

**MODERNIST BARD AND BALLADEER:
POETIC PERSONAS OF AVRAHAM SHLONSKY AND ITZIK MANGER**

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Born (or claiming to be born) with the new century in 1900, the Hebrew poet Avraham Shlonsky and the Yiddish poet Itzik Manger both situate the artist as a revolutionary force in the preservation and transformation of the nation. Although Shlonsky and Manger privilege the modernist poet as the herald of the new order and the arbiter of a new aesthetic, they offer different linguistic and ideological visions of the future in their creative work and manifestos.

Despite their different linguistic, literary and political stances, both Shlonsky and Manger conceive of the poet as artist and ideologue. They each construct their public and literary personas to lead their respective cultural transformations of the national soul. In his early work, Shlonsky creates himself as bard and builder of a new language and new society, articulating and exemplifying his ideological imperative as a thoroughly public individual. For example, in the well-known poem "Amal," published in 1927, Shlonsky names his poetic voice after himself and substitutes Avraham for the biblical Ephraim, appropriating the biblical narrative as he sanctifies his labor. The poetic Avraham creates a wondrous scene around him through both his words and his actions, embodied in his self-representation as *paytan-solel be-yisrael*, one of the many poetic personas and literary masks that fill his poetry and essays. Itzik Manger also writes himself into his modernist retellings of biblical narratives in his 1935 collection, *Chumesh lider*. As "the tailor from Wallachian land," Manger uses antiquated Yiddish, lilting rhymes and matter-of-fact prologues to shape himself as the balladeer of the Jewish folk and an integral part of the folk-world he creates. He updates the biblical text by setting his version in the familiar world of Eastern Europe and often inserts himself as a character in the biblical drama, like Shlonsky, claiming the familiar narrative for himself and his time. As they write and rewrite themselves into their work, Shlonsky and Manger use their poetic personas as productive and complex sites for literary experimentation and ideological expression.

Though a comparison of the early poetry and essays of these two prominent poetic figures in Hebrew and Yiddish, I will examine the ways in which the modernist poet constructs himself in a particular artistic image in the service of a highly ideological aesthetic that crosses linguistic boundaries.