.<sup>4</sup> Though Glatstein appreciates Manger’s poetry, he is clearly nervous about its popularity; implicitly, he and other critics react against Manger’s mass appeal, perceiving it as a step in the wrong direction in the ongoing process of developing a Yiddish modern and modernist high culture. Instead of analyzing the sly modernism and complex intertextuality of Manger’s Yiddish poetry and prose, the overwhelming majority of commentary on Manger focuses on his importance as a *folksdikhter*, a poet of the Yiddish folk.

While Itzik Manger occupies an ambiguous place in the Yiddish canon, his poetry has become a paradigm for the integration of Yiddish into Hebrew culture before and after 1948. Manger’s celebrity in Israel is best epitomized by the stunning success of the dramatic adaptation of his *Megile lider* (Megillah poems), produced and performed by the Burstein family in Jaffa in 1965–1966. Israeli crowds flocked to the Yiddish performances, Hebrew newspapers praised the production, and Manger was feted by prominent Israeli artists and politicians.<sup>5</sup> Yet Manger’s work had seeped into Hebrew culture much earlier; chapters from his imaginative history of Yiddish literature, *Noente geshtaltn* (Close Figures; 1938), were translated into Hebrew by Avraham Shlonsky in the late 1930s, and Manger himself visited Israel in 1958 after years of postwar drifting through Europe and North America. Cautiously accepted by Hebrew pre-State critics, he was welcomed with unprecedented warmth in Israel nearly twenty years later by a cultural establishment that had long been hostile to Yiddish language and culture.

The poet and his work, however, have been transformed in this encounter with Hebrew and Israeli culture. If, as Glatstein argues, Manger’s popularity in Yiddish was largely unmediated by the cultural establishment, Manger’s status in

Israel reflects the careful mediation of Hebrew language and Zionist ideology, as his unique combination of modernism and the Yiddish folk tradition has been translated into a Hebraic environment. Through close readings of Manger's collection of literary portraits, *Noente geshtaltn*, his late poem, "Kh'hob zikh yorn gevalgert" (For Years I Rolled About; 1952), and their Hebrew translations, I analyze the ways in which Manger and his work are shaped into representatives of a Yiddish culture palatable to the Hebrew establishment between the late 1930s and 1960s. Manger's poetics and ideology, specifically his proximity to the Jewish masses and thematization of exile, are rewritten by the desire to represent Israel as the final destination and the repository of the Yiddish literary tradition.

#### YIDDISH IN THE YISHUV

Yiddish language and culture were highly contested in the pervasive ideological climate of the Yishuv and later in the state of Israel. As early as 1911, the Tenth Zionist Congress proclaimed that Hebrew was to be the language of the Yishuv.<sup>6</sup> But few Jewish immigrants spoke Hebrew when they arrived in Palestine and those who did had learned Hebrew as a liturgical and literary language, not as a vernacular. Yael Chaver argues that "the Zionist pioneers could not do without Yiddish," since for many it was their first language; Yiddish was commonly spoken and used in songs, poetry, and prose well into the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> But many viewed Yiddish as a linguistic and ideological threat to the Zionist vision for the new Hebrew nation in Palestine. Among the extreme opponents to Yiddish was the Gedud Meginei Hasafa (Brigade of the Defenders of the Language), whose young members protested against signs not written in Hebrew, pressured publishing companies not to print Yiddish and theaters not to allow performances and lectures in languages other than Hebrew, intimidated people who did not speak Hebrew in the streets, and distributed pamphlets with beliefs and slogans such as "*Ivri daber ivrit!*" (Hebrew, Speak Hebrew!)<sup>8</sup> These efforts to replace *Jew* with the new *Hebrew*, and to replace Yiddish, Russian, and other languages with Hebrew demonstrate the high stakes of this ongoing "language war"; a reinvigorated Hebrew was designated *the* language of the Jewish national project in the

land of Israel, while Yiddish was the language of the Diaspora, anti-Zionist Yiddish nationalists in Eastern Europe and the United States, or perhaps even worse for some politicians, the voice of the Linke Po'alei Tsiyon, the breakaway left-wing labor Zionist party.

These periodic battles over language in the Yishuv reflect the enduring presence of Yiddish language and culture within an increasingly Hebraic society. The Hebrew cultural center developing in the Yishuv in the 1920s maintained its connections with international Yiddish culture. In the first year of *Davar's* literary supplement (1925–1926), for example, a weekly section, “Basifrut uva’omanut” (In Literature and Art), informed readers about writers and about new books and cultural events in Yiddish and Hebrew in the Yishuv, Eastern Europe, and the United States. Though *Davar's* coverage of Yiddish declined precipitously toward the end of the decade, Yiddish writers continued to visit the Yishuv and to interact with their Hebrew counterparts. The expressionist poet Peretz Markish met with Shlonsky during a trip to the Yishuv in 1923, while the American poet H. Leivick was warmly received when he visited in October 1937. Perhaps the most notorious of these visits was writers Sholem Asch and Peretz Hirshbein’s trip to the Yishuv in 1927; at a reception for the visiting writers, Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik recognized the long relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish as “a marriage made in heaven.”<sup>9</sup> Perceived by critics as a defense of Yiddish, Bialik’s comments ignited furious reactions in the Hebrew press, particularly by Shlonsky and Eliezer Steinman in the literary journal *Ktuvim*. Although, as Zohar Shavit argues, their polemic against Yiddish was a thinly disguised attack on Bialik,<sup>10</sup> Shlonsky’s powerful rhetoric reveals the polarizing effects of Yiddish. For example, he writes: “We view this calamity of bilingualism as we would view tuberculosis, gnawing away at the lungs of the nation. We want Israeli breathing to be *entirely Hebrew*, with both lungs!”<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, the controversy surrounding Asch and Hirshbein’s visit was part of a larger battle between opposing poetic camps within Hebrew literature far more than a skirmish between Hebrew and Yiddish, and was only one of many interactions between Hebrew and Yiddish writers. Itzik Manger’s trips to Israel in the late 1950s and 1960s represent a later and less controversial manifestation of the same circulation of Yiddish writers and intellectuals in Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Hebrew readers also kept abreast of developments in Yiddish literature through translation. In the Yishuv, Hebrew translations from Yiddish were part of the larger nationalist project to translate both classic works of world literature and recent books into Hebrew. With a limited number of original works being published, the cultural establishment relied on translated literature to supply literary texts to the reading public, to spur linguistic innovation, and to establish Hebrew as a legitimate literary language.<sup>13</sup> From early maskilic translations on, Hebrew writers recognized the need to import texts through translation but were faced with their language's limited literary and vernacular resources. Part of the solution, Gideon Toury argues, was "positing acceptability as a major constraint on literary translation, to the almost complete forfeiture of translation adequacy; a kind of Hebraic *belle infidèle*, if you wish."<sup>14</sup> Hebrew translations emphasized the language's linguistic and ideological needs over loyalty to the source language and original text. Advocating for what he calls a descriptive study of translated texts, Toury sets aside the questions of fidelity—is this a faithful or unfaithful rendering of an original text?—that have filled translation debates in favor of an empirical approach to linguistic and literary translation.

In my own readings of Manger's work, I am similarly less concerned with issues of interlinguistic equivalence and faithfulness than with the implications of linguistic and literary choices that surface in a series of Hebrew translations. In contrast to Toury's resolutely descriptive approach, however, my readings of Manger's translated texts are informed by the historical conditions and power relations that underlie Hebrew translations of Yiddish texts. Though Toury briefly notes that the Jewishness of the writer often had an effect on Hebrew translation,<sup>15</sup> he focuses primarily on the translated text and overlooks the significance of source language, in this case disregarding the ways in which translating from Yiddish is fundamentally different from translating from English, German, or even Russian. In a recent overview of Israeli literary criticism, Dan Miron offers a related critique of structuralist theorists such as Toury and Itamar Even-Zohar, although he does not mention them by name. Miron claims that in systemic accounts of Hebrew literary history—a clear reference to Even-Zohar's polysystem theory—Hebrew is used as a model for universal theses, which elide the unique linguistic and cultural conditions of the development of modern

Hebrew and Israeli culture. Literary translation into Hebrew, Miron argues, was closely tied to historical conditions and readership; thus Hebrew translations from Russian or German produced when a majority of Hebrew readers could read the works in the original were profoundly different from English and French translations of the same Russian and German texts.<sup>16</sup> Yiddish, in particular, necessitates a different approach to translation given its linguistic and cultural proximity to Hebrew.

Unlike translations from European languages, Hebrew-Yiddish translations were entangled in the long and complicated historical relationship between the two languages. The two languages were also enmeshed in the shifting social and cultural dynamics of rapidly modernizing Jewish life. In traditional Jewish society in Ashkenaz, and later in Eastern Europe, Yiddish and Hebrew (or, in Max Weinreich's terms, *loshn-koydesh*) had functioned symbiotically as part of a long-standing internal bilingualism; Hebrew was the bookish language of prayer and the sacred texts, while Yiddish was the language of face-to-face communication.<sup>17</sup> The prestige long associated with Hebrew was balanced by the wide audience that existed for Yiddish. As both languages were developed into modern and secular literary languages, however, this coexistence developed into fierce competition, epitomized by the contentious Conference for the Yiddish Language in Czernowitz in 1908.<sup>18</sup> Hebrew was embraced as a critical component of the Zionist national revival, while Yiddish was associated with a variety of rival political affiliations, most prominently Bundist socialism.

In the Yishuv, Hebrew was the dominant language but Yiddish was still perceived as a danger to emergent Hebrew culture. The intense, ideologically-driven rivalry between the two languages that reached its climax in Czernowitz was dissipating by the time Shlonsky first translated Manger's prose in the late 1930s, but these two Jewish languages were still intertwined because a large population of readers and writers used both, in the Yishuv, Europe, and the United States. Though Yiddish books represented only 10 percent of translations into Hebrew between 1930 and 1945,<sup>19</sup> these translations are particularly interesting because a significant segment of the Hebrew reading public grew up speaking Yiddish and could, presumably, also read Yiddish texts in their original language. Translating from Yiddish became a way of filling the gaps in Hebrew

literature and asserting Hebrew's ambitions in the arena of Jewish culture; Hebrew versions of Yiddish texts incorporate them into a Zionist framework and demonstrate modern Hebrew's newfound literary capacity to serve as the language of Zionist ideology and daily life.

After the Holocaust, the relationship between Yiddish and Hebrew—like all facets of Jewish life—was radically transformed. In broad strokes, Hebrew became the official language of the new state of Israel, while Yiddish was regarded as the fading language of an exterminated people. But in practice, many Israelis, especially postwar refugees, still spoke Yiddish, which was stigmatized as the language of the Diaspora and was increasingly sentimentalized as the language of the victims. Yiddish literature was still translated into Hebrew, but primarily in limited circulation, as, for example, Benjamin Hrushovski/H. Binyamin's translations of A. Glantz-Leyeles, Avrom Sutzkever, and Moyshe Leyb Halperin between 1960 and 1964.<sup>20</sup> The many translations of Itzik Manger's poetry, published as early as 1962, represent a fascinating exception; Manger was one of the only Yiddish writers embraced by both the Israeli establishment and the Israeli public. The Hebrew translations of Manger's work reflect his popularity, but also reveal the ambitions and abilities of Hebrew as *the* language of Zionism, the Jewish people, and the new Jewish state.

Below, I analyze both the poetics and politics of Hebrew translations of Manger, focusing in particular on the cultural transformations that accompany literary translation. I combine a close literary and linguistic analysis of Manger's texts and their Hebrew versions with a consideration of the political nature of these translations—in Tejaswini Niranjana's words, "political in the sense that it is enmeshed in effective history and relations of power."<sup>21</sup> While my study of the relationship between Hebrew and Yiddish is quite different from the postcolonial context featured in the work of Niranjana, Mary Louise Pratt, and other recent theorists, I share their attention to the power relations that shape the intersections of languages and texts and their conviction that translation practices and commentaries (i.e., introductions, afterwords) expose critical cultural developments and historical attitudes. In the decades before and after the establishment of the state of Israel, Hebrew translations of Manger's prose and poetry sought to naturalize Yiddish within the poetic and ideological norms of Hebrew culture.



These texts participate in the larger task of transforming Manger into a suitable Hebrew cultural figure and communicating the proper place for the Yiddish culture that he embodies in Israel.

## FROM PEACOCK TO HOOPOE: LITERARY HISTORY BETWEEN YIDDISHISM AND ZIONISM

Manger's work first appeared in Hebrew in Avraham Shlonsky's translation of a series of imaginative portraits of Yiddish literary figures, essays that had originally been published in Warsaw's *Naye folks-tsaytung* in the mid-1930s and reprinted in Hebrew, primarily in *Hashomer hatsa'ir* between 1939 and 1942. Later collected and published in book form in Yiddish as *Noente geshtaltn* and in Hebrew three years later as *Demuyot kerovot* (1941), the near-identical titles mask the ways in which Shlonsky's Hebrew translation subtly rewrites Manger's Yiddishist narrative. This initial appearance of Itzik Manger in Hebrew lays the groundwork for his later fame in Israel as it demonstrates how Yiddish literature was progressively rewritten into Hebrew culture.

Manger's *Noente geshtaltn* focuses on brief but telling moments in the lives of historical figures such as Yisroel Aksenfeld, an early nineteenth-century Yiddish novelist and dramatist, and Avrom Goldfaden, the well-known impresario of Yiddish theater, interspersed with portraits of relative unknowns, including Gelle, a young eighteenth-century girl who composed a short dedicatory poem, and Yosef Bovshover, a "worker's poet" locked up in an insane asylum. In contrast to the histories of Yiddish literature and language published in the 1920s and 1930s by scholars such as Max Erik and Max Weinreich,<sup>22</sup> Manger rewrites Yiddish literary history into a personal, anecdotal narrative of individual paragons, what he calls his "twenty apostles of Yiddish literature."<sup>23</sup> In his brief preface, he addresses his literary portraits to a popular audience, *di breyte leyener-masn* (the broad reading-masses), part of his larger project of revitalizing Yiddish literature and culture through the folk and its folklore.<sup>24</sup> Yiddish culture, he argues throughout the work, must use the rich folk tradition to construct a sense of shared culture and history, a version of the past that could serve as the basis for a Yiddish cultural nationalism. Though he

published his imaginative profiles in the daily paper of the socialist Bund, his populist bent disguised a carefully crafted artistic project. Writing in a long and lofty Western tradition of biographical portraits dating back to Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans*, Manger showcases both the historical figures and the linguistic capacity of Yiddish, making the case for a full-fledged literary tradition in that language. His version of Yiddish literary history, however, omits the figures that comprise Yiddish's small pantheon of classics: Abramovitch, Sholem Aleichem, and Peretz only make brief cameo appearances in the portraits of lesser known historical figures. Avoiding the stalwarts of Yiddish literary history, Manger creates a counter-tradition that foregrounds Yiddish as the language and culture of the Jewish masses.

One of the key figures depicted in *Noente geshtaltn* is the poet and troubadour Velvl Zbarzher, a *maskil* who reinvents himself as part of the Yiddish folk. Manger's narrative opens in a rowdy tavern in the Romanian city of Iași as the clock strikes one in the morning. Zbarzher entertains the crowd with his songs, basking in the attention of the enthusiastic revelers:

וועלוול זבאַרזשער שמייכלט. ער פֿילט זיך גוט צווישן אַט דעם פּראָסטן עולם. ער האָט זיי ליב און זיי האָבן אים ליב. ער פֿילט זיך גוט, ווען ער הערט דעם גוט-ברודערישן „דו.“ ס'איז אַ גרויסע מדרגה, ווען דאָס פֿאַלק זאָגט צום פֿאַלקס-דיכטער „דו.“ די ווינער משכילים האָבן דאָס נישט פֿאַרשטאַנען. זיי האָבן נישט פֿאַרשטאַנען, ווי אזוי ער, וועלוול זבאַרזשער, דער באַרימטער משכיל און דיכטער, חברט זיך דאָס מיטן המון, זיצט און טרינקט מיט זיי אינאיינעם.<sup>25</sup>

Velvl Zbarzher smiles. He feels good among this simple audience. He loves them, and they love him. He feels good when he hears the good, brotherly “you.” It's quite an accomplishment when the folk says to a folks-poet “you.” The Vienna *maskilim* don't understand this. They don't understand how he, Velvl Zbarzher, the famous *maskil* and poet, befriends the masses, and sits and drinks with them.<sup>26</sup>

Drawing on the techniques of the modernist novel, Manger's third-person narration is focalized through Zbarzher, who embraces the Jewish masses and rejects

the elitism of the Haskalah. Though Zbarzher speaks in a Yiddish filled with Hebraic words (*oylem, groyse madrege, hamoyn*), conveying his maskilic intellectualism, he also rejoices in his proximity to the folk through language. He happily sits *tsvishn ot dem prostn oylem* (among this simple audience) and takes pleasure in the fact that he is accepted as a friend and equal when he hears *dem gut-bruderishn "du,"* the Yiddish informal, second-person address. Here and throughout the book, the "closeness" of Manger's literary figures is both historical, as he chooses individuals close to the masses, and literary, as he crafts an intimate point of view that ushers the reader into the narrative.

Manger's narrative uses this proximity to the Jewish folk as the basis for a Yiddish nationalism, on the model of German romantic nationalism, particularly in the mode of Johann Gottfried Herder.<sup>27</sup> In his last chapter, "Di goldene pave" (The Golden Peacock), Manger argues that Yiddish is the only language that can authentically capture the Jewish spirit residing in the folk. Instead of focusing on a historical figure, this final chapter sketches an idyllic portrait of the Jewish folk, filled with snatches of folk songs: a master tailor and his assistants, singing as they work; a mother singing her baby to sleep; children singing as they play outside. Presiding over this scene, as Manger writes in the last line of the book, is the deeply resonant image of *di goldene pave*: "And on the threshold of the Jewish tailor's shop stands the golden peacock." Fittingly, Manger's literary history ends with fiction, the highly constructed scene of the folk and the elusive figure of that golden bird, an emblem of the rich Yiddish poetic tradition. Yiddish culture, Manger argues, needs to return the *goldene pave* to its past glory not by returning to the past, but by using the richly variegated traditions of the Yiddish folk as the foundation for a new Yiddish culture and identity.

*Demuyot kerovot*, Avraham Shlonsky's 1941 translation of *Noente geshtaltn*, seems to be a strange choice of text for a well-known Hebrew poet and staunch Hebraist, a leading member of the anti-Yiddish cultural establishment in the Yishuv. Despite his strident campaign against Yiddish in 1927, Shlonsky was reading and translating Yiddish poetry and prose well into the 1940s.<sup>28</sup> His decision to translate this text reflects a surprising compatibility between Manger's literary history and Shlonsky's ideological agenda. Shlonsky shared Manger's belief in the importance of folk songs, and worked to create a folk genre in

Hebrew, writing his own *pizmonim* and encouraging other Hebrew writers to follow his lead in the 1920s. He believed that the absence of folk songs and lullabies in Hebrew—only recently a vernacular—would prompt people to turn to other languages, in his words *sadot zarim* (foreign fields), to meet their cultural needs. Promoting the self-sufficiency of Hebrew, Shlonsky created a section in the literary journal *Ktuvim* to publish songs in Hebrew that reflected the new pioneering reality, but he received few submissions and even fewer successful folk songs or lullabies.<sup>29</sup> Translating Manger’s literary history, and in particular, rendering the text’s Yiddish poetry and folk songs into Hebrew, offered an alternate approach to filling this gap in Hebrew culture. But for Manger’s text to function in Hebrew translation and the Yishuv’s Zionist environment, its Yiddishist perspective had to be muted, first in Shlonsky’s translation and subsequently in Dov Shtok’s Hebrew afterword.

Shlonsky transforms Manger’s anecdotal history by distancing the text from its Yiddish milieu. Certain changes are inevitable given the linguistic differences between Hebrew and Yiddish, but others reflect a careful rewriting of Yiddish literary history for the Hebrew-reading public in the Yishuv. Shlonsky’s Hebrew still does not have the range, flexibility, and orality of Manger’s Yiddish prose, evident in stilted translations of Yiddish idioms and occasional incongruous biblical allusions. Yet from the writer’s brief preface, the changes in translation exceed strictly linguistic problems or substitutions; Manger reads very differently in Hebrew. Manger’s desire “to present the figures of our literary past for the broad reading-masses, to introduce them to older Yiddish literature” becomes in Hebrew: “I intended to present the figures of our literary past before the community of readers [*kehal hakor'im*], so that they would recognize and know the fathers of Jewish literature.” The bland “community of readers” erases Manger’s explicit address to the socialist Yiddish-speaking masses, just as the specificity of Manger’s “Yiddish literature” is obscured by this introduction to the “fathers of Jewish literature.” Yiddish, of course, contributes to this confusion, using the same adjective, *yidische*, to mean both Yiddish language and Jewish. Throughout this brief preface, however, the Hebrew translation elides the specificity of Yiddish life and culture that suffuses Manger’s text, omitting, for example, his comment that the literary portraits were first published in the Yiddish press and

his dedication to students and teachers in secular Yiddish schools in Poland. Shlonsky's translation deftly separates Manger's literary history from its Yiddish context, transforming the Yiddish folk from audience to subject, part of a larger process of cultural appropriation that reads Yiddish as a Jewish cultural legacy.

The Hebrew version of Manger's depiction of Velvl Zbarzher, for example, elevates the Yiddish bard through translation:

ולוול הזבארזשי מחייך. טוב לו בתוך עולם זה של הדיוטות. הוא מחבבם, והם מחבבים אותו. ניחא לו, שהוא שומע לשון-„אתה" מפיהם בדברם אליו. מדרגה גדולה היא למשורר-העם ש„העם" מדברים אליו בלשון-„אתה". משכילי ווין לא הבינו דבר זה. קצרה בינתם להבין, איך הוא, וולוול הזבארזשי, המשכיל הנודע, המשורר המפורסם, יושב בתוך קהל של הדיוטות ושותה עמהם לשכר.<sup>30</sup>

Velvl the Zbarzhite smiles. He feels good in this world of simpletons. He likes them, and they like him. It is pleasant to hear language of “you” from their mouths when they speak to him. It is an accomplishment for a folks-poet when the “people” speak to him in the language of “you.” The *maskilim* of Vienna did not understand this. They fail to grasp how he, Velvl the Zbarzhite, the well-known *maskil*, the famous poet, sits in the company of ignoramuses and drinks with them to intoxication.

From the beginning of the translation of Zbarzher's reflections, Shlonsky's Hebrew erases the Yiddish flavor of the narrative: the familiar Yiddish name Zbarzher (from the Galician town of Zbarazh) becomes the thoroughly Hebraic *bazbarzhi*. Shlonsky, following S. Y. Abramovitsh's autotranslations of the late 1880s, translates Manger's Yiddish into a distinctive Hebrew *nusakh*, a predominantly rabbinic Hebrew mixed with Aramaic and biblical phrases. Like Abramovitsh, he tries to give his Hebrew translation a colloquial—but still legitimately Hebraic—element by adding Aramaic phrases such as *niḥa lo* (it is pleasant). His Velvl Hazbarzhi ends up speaking a stilted but stylistically impeccable Hebrew.

As he translates Zbarzher into Hebrew, Shlonsky rewrites Manger's relationship between the poet and the folk. On a linguistic level, the Hebrew can only vaguely point to the Yiddish use of a formal and informal “you” as a marker of

the folks-poet's acceptance, since Hebrew grammar does not differentiate, in Manger's words, this "good, brotherly you" from a more formal address. But Shlonsky also systematically distances the Hebrew Zbarzher from the very people he claims to be part of: instead of loving the folk, he merely likes them (*meḥabevam*); he tolerates their company (*niḥa lo, yoshev betokh kehal*) rather than befriending them; and he refers to them condescendingly (as *bedyotot*), not affectionately. The choice of the word *bedyotot* to replace Manger's *prosn oylem* and *hamoyn* is particularly revealing: *bedyotot*, a rabbinic word for "common people," assumes a strong connotation of idiot or simpleton, deriding the Yiddish masses as it distances Zbarzher from his audience. While Shlonsky's translation elevates Zbarzher and separates him from the masses, the end of the passage jabs at Zbarzher and implicitly at Manger, well known as an alcoholic. Manger's Zbarzher befriends the masses and sits and drinks with them, but his Hebrew counterpart sits with his clearly inferior audience and "drinks with them to intoxication," giving us a drunk instead of a social folk-poet. Shlonsky simultaneously translates and transforms the Yiddish Zbarzher, muting Manger's focus on the Yiddish folk and accentuating his own interest in the poet and his poetry.

Manger's final chapter, "Di goldene pave," is similarly transformed into a clearly Hebraic version of the Yiddish folk. Shlonsky's bird sings in a different way from its Yiddish counterpart, one of the many transformations of Manger's quoted Yiddish verse in the Hebrew translation. The motif of the bird is woven throughout the chapter, as the narrator ushers the reader into the world of the folk, beginning with a children's song. Manger's Yiddish reads as follows, in a literal translation:

טרעטי, טרעטי, טרעטי,	<i>Treti, tret, tret</i>
וואָס די טרעטי זינגט?	What does the <i>treti</i> sing?
קומט אַ שיינער פֿויגל	A pretty bird comes
און מאַכט אַ שיין געזאַנג.	And makes a pretty song. <sup>31</sup>

Shlonsky's Hebrew version vaults the simple lines into a high Hebrew register:

טְרֵטִי, טְרֵטִי, טְרֵטִי     *Treti, treti, treti,*  
 טְרֵטִי, דָּרְגָא תְבִיר,     *Treti, darga tvir,*  
 בָּאָה כְּנֵף-רִנְנִים     Comes a winged-joy  
 ופּוֹצְחַת שִׁיר.     And bursts into song.<sup>32</sup>

The songbird begins with the same Yiddish coos of “treti,” the sound transliterated in the Hebrew lines, but it suddenly leaps to lilting Aramaic cantillation notes, *darga* and *tvir*. Instead of the childish repetition of “pretty bird” and “pretty song,” the Hebrew version borrows a phrase from Job 39:13, *kenaf-renanim* (winged-joy), which infuses the children’s song with an incongruously allusive tenor. The childish language of the Yiddish song is replaced with lofty biblical Hebrew phrases that elevate as they translate, shaping a much more formal song at odds with the quintessentially folkish atmosphere. In Shlonsky’s translation, the Yiddish folk speaks and composes in Hebrew, but in a Hebrew far removed from the tone and register of the original Yiddish.

While Shlonsky’s translation frequently loses the colloquial flavor of Manger’s Yiddish, it also often adds different connotations through Hebrew’s wealth of allusions. For example, instead of translating the Yiddish *pave* (peacock) into the closest Hebrew equivalent, *tavas*, Shlonsky chooses another bird—*dukhifat*—the hoopoe, a crafty bird of midrashic fame. The hoopoe, a bird native to the land of Israel (unlike the peacock), appears in several midrashic tales as a persistent, clever bird, notably in a story about King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.<sup>33</sup> More significantly, Shlonsky’s hoopoe is an allusion to the poetry of Bialik, as the latter’s “Beyn nehar prat unehar hidekel” (Between the Euphrates and the Tigris; 1908), a Hebrew poem written in the “spirit” of Jewish folk songs (*me’eyn shirei am*), features a golden hoopoe in its rhymed couplets:

Between the Euphrates and the Tigris  
 On the mountain a palm tree rises.  
 In the palm, amidst its branches,  
 Dwells a golden hoopoe [*dukhifat zahav*].<sup>34</sup>

This golden hoopoe is clearly inspired by certain mythical birds of the Yiddish folk tradition, which serve as messengers for distant lovers. But Bialik locates his bird within the Hebrew literary tradition in these opening lines, as his hoopoe dwells in the Garden of Eden, between the Tigris and Euphrates as described in Genesis 2:14. The golden hoopoe also stars in one of Bialik's midrashic tales, "Mi anad ledukhifat tsitsat notsa?" (Who Gave the Hoopoe a Feather Plume?) found in his collection, *Me'agadot hamelekh Shlomo* (From the Tales of King Solomon),<sup>35</sup> in which Bialik extends the midrashic tradition of the hoopoe into modern Hebrew writing. Despite Shlonsky's antagonistic relationship with Bialik,<sup>36</sup> he uses Bialik's hoopoe to establish a Hebrew countertradition to the Yiddish peacock. Replacing the emblem of the Yiddish folk tradition with a mythical Hebraic bird, Shlonsky predicated the parade of literary figures on a Hebrew literary motif rather than on a Yiddish folk tradition.

Shlonsky's translation of Manger's folk tradition is part of a process of linguistic and cultural transformation that is continued much more explicitly in Dov Shtok's afterword. Shtok, better known as the influential literary critic Dov Sadan, played a critical role in bringing Yiddish literature to the Hebrew reading public by translating and publishing Yiddish poetry in Hebrew. Yet Sadan does not hesitate to criticize Yiddish works that fail to recognize Hebrew's preeminence.<sup>37</sup> In a substantial afterword to Shlonsky's translation, Sadan rewrites Manger's narrative by inserting Hebrew literature into Yiddish literary history at every opportunity: he details the great Hebrew works written by many of Manger's figures and emphasizes others' staunch commitments to Zionism and Hebrew pedagogy. For example, Sadan praises the depiction of Velvl Zbarzher in *Demuyot kerovot*, but cautions: "the image of Velvl Zbarzher is incomplete if you do not know his commitment to Hebrew language and poetry or if you do not know that he himself was a Hebrew poet."<sup>38</sup> He then revises Manger's portrait of Zbarzher by mentioning Zbarzher's Hebrew poetry, his friendship with the Hebrew *maskil* Peretz Smolenskin, and the bilingual Hebrew-Yiddish edition of his poetry. In contrast to the subtle linguistic and literary choices that characterize Shlonsky's translation, Sadan deliberately grafts Hebrew culture onto the Yiddish narrative; his afterword is a corrective account that explicitly moves Manger's text within the sphere of Hebrew culture by asserting the Hebrew



credentials of these Yiddish writers and subsuming Yiddish culture within Hebrew literary history.

In the final line of his essay, Sadan inscribes Manger himself in Hebrew culture: “the book is now given in the language of the Bible, and Itzik moves from the language of the time to the language of eternity [*mesfat hazman lesfat hanetsah*], realizing the biblical promise “through Isaac shall your seed be acclaimed.”<sup>39</sup> Sadan concludes in grand fashion by quoting God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 21:12, where God instructs Abraham to send away Ishmael in favor of Isaac. Sadan offers his own midrash to counter Manger’s well-known poetic collection, *Medresh Itzik*, linking the newly Hebraic Itzik Manger to his biblical namesake, Isaac, and banishing Yiddish along with Ishmael. As Shmuel Werses notes, Sadan adopts Bialik’s distinction between Yiddish as the “language of the time” and Hebrew as the “language of eternity,” subsuming Yiddish within the eternal Hebrew tradition.<sup>40</sup> Here and throughout his afterword, Sadan asserts that Yiddish culture comes to fruition only in modern Hebrew.

In *Noente geshtaltn*, Manger flaunts the malleability of literary figures as part of an idiosyncratic, ideologically-driven narrative of Yiddish literary history. Presenting a pantheon of cultural figures in fictionalized vignettes, he constructs an unconventional literary history to serve as the foundation for a new, and in his words, organic Yiddish national culture that reflects the Jewish spirit. His literary project is subsequently rewritten in Shlonsky’s Hebrew translation and Sadan’s afterword. Shlonsky translates Manger’s text because its selective, anecdotal literary history offers a narrative of a Jewish folk that Hebrew literature lacks; he deftly replaces the Yiddish folk with Hebrew language and literary tradition. Sadan, anxious about Manger’s text even in translation, takes further steps to subordinate Manger’s Yiddish narrative within a broader history of Hebrew. Yet these Hebrew versions of Manger’s text also become an unanticipated extension of Manger’s cultural project. Like the Yiddish and Yiddishist original, both Shlonsky’s translation and Sadan’s commentary revise literary history, shaping Yiddish literature to suit a different Jewish nationalist ideology of the time. Manger’s early appearance in Hebrew sets the stage for later translations of his poetry and persona, as he himself is progressively rewritten in a manner reminiscent of his creative portraits of Yiddish historical figures.

## ROLLING ABOUT AT HOME—MANGER IN ISRAEL

If Shlonsky's *Demuyot kerovot* and Sadan's afterword reflect the ideological imperatives that motivated translations from Yiddish in the Yishuv, later translations and reviews of Manger's work wholeheartedly embrace the Yiddish poet as a Zionist immigrant. Manger's poetry has been translated into Hebrew more frequently than any other language; from Shimshon Meltzer's *Shir, balada, sipur* (1962) to Meir Avni's *Tseror shirim uvaladot* (1999), the many Hebrew translations of Manger reflect widespread interest in his work in Israel.<sup>41</sup> One of Manger's most commonly quoted, translated, and anthologized poems is "Kh'hob zikh yorn gevalgert" (For Years I Rolled About), which appears at the beginning or end of the majority of the numerous Hebrew versions of the poet's work.<sup>42</sup> Although a common apocryphal story claims that Manger composed the poem while he was overwhelmed with excitement on his way to Israel, it was in fact first published in 1952, six years before the poet's actual first trip to Israel. Still, the poem has long been interpreted as his Zionist homecoming, despite its lyrical ambivalence about the idea of home—national or otherwise. Hebrew translations of the poem, as well as the narrative that surrounds it, reinvent Manger as a Yiddish poet who finds a home for himself and Yiddish culture in the state of Israel.

Yiddish no longer threatened Hebrew's dominance after World War II, but Israeli attitudes toward Yiddish in the years following 1948 continued to express the persistent suspicion of the Eastern European language entrenched in Zionist ideology. In 1949, for example, Yosef Sprinzak, cofounder of the Histadrut labor federation and the first speaker of the Knesset, reveals his anxiety toward Yiddish in his introduction to the inaugural volume of the Yiddish literary journal *Di goldene keyt*. Launching this official Yiddish publication with an affirmation of Hebrew's preeminent role in Jewish culture, he writes, ironically enough, in Yiddish: "Hebrew is the language of our Jewish land, the language in which sprouted the new life of the Jewish nation."<sup>43</sup> The primary goals of *Di goldene keyt*, at least in Sprinzak's view, were to bridge the gaps between Israel and what he calls the "*folksman in golus*," the Diaspora man-on-the-street, and to shape a Yiddish culture to suit Israel's Zionist society, infusing Yiddish with the pioneering spirit of the labor movement and, ultimately, incorporating Yiddish

within the Hebraic sphere of Israeli culture. He reveals his anxiety about Yiddish through his continual reiteration of Hebrew's supremacy: when he mentions the Israeli esteem for Yiddish culture, he gives examples of Yiddish plays performed in Hebrew and treasured books by Sholem Aleichem or I. L. Peretz in Hebrew translations; when he describes the spirit of Jewish culture, he is quick to emphasize the new generations of sabras living and breathing the Hebrew language.<sup>44</sup> A prominent member of the political establishment, Sprinzak demonstrated a persistent desire to defend Hebrew from the cultural threat of Yiddish.

With his folkish persona and nomadic postwar life in England, Canada, and the United States, Itzik Manger embodied the arrival of Sprinzak's "*folksman in golus*" in Israel and became the shining representative of Yiddish seeking refuge in the Jewish state. When he first arrived in 1958 from New York on a trip sponsored by the Histadrut, Manger was greeted with a level of fanfare never before experienced by a Yiddish writer in Israel. At a welcoming ceremony in Tel Aviv, attended by government ministers and prominent cultural figures, the Israeli Yiddish poet Avrom Sutzkever hailed Manger as a cultural hero and praised his poetry as the beloved property of the folk: "His poetic wine refreshes and intoxicates his readers throughout the world."<sup>45</sup> Although Sutzkever was slyly alluding to Manger's well-known and well-earned reputation as an alcoholic, he was also highlighting Manger's popularity with readers. Sutzkever briefly mentions the rich cryptic and symbolic undercurrents in Manger's poetry, but he also captures the popular perception of Manger as a simple and accessible poet, the poet of the Jewish working class. Sutzkever's welcoming speech also reflects another key element of Manger's reception in Israel: the poet as *farvoglder printz*, the quintessential wanderer, returning home to the Jewish state. He addresses Manger dramatically in a Tel Aviv theater: "And now that you have come 'to roll about [*zikh valgern*] at home'—we bow low before you. Blessed are you, Itzik Manger, wandering prince [*farvoglder printz*], that your blue prayer has been fulfilled."<sup>46</sup> Sutzkever welcomes Manger to Israel with several phrases from "Kh'hob zikh yorn gevalgert," enacting a Zionist return of exiles, *kibbutz galuyot*, for the Yiddish poet, despite the fact that he had arrived for just a three-month visit.

Yet Manger's "Kh'hob zikh yorn gevalgert," frequently cited as the poet's embrace of the land of Israel, tempers its love for Zion with its resistance to a

Zionist homecoming. The richly allusive poem conveys a profoundly ambivalent relationship to a territorial home. The poem opens with a clearly drawn opposition between home and the foreign:

כ'האב זיך יאָרן געוואַלגערט אין דער פֿרעמד,	For years I rolled about in the world,
איצט פֿאַר איך זיך וואַלגערן אין דער היים.	Now I'm going to roll about at home.
מיט איין פֿאַר שיר, איין העמד אויפֿן לייב,	With a pair of shoes, a shirt on my back,
אין דער האַנט דער שטעקן. ווי קען איך	The stick in my hand. How could I be
זיין אַן דעם?	without it? <sup>47</sup>

The poem's speaker strongly identifies himself as a wanderer, both in his actions and his accoutrements, a theme familiar from so many of Manger's earlier poems. In his oeuvre, Manger evokes the wanderer in different guises, drawing on the Yiddish folk tradition of the itinerant troubadour and traveling jester. But in his quintessential fashion, his wandering personas and protagonists also reflect the exilic conditions of modern existence, particularly the dislocations of Jewish life and Yiddish culture in the first half of the twentieth century. The expressionist poet Peretz Markish offers a similar critique of home:

I don't know if I have a home [*heyim*],  
 Or have an away [*fremd*],  
 If I'm a beginning, or an end . . . <sup>48</sup>

Written during the upheaval of the Russian Revolution, Markish's lines convey the chaos and frantic pace of modern life through this lack of a *heyim* or *fremd*—a home or an “away”—an existential homelessness that Manger shares. For both Markish's text and Manger's much later poem, *heyim* is an abstract, elusive concept, not a specific geographical location.

In the second stanza, Manger's poem shifts into a different intertextual mode, as the speaker compares his journey with that of the famed voyage of the twelfth-century Hebrew poet Yehuda Halevi from Andalusia to the Holy Land:

כ'וועל נישט קושן דיין שטויב ווי יענער גרויסער פאָעט,  
 כאַטש מײַן האַרץ איז אויך פֿול מיט געזאַנג און געוויין.  
 וואָס הייסט קושן דיין שטויב? איך בין דיין שטויב.  
 און ווער קושט עס, איך בעט אײַך, זיך אַליין? (486)

I'll not kiss your dust like that great poet,  
 Though my heart is also full of song and lament.  
 How can I kiss your dust? I am your dust.  
 And who kisses, I ask you, himself?

With the phrase *yener groyser poet* (that great poet), Manger alludes to Halevi's famous "Tsiyon halo tish'ali" (Ode to Zion). In Manger's poetic context, Halevi's poem becomes an originary *vanderlid*, or wandering-poem. In T. Carmi's prose translation, the poem reads:

If only I could roam [*meshotef*] through those places where God was revealed to your prophets and heralds! Who will give me wings, so that I may wander far away [*ve'arḥik nedad*]? I would carry the pieces of my broken heart over your rugged mountains. I would bow down, my face on your ground; I would love your stones; your dust would move me to pity.<sup>49</sup>

Halevi's speaker imagines himself in the sacred landscape of Zion as a wanderer, roaming through the promised land. His pilgrimage becomes an ongoing journey; even the climactic moment of his arrival, face in the dust, quickly gives way to further wandering, from the tomb of the Patriarchs to the forests and meadows of biblical fame. Manger's lyric persona, like Halevi's poetic speaker, addresses a personified Zion and imagines his own path through an abstract landscape of sea, sand, and camels: an Israel from the Bible or from postcards.

Manger injects irony into the wholehearted, pious embrace of the land that Halevi inscribes in the Jewish literary and cultural imagination. In the first line of the second stanza Manger announces that he will not kiss the sacred dust because, drawing on another longstanding Jewish tradition, "I am your dust." While Manger lightens the import of the statement with the final line of the

stanza, “And who kisses, I ask you, himself?”, he critically rewrites Halevi’s paradigmatic representation of Zion into his Yiddish poem, transforming Halevi’s praise of the life-giving power of the holy land into an idiosyncratic internalization of an idealized biblical landscape. The speaker’s body, in wanderer’s garb, becomes the shifting site of veneration, replacing the land. Manger’s allusion to Halevi’s famous poem assimilates a towering figure of Hebrew literature into his own modern Yiddish experience of homelessness and exile. Placing Yehuda Halevi and Peretz Markish incongruously side-by-side as intertexts, he rewrites a canonical expression of the return to Zion into perpetual modern wandering.

The poem itself wanders through a romanticized Israeli landscape, from the Sea of Galilee to the desert, but replaces the actual land with a dreamlike sense of self. In the fifth and final stanza, more than double the length of the previous stanzas, it returns to the rhythms and history of the *vanderlid*, traveling through time and genre:

כיוועל שטיין פֿאַרטראַכט פֿאַר דיין מדבר גרויס  
און הערן די דורות-אַלטע קעמעלטריוט,  
וואָס וויגען אויף זייערע הויקערס איבערן זאַמד  
תורה און סחורה, און דאָס אַלטע וואַנדערליד,  
וואָס ציטערט איבער די זאַמדן הייס-צעגליט,  
שטאַרבט אָפּ, דערמאָנט זיך און וויל קיינמאָל נישט פֿאַרגיין.  
כיוועל נישט קושן דיין זאַמד, ניין און צענמאָל ניין.  
וואָס הייסט קושן דיין זאַמד? איך בין דיין זאַמד,  
און ווער קושט עס, איך בעט אייך, זיך אליין? (487)

I’ll stand thoughtful before your great desert  
And hear the age-old camel treads,  
Rocking their humps over the sand  
With *toyre un skboyre*, and the ancient wandering song,  
That trembles over the burning sands,  
Dies, revives, and will never disappear.  
I’ll not kiss your sand, no, and ten times no.  
How can I kiss your sand? I am your sand.  
And who kisses, I ask you, himself?

Manger replicates the slow, meandering pace of the camel in these lines, winding toward an emphatic conclusion that reiterates his denial of territorial claims of belonging. In this unpopulated desert, far from stereotypical Zionist landscapes of orange groves and cooperative settlements, the Yiddish *vanderlid* becomes an “ancient wandering song” of the Middle East. The quintessentially Yiddish *toyre un skboyre* (Torah and trade) is loaded onto swaying camels to traverse the sands in never-ending journeys. Manger’s lyric persona affiliates himself with the Middle Eastern nomad, traveling beyond the boundaries of the modern state of Israel to explore the generic possibilities of the *vanderlid* and to subvert the Zionist ideal of the ingathering of exiles. His journey from *fremd* to *heym* transforms the contours of the landscape, inscribing his Yiddish self in a new but not necessarily Zionist cultural context. Unlike Yehuda Halevi, who writes “I am a lute for your songs” to his beloved Zion, Manger’s imagined encounters with his own Zion open a new way for him to sing about himself, a perpetual wanderer.

Yet Manger’s modernist *vanderlid*, widely read and frequently translated, was perceived as the Yiddish poet’s embrace of the state of Israel by both Israeli Yiddish critics and by Hebrew translators. In a 1959 essay, Ya’akov Zvi Shargel uses the opening lines of the poem to interpret Manger’s arrival in Israel and responds with great emotion: “We take him with open hearts and arms, and we say to him: You won’t roll about here, instead you will live, create, and enrich the Jewish literatures here with your incomparable creations.”<sup>50</sup> Shargel, borrowing Manger’s language, stresses the *heym* over the *fremd* as he welcomes the poet to the Jewish state and settles him among the deliberately plural “Jewish literatures.” Mordekhai Tsanin quotes Manger’s poem, along with Avrom Sutzkever’s “Ven kh’volt nit zayn mit dir baynand” (If I could not be with you), as evidence of Yiddish writers’ deep identification with and loyalty to the Jewish state, despite the denigration of Yiddish in Israel that he cautiously describes in the rest of the article.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, “Kh’hob zikh yorn gevalgert” is translated and retranslated into Hebrew; its frequent inclusion in books and anthologies balances the majority of the poetry’s East European focus as it highlights the poet’s Zionist credentials.

Among the many Hebrew translations, Binyamin Tene’s version, published in 1968, demonstrates the difficulty of rendering Manger’s Yiddish idiom into

Hebrew and the ideological nature of this rewriting. The first two translated stanzas read:

הייתי שנים נע-ונד בנכר,	For years I roamed in foreign lands,
לנוד בביתי יצאתי עכשיו.	To roam in my home I go now.
נעלי לרגלי, כתנתי לעורי,	My shoes on my feet, my shirt on my back,
ובידי המקל. איך אוכל בלעדיו?	And a stick in my hand. How could I be without it?
לא אשק עפרך כמשורר הדגול,	I will not kiss your dust like the distinguished poet,
אם גם בלבי רן ובכי עד-בלי-די.	Though my heart is filled with joy and tears.
איך אשק עפרך? הן אני עפרה.	How could I kiss your dust? Here I am your dust,
ומי נושק את עצמו, רבותי?	And who kisses himself, gentlemen? <sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the most difficult choice in translating this poem is to decide how to render the Yiddish verb *valgern zikh*, which appears in the title and the first two lines, in Hebrew.<sup>53</sup> *Valgern zikh* is one of many Yiddish verbs for wandering, with the more specific connotation of rolling, being scattered or homeless.<sup>54</sup> The different Hebrew versions of “Kh’hob zikh yorn gevalgert” choose a variety of Hebrew verbs for wandering, but perhaps the most interesting contrast to Tene’s translation is found in Mordekhai Amitai’s 1975 translation, which features both *lebitgalgel* (to roll) and *lebitpalesh* (to wander or wallow) in the first stanza: “*Shanim banekhar hitgalgalti / ve’ata ehzor lebitpalesh beveyti*” (Years abroad I rolled about / and now I will return to wallow in my home).<sup>55</sup> Amitai’s translation uses two different Hebrew verbs to translate the Yiddish *valgern zikh*—*hitgalgalti* in the first line and *lebitpalesh* in the second—which implies that a fundamentally different kind of wandering occurs in Israel. In contrast to Amitai’s translation, Tene’s text substitutes the more refined and biblical *na vanad*, to roam or wander. In Hebrew, *na vanad* alludes to Cain’s punishment after killing his brother Abel in the fourth chapter of Genesis: “*na vanad tehiye ba’arets*” (you shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth).<sup>56</sup> The speaker’s—and by implication, the Yiddish poet’s—wandering becomes a punishment, a mark of Cain, that can presumably be remedied in the land of Israel, rather than an aspect of Jewish diaspora and modern life.



Several other changes shift the poem's emphasis from endless wandering to a more directed path. Tene's version sacrifices the critical parallel between *fremd* and *heym* in the first two lines to the demands of Hebrew syntax and rhyme. The temporal progression from *hayiti* (I was) to *akhshav* (now) frames the first two lines, emphasizing the journey from the foreign to the familiar, from then to now, rather than the original poem's emphasis on wandering in both places. He also makes the speaker's connection to home much more explicit than the oblique *in der heym* by using the possessive *beyti*, my home. In contrast to Yiddish, the Hebrew *bayit* resounds with geographical specificity as the Zionist homeland. Using a Hebrew filled with archaic and rabbinic language, Tene crafts a stilted, old-fashioned version of Manger's poem with clunky phrases such as *konam hu alay*, a rabbinic formula for an oath, in the final stanza. His translation loses Manger's Yiddish irony and ambiguity and creates a Zionist celebration of return.

While Tene's translation subtly rewrites Manger's poem, the closing lines of his translator's preface explicitly interpret the text:

Itzik Manger sprouted from the people and his poetry spoke to the people. Masses of readers in the Diaspora read his poems and loved him, but most were cut down by enemies and the rest are dwindling and disappearing. "Hayiti shanim na vanad" (For Years I Roamed)—sang the poet in one of the final poems in this collection. At the end of his days, after he came to Israel, he grieved and sobbed: "How can I kiss your dust? Behold I am your dust. . . ." May these poems in their Hebrew translation, which throb with the soul of a people filled with tears and laughter, find a path to the hearts of poetry-lovers in our land.<sup>57</sup>

Tene solemnly situates Manger in the diasporic past, as a poet of a murdered and disappearing folk rather than as part of the Israeli masses. Despite the many Yiddish speakers in Israel in the 1960s, particularly those flocking to see Manger's *Megile lider* performed in Yiddish, Tene firmly places Manger and his Yiddish poetry in the dwindling minority, accessible to Israeli-poetry lovers only through his Hebrew translations. He highlights "Hayiti shanim na vanad" as the poet's

melodramatic narrative of his immigration to Israel, reading the poem anachronistically as a heart-wrenching return rather than an ironic rewriting of home. The Hebrew translations of Manger's poetry, and specifically "Kh'hob zikh yorn gevalgert," provide the Israeli reader with a way to appreciate Manger's poetry not as a living cultural force—the product of a poet who was ill but still alive—but as a sentimentalized relic of the Diaspora.

Similarly, Zalman Shazar, the third president of Israel, an enthusiastic supporter of Manger and a Yiddish poet himself, holds the Manger of "Kh'hob zikh yorn gevalgert" as a paradigmatic example of a vision for Jewish culture in Israel, a cultural *kibbutz galuyot*. He, too, reveals his desire to transform Manger as a poet of the Yiddish folk into a national poet, endorsed by the Hebrew-speaking state. In his speech announcing the establishment of the Manger Prize in 1968, Shazar refines both Dov Sadan's and Yosef Sprinzak's earlier comments about the place of Yiddish in Israeli society by pronouncing an end to the battle between Hebrew and Yiddish and encouraging cooperative efforts: "We wish to reach the point where the state of Israel can be an example and caretaker for the creative-circles of the *folk*, scattered and gathered, well known and less well known."<sup>58</sup> But even Shazar's vision for the cultivation of Yiddish in Israel represents a fundamental transformation of Yiddish culture; Hebrew, privileged as the language of the state, is to be an example and caretaker, a national repository for folk traditions. The Manger Prize exemplifies this simultaneous celebration and appropriation of Yiddish culture in Israel, illustrated by the objectives printed in the annual program at the award ceremony. The only cultural prize named after a Yiddish writer aims:

- To raise the banner of Yiddish creativity in Israeli culture to its place, value and rights and its contributions to the nation's spiritual and artistic storehouse of thought and creativity for generations;
- To encourage people of literature and research who create in this language in the state of Israel and the Diaspora; to support them in their activities to continue its life; and to awaken the public's interest in the wonderful works that have been created in the Yiddish language and are being created even now;

- To express the esteem and affection of all lovers of poetry and art for the man who gave his name and memory to the prize—the poet Itzik Manger, one of the most brilliant writers in the Yiddish language and one of the greatest poets in our generation, who in his last years lived in Israel and upon his death was buried in Israeli soil.<sup>59</sup>

The state's official recognition of Yiddish literature and commemoration of Itzik Manger begins by focusing its attention on Israel as the “storehouse” for Yiddish creativity and ends by interring Manger himself in Israel.<sup>60</sup>

The translation of Manger into Hebrew and into Israeli society—creating him as a fitting writer for public consumption in print or on stage, and an appropriate namesake for a street in Tel Aviv and for an Israeli cultural prize—participates in this larger Israeli rewriting of Yiddish. While Manger is warmly welcomed into Hebrew culture, he is transformed from a homeless Yiddish modernist into an Israeli folk poet. Ultimately he himself becomes one of the “close figures” that he reinvents in his Yiddish literary history, a Yiddish figure inscribed in a Jewish folk tradition in a manner that serves the cultural and ideological needs of the present. This rewritten Itzik Manger comes to epitomize the officially sanctioned place of Yiddish culture in Israel as a representative of a once vibrant folk culture that finds refuge in *di yidishe medine*.

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## NOTES

- 1 Yitskhok Panner, *Sbtrikhn tsum portret fun Itzik Manger* (Tel-Aviv: Hamenorah, 1976), 92-94.
- 2 Yudl Mark, “Der Itzik Manger vos is veyniker bakant,” *Jewish Book Annual* 24 (1971): 76.
- 3 Melech Ravitch, *Mayn leksikon* (Montreal: A komitet, 1945), 1:126.
- 4 Yankev Glatstein, *In tokh genumen* (New York: Farlag fun yidish natsionaln arbeter farband, 1956), 2:307. While Glatstein accedes to the tastes of the Yiddish reading public and praises Manger's work, other critics have omitted Manger

- from their histories and critical accounts of Yiddish literature. For example, Benjamin Harshav has written extensively about Yiddish modernist poetry but does not mention Manger. See Benjamin Harshav, *The Meaning of Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). An important exception, however, is a perceptive chapter on Manger in David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 230–65.
- 5 See the documentary film by Arnon Goldfinger, *The Komediant* (Israel: Zebra Productions Ltd., 1999).
  - 6 Yael Chaver, *What Must Be Forgotten: The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 15.
  - 7 *Ibid.*, 29–37.
  - 8 Arye Leyb Pilowsky, *Tsvishn yo un neyn: yidish un yidish-literatur in Erets-Yisroel, 1907-1948* (Tel-Aviv: Veltrat far yidish un yidisher kultur, 1986), 198–200. See also Shimon Shur, *Gedud meginei hasafa be'Erets Yisra'el 1923-1934* (Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2000).
  - 9 “Ash ve-Hirshbeyn bemisibat hasofrim,” *Ha'arets*, May 4, 1927. For historical analysis of the controversy, see Chaver, 106, and Arye Leyb Pilowsky, “Yidish vesifrutah be'Erets Yisra'el, 1907-1948” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980), 96–115. For analysis of the highly gendered debate, see Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 124–31.
  - 10 Zohar Shavit, *Habayim hasifrutiyim be'Erets Yisra'el, 1910-1933* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hame'uchad, 1982), 176–79.
  - 11 Avraham Shlonsky, “‘Al ha'shalom,’” *Ktuwim*, May 11, 1927, p. 1.
  - 12 For a more detailed description of Manger's trip to Israel, see Hayyim S. Kazdan, *Di letste tkufe in Itzik Mangers lebn un shafn* (Mexico City: Imprenta Moderna Pintel, 1973), 149–58.
  - 13 Itamar Even-Zohar, “Israeli Hebrew Literature,” *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 169–70.
  - 14 Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Publishers, 1995), 131.
  - 15 A work by a Jewish writer, Toury suggests, was often considered to be “closer” to an original Hebrew text of the same type (genre, intended audience, etc). Gideon

- Toury, *Normot shel tirgum, vebatirgum hasifrutit le'ivrit bashanim 1930-1945* (Tel Aviv: 1977), 231.
- 16 Dan Miron, *Harpaya letsorekh negi'ab* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2005), 57-58.
  - 17 Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language*, trans. Shlomo Noble (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 252-54.
  - 18 For more about the Czernowitz conference, see Weinreich, 293-95, and Emanuel S. Goldsmith, *Architects of Yiddishism at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976).
  - 19 Toury, *Normot shel tirgum*, 116. In his study of literary translation into Hebrew, however, Toury counts only translations published in book form, not those that appear in newspapers or journals, which are particularly important venues for publishing poetry.
  - 20 Binyamin Hrushovski, later known as Benjamin Harshav, published several translations of Yiddish poets in the early 1960s under his pen name, H. Binyamin. See Aren Leyeles, *Shirim vephezyonot*, trans. Binyamin Hrushovski and Shimon Meltzer (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1960); Moyshe Leyb Halpern, *Tavas hazabav: shirim ufo'emot*, trans. H. Binyamin and Arye Sivan (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1963); and Avrom Sutzkever, *Berekhev esh: shirim ufo'emot*, trans. H. Binyamin (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1964).
  - 21 Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 61.
  - 22 See, for example, Max Erik, *Di geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur fun di eltste tsaytn biz der haskole-tekufe* (Warsaw: Kultur lige, 1928) and Max Weinreich, *Bilder fun der yidisher literatur-geshikhte* (Vilna: Tamar, 1928).
  - 23 Itzik Manger, *Noente geshtaltn* (Varshe: H. Bzshoza, 1938), unpaginated.
  - 24 In the preface, Manger also acknowledges the historical pressures of writing in the late 1930s; in a comment reminiscent of Eric Auerbach's epilogue in *Mimesis*, he apologizes for the many missing figures because by 1938 he is suffering from *di heymlozikayt*, homelessness, writing in Paris without his materials at hand. See *Noente geshtaltn*, unpaginated preface.
  - 25 *Ibid.*, 97.
  - 26 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
  - 27 Manger refers to Herder's work on language, nationalism, and the folk in his early writing in his short-lived literary journal, *Getseylte verter*. See Itzik Manger,

- “Tsveyter briv tsu X.Y.,” *Getseylte verter* 1, no. 3 (1929): 1-2. On Herder’s nationalism and its relationship to language, see J. G. Barnard, *Herder on Social and Political Culture* (Cambridge: 1960), 165, and F. M. Barnard, “The Hebrew and Herder’s Political Creed,” *Modern Language Review* 54, no. 4 (1959): 533-35.
- 28 In addition to Manger’s *Demuyot kerovot* in 1941, Shlonsky published Hebrew translations of Fishl Shneyerson’s Yiddish book *Khayim Gravitser* in 1939; H. Leyvick’s *Balada al beyt ḥolim beDenver*; and Arye Shamri’s *36 shirim al Leyzer Tsiprs* in 1942. Shmuel Lachover, *Avraham Shlonsky: bibliyografya* (Merḥavyah: Sifriyat Po’alim, 1950), 18-19, 42.
- 29 Hagit Halperin and Galiyah Sagiv, *Meagvaniyah ad simfonyah: hashirah bakalah shel Avraham Shlonsky veparodyot al shirato* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po’alim, 1997), 11-12.
- 30 Itzik Manger, *Dmuyot krovot*, trans. Avraham Shlonsky (Merḥavyah: Hashomer ha-Tsa’ir, 1941), 65.
- 31 Manger, *Noente geshtaltn*, 205.
- 32 Manger, *Demuyot kerovot*, 133.
- 33 Daniel Biton, *Sefer Megilat Ester: im targum sheni vealav hama’or shebamegilah* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Hama’or, 2004), 8-10; also see versions in H. N. Bialik and Y. H. Ravnitsky, eds., *Sefer ha’agadah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1948), 1:95-97, and Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), 6:290.
- 34 Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik, *Kol kitve H. N. Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1938), 62-63. Among Bialik’s many poetic birds (“El hatsipor,” “Levadi”) is also, interestingly enough, a full-fledged golden peacock. His poem “Tavas zehavi” (My Golden Peacock; *Kol kitve H. N. Bialik*, 67) is a much more transparent Hebrew version of the Yiddish tradition of the *goldene pave* as a messenger to a distant love. Yet Shlonsky chooses Bialik’s hoopoe rather than his peacock for his translation.
- 35 Bialik, *Kol kitve*, 302-03.
- 36 See Avraham Hagorni-Green, *Shlonsky ba’avotot Bialik* (Tel Aviv: Or Am, 1985).
- 37 Shmuel Werses, “Sugiyat yidish be-masekhet Dov Sadan,” *Sadan* (1994): 10.
- 38 Manger, *Demuyot kerovot*, 147.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 153.
- 40 Werses, “Sugiyat yidish bemasekhet Dov Sadan,” 16.
- 41 The many Hebrew translations of Manger’s poetry include Itzik Manger, *Sbir, balada, sipur*, trans. Shimshon Meltzer (Tel Aviv: Farlag Y.L. Peretz, 1962), Itzik

- Manger, *Shirim uvaladot*, trans. Binyamin Tene (Ramat-Gan: Hotsa'at al Hamishmar, 1968), Itzik Manger, *Levana aduma al gag makhsif*, trans. Mordekhai Amitai (Tel Aviv: Hotsa'at "Hamenorah," 1975), Itzik Manger, *Mivhar shirim*, trans. Natan Yonatan (Jerusalem: Keter, 1986), Itzik Manger, *Meshirei tavas hazahav*, trans. Ya'akov Orland (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1995), and Itzik Manger, *Tsrer shirim uvaladot*, trans. Me'ir Avni (Shamir: Me'ir Avni, 1999). This interest in translating Manger strongly contrasts with the general lack of interest in Yiddish works from the late 1950s to the 1980s that Dan Miron describes (Miron, *Harpaye letsorekh negi'ab*, 55-56), even if many of these translation were limited editions geared at a popular audience. By contrast, the only book-length translation of Manger's poetry in English is the relatively recent anthology translated and edited by Leonard Wolf, *The World According to Itzik: Selected Poetry and Prose* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002).
- 42 "Kh'hob zikh yorn gevalgert" appears in Hebrew in translations by Shimshon Meltzer (Manger, *Shir, balada, sipur*, 84-86), Binyamin Tene (Manger, *Shirim uvaladot*, 252-53), Mordekhai Amitai (Manger, *Levana aduma al gag makhsif*, 80), and Ya'akov Orland (Manger, *Mishirei tavas hazahav*, 13-14), as well as Moshe Basok's early anthology of translations from Yiddish poetry (Moshe Basok, *Mivhar shirat Yidish* [Ramat-Gan: Hakibbutz Hame'uchad, 1963], 306). It was also set for voice and piano by the Israeli composer Alexander (Sasha) Argov under the title "Hen nadaditi shanim al shanim banekhar."
- 43 Yosef Sprinzak, "Di goldene keyt," *Di goldene keyt* 1 (1949): 5.
- 44 Ibid., 5-6.
- 45 Avrom Sutzkever, "A vort tsum poet," *Di goldene keyt* 31 (1958): 12.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Itzik Manger, *Lid un balade* (New York: Itzik Manger Komitet, 1952), 486-87. Subsequent quotations from the poem will be given in parentheses.
- 48 Benjamin Harshav et al., *A shpigl oyf a shteyn: antologye poezye un proze fun tsvef farshnitene yidische shraybers in Ratn-Farband* (Tel-Aviv: Farlag Y.L. Perets, 1964), 375-76.
- 49 T. Carmi, ed., *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 348.
- 50 Ya'akov Zvi Shargel, *Fun onheyb on* (Tel Aviv: Yisroel-bukh, 1977), 159-60.
- 51 M. Tsanin, "Di yidische literatur un medines-yisroel," *Di goldene keyt* 66 (1969): 35.

- 52 Manger, *Shirim uvaladot*, 252.
- 53 I am also aware of the thorny linguistic issues involved in my own English translation of “Kh’hob zikh yorn gevalgert” as “For years I rolled about.” Leonard Wolf translates the critical first line of the poem as “For years I wallowed about in the world,” (Wolf, 106) closer to the Hebrew *hitpalesh* than Tene’s *na va-nad*. In contrast to Wolf, I have translated *gevalgern zikh* as “roll about,” to avoid the negative connotations associated with wallowing.
- 54 In his Yiddish-English-Hebrew dictionary, Alexander Harkavy provides a considerable list of definitions for *valgern zikh*, beginning with “*hitgalgel*, to roll”; see Alexander Harkavy, *Yidish-English-Hebraisher verterbukh* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1928), 200–201.
- 55 Amitai’s translation, “Shanim banekhar hitgalgalti,” appears in Manger, *Levana aduma al gag makhsif*, 80.
- 56 Genesis 4:12.
- 57 Manger, *Shirim uvaladot*, xlviii.
- 58 Zalman Shazar, “Der khut hameshulash,” *Di goldene keyt* 65 (1969): 231.
- 59 *Itzik Manger Prize for Yiddish Literature, Fourth Award* (1972), 6.
- 60 Yet such words were possible in Israel only in the late 1960s, and not without controversy. In a brief history of the Manger Prize, Meyer Vaysgal, the chairman of the prize committee, describes his efforts to convince the Israeli cultural establishment to award one of the state’s existing literary prizes to Itzik Manger, shortly before the poet’s death, for his contributions to Yiddish literature. The prize committee, Vaysgal recounts, was on the verge of presenting Manger with a major prize but was stopped by vehement public opposition, spearheaded by several prominent (but unnamed) Hebrew writers. Frustrated and disappointed, Vaysgal claims that he convinced Shazar and S. Y. Agnon to lend their support for a separate prize designated for Yiddish literature. See the prize ceremony program, 3–4.