The Image of Streetwalkers in Itzik Manger's and Debora Vogel's Ballads

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In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies (December 2020)

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THE IMAGE OF STREETWALKERS IN ITZIK MANGER'S AND DEBORA VOGEL'S BALLADS

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Abstract: *This article focuses on three ballads by Itzik Manger (*Di balade fun der zind, Di balade fun gasn-meydl, Di balade fun der zoyne un dem shlankn husar*) and two ballads by Debora Vogel (*Balade fun a gasn-meydl I un II*). We argue that Manger and Vogel subvert the ballad genre and gender hierarchies by depicting promiscuous female embodiment, theatricality, and the valuation of "lowbrow" culture of shund in their sophisticated poetic practices. These polyphonous texts integrate theatrical and folkloric song elements into "highbrow" Modernist aesthetics. Furthermore, these works by Manger and Vogel draw from both European influences and Jewish cultural traditions; they contend with urban modernity, as well as the resultant changes in the structures of Jewish life. By considering the image of the streetwalker in Manger's and Vogel's work, we deepen the understanding of Yiddish creativity as ultimately multimodal and interconnected.*

1. Itzik Manger's and Debora Vogel's Ballads: Points of Contact

Our study aims to bring two Yiddish authors—Itzik Manger and Debora Vogel—into dialogue. Manger and Vogel wrote numerous ballads where they integrated Eastern European folklore and interwar popular Jewish culture into this European literary genre. The poets used the ballad in two ways. First, they introduced the character of the prostitute into the ballad as a means to discuss gender and sexuality; second, Manger and Vogel critically engaged with the body of texts considered to be *shund,* or "trash" literary and theatrical production, as a means of subverting the ballad genre. The comparison of Manger's and Vogel's ballads offers new insights into the work of the two Modernist Yiddish poets, as well as a better understanding of the evolution of the ballad genre in Yiddish literature.

The ballad was originally an oral literary genre. During Romanticism, European poets[1] turned to folklore and became interested in the ballad and its possibilities for written literature and national expression.[2] This interest was not confined to the nineteenth century; it lasted well into the beginning of the twentieth century. The ballad's principal feature is its tragic plot that often features the themes of love and death, domestic crimes, mysterious encounters with ghosts and other non-human entities , as well as the themes of fatality and doom. The ballad combines significant events with marginalized experiences. This genre often includes dialogues between characters and dramatic elements. Ballads tend to enact the story for the reader rather than simply providing a retelling, hence the importance of visual elements, the narrative technique of repetition, and an emphasis on theatricality. In other words, this genre is at the intersection of written and oral literary traditions, theatre, and folklore.

Mani Leyb (1883-1953) was one of the first Yiddish poets to tap into the richness of the ballad genre. He published a poetry collection entitled *Baladn* in New York in 1918. Despite the title, not all poems in the book can be considered ballads from a formal standpoint. The ballad genre itself is fluid, and it was especially malleable in Mani Leyb's Modernist approach. Itzik Manger considered Mani Leyb to be his mentor in the art of poetry and an influence on his own engagement with the ballad genre.[3]

Mani Leyb pioneered the genre in Yiddish literature, but it was Itzik Manger who became the most prolific Yiddish writer of ballads, with over ninety ballads to his name. Manger holds a very special place among Yiddish poets. He combined Jewish and European influences in his writings to create Yiddish poetry that met the highest European aesthetic and literary standards. Manger used European imagery, genres, and literary methods and filled them with Jewish content, that is, Jewish folklore, traditional motifs, and religious allusions. Heine, Rilke, and the French and German symbolists exerted influence on Manger's literary taste and his poetry. The traditional Jewish culture of the poet's family in Czernowitz and the contemporary Yiddish poetry that inspired Manger in Romania were also central to the poet's artistic development. In Manger's literary work, European and Jewish sources and tendencies intertwined and gave birth to a unique poetics.

While Itzik Manger's ballads have been widely discussed in scholarly work,[4] Debora Vogel's ballads have received less critical attention. Unlike Manger, Vogel does not attribute her interest in the ballad to any of her literary predecessors. One of the few essays where the author discusses the ballad genre, among other topics, is her essay on Yiddish poets in Galicia.[5] In this text, Vogel traces the origins of Yiddish secular writing by non-anonymous authors in Galicia to Mikhl Wirta, a nineteenth-century bard.[6] In

[1] Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Hugo, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Heinrich Heine, Oscar Wilde, Edgar Allan Poe, Federico Garcia Lorca, and others worked in the ballad genre.

[2] See David Atkinson, *The Ballad and Its Pasts: Literary Histories and the Play of Memory* (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 2018).

[3] Manger sent his first poems in a letter to Mani Leyb in New York in 1919. See Efrat Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache. Itzik Manger — ein eupäischer Dichter* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016), 119.

[4] See Sadan 1968, Roskies 1995, Beer 1998, Gal-Ed 2016.

[5] See the essay in Polish "Pierwszi poeci żydowscy" [First Yiddish Poets], *Sygnały,* no. 14 (1936): 5.

[6] Wirta was born in Lemberg in 1877 and died in Vienna in 1919. He did not publish poetry collections. His

Vogel's view, Wirta transitions from the anonymity of folk song to his authorial work written in the ballad genre. Notably, Vogel discusses at length Wirta's ballad where a female character, the good-looking and blissful Mirele, takes center stage. The plot of this ballad is as follows: Mirele lingers at her window and fights off courtship at the outset of the poem only to be left alone and dissatisfied in the end. Mirele's actions, or lack thereof, seem theatrical, exaggerated. The attention to Wirta's treatment of a female character in his ballad betrays Vogel's own interest in the ballad's ability to express gender roles and norms theatrically. In Vogel's own ballads, as we will see below, female characters appear with exaggerated gestures, as if they were acting in a theatrical production.

Vogel made no mention of Manger as a possible influence. Her points of connection to Manger are tangential. Rachel Auerbach, a Yiddish writer and historian, was Vogel's lifelong friend and Manger's companion. Auerbach translated Vogel's earliest work from German into Yiddish, helping Vogel launch her Yiddish literary career. Auerbach also rendered Manger's work into Polish, enabling Polish-speaking readers to appreciate the Yiddish poet's work.[7] Both Auerbach and Manger are mentioned in Ber Shnaper's review of Debora Vogel's first poetry collection *Tog Figurn* as "singular talents," in contrast to other poets who wrote for the "market."[8] Besides her friend's personal connection to Manger, Vogel was certainly familiar with his work. A committed reader of Yiddish Bessarabian literature, Vogel read *Shoybn [Windowpanes]*, the journal where Manger published his work and corresponded with Shloyme Bikl, the journal's editor.[9]

It is through their interest in ballad that the two authors meet in a way that they did not meet in life. In the following sections, we will discuss Manger's ballads and their intriguing rewriting of the Jewish sacred textual tradition with promiscuous female characters at its center. We will also consider Vogel's expansion of the ballad's possibilities through the use of *shund* and foregrounding the everyday lives of women, especially the marginalized ones, i. e. streetwalkers in the ballad.

In the coming pages, we discuss in depth three ballads by Itzik Manger that focus on the promiscuous female characters (*Di balade fun der zind*, *Di balade fun gasn-meydl*, *Di balade fun der zoyne un dem shlankn husar*) and two ballads by Debora Vogel that feature streetwalkers (*Balade fun a gasn-meydl I un II*). We argue that Manger and Vogel subvert the ballad genre and gender hierarchies by depicting promiscuous female embodiment and offering a complex valuation of "lowbrow" culture of *shund* in their sophisticated poetic practices.

2. Ballads in Manger's Poetics: An Overview

texts were scattered across the almanacs, or "calendars," where Jewish writings saw the light of day due to lack of conventional publication venues such as journals.

[7] See Gal-Ed,. *Niemandssprache*, 303.

[8] See Ber Shnaper, "In ofene kartn. Vegn dikhtung koniunktur un shablon (oyfn rand fun a nay bikhl poezie) [Openly about poetry, market, and cliche. Reflection on the new poetry collection]," *Der nayer morgen* 4, no. 1121 (1930): 11.

[9] See Vogel's letter to Shloyme Bikl from June 5, 1936 in which Vogel thanks Bikl for sending her issues of *Shoybn*. Bickel Collection, Correspondence, RG 569, Box 28, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

Manger's mature literary experiments took the form of many genres, including songs, romances, serenades, and lullabies. Among these, the ballad occupies the most significant place in his work. This is even more remarkable because the ballad was never fully developed in the Jewish folklore from which Manger heavily borrowed. Manger's collection, *Shtern oyfn dakh* ("Stars on the Roof," 1929) contains twenty-seven ballads; the poet's second book, *Lamtern in vint: Lid un Balade* ("Lantern in Wind: Poems and Ballads," 1933) includes twenty-nine different ballads out of sixty poems in total.

Manger's essay *Di balade – di vizie fun blut* ("The Ballad – the Vision of Blood," 1929) provides insight into the attractiveness of the ballad genre for the poet. Manger claims that nations that can boast a rich balladic tradition in their folklore have later successfully created beautiful dramatic art. In his later essay, *Dos shpanishe folkslid* ("The Spanish Folksong," 1936), Manger further discussed his original idea about the relationship between the ballad and drama. For Manger, the ballad is the quintessence of European literature, a forerunner and a necessary condition for dramatic art. Besides drama, Manger looked for different aspects of tragedy in literature, and the two categories, drama and tragedy, were inseparably connected in his poetics.[10]

In *Di balade – di vizie fun blut* Manger listed the typical characters of ballads: street beggars and vagabonds, abandoned children, madmen, prostitutes, and the moon. The characters and elements mentioned by Manger are universal and do not bear any features that could point to a specific time period.[11] In the essay, Manger also included several examples of typical ballad plots. They all contain elements of phantasmagoria: the characters face supernatural forces that are dark and frightening. Towards the end of his essay, Manger mentioned Goethe's famous work, *Erlkönig,* and Heine's *Belsatzar*, as well as Edgar Allan Poe's writings. All these texts share the motifs of gloom, the presence of death, and human encounter with otherworldly forces and characters. These are the features that Manger incorporated into his ballads.

Manger proclaimed that his main goal was to find the roots of the ballad in Jewish culture and to reveal them in his poetry. The author's relationship with the ballad was not only poetic; he was spiritually and emotionally connected to the "death mystery" of the genre. As a result of this devotion, Manger discovered

> a form of lyric that operated through dialogue, character, symbolic landscape, strict rhythms and rhymes, refrains, and a diction close to that of the folksong. [...] Manger enlisted the compressed and conventional format of the ballad to combine the lyric sensibility of a German poet, the ethical sensibility of a modern secular Jew, and the dramatic sensibility of a born storyteller.[12]

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[10] See: Janet Hadda, "Christian Imagery and Dramatic Impulse in the Poetry of Itsik Manger," *Michigan Germanic Studies* 3:2 (1977), 9.

[11] See Atkinson, *The Ballad and its Pasts*, 7: "A balladic plot belongs to an unspecified past, "[i]ts weapons are the sword, the penknife, and the flintlock pistol, its modes of transport the horse and the sailing ship, its social structures (loosely speaking) feudal, its language formulaic and inclining towards the archaic."

[12] David Roskies, *A Bridge of Longing: The Lost Art of Yiddish Storytelling* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 237.

Manger's characters and the plots of his ballads are impressively diverse. They include stories about young women waiting for princes and dying alone, timeless tales about the tragic destiny of children who are not able to leave their parents, and narratives about brides dying right before their wedding. There are also stories about murder, beggars, paupers dying of hunger, and wanderers in the middle of nowhere. We see the narrative sliding as Manger experiments with the possibilities of the genre.

There is a spectrum of female types in Manger's poetry: "Mother, World mother, Martyr, Saint, Harlot, Bride, Daughter or Princess."[13] According to Ella Alfa, who analyzed Manger's poetry from the perspective of Jungian psychoanalysis, Manger was attracted to female archetypes because of their propensity to transform. Alfa asserts that, among his female characters, the prostitute is central to Manger's work. The dynamic and transformative elements in the figure of the prostitute are expressed in dialogues with the character's own shadow or in various personifications of it.[14] Thus, in addition to the inner tragedy of the shadow, the image was also attractive to Manger because of its possibility to transform, its vivid flexibility.

We may define the common features of Manger's ballads as following:

1. Tragic content and emotional tension. As mentioned above, death, madness, despair, irretrievable loss, and poverty are ever present; in many cases they result from an unsolvable conflict;
2. Precise visual imagery. Every one of Manger's ballads can be performed as a theatrical play;
3. The motifs of darkness and twilight. The time of action is often in the evening or at night; black, red (associated with blood), and dark blue are prevalent colors;
4. The "Silhouette nature" of characters. Manger did not intend to create reliable, psychological images; rather, his characters are archetypal and symbolic.

The characters, with their silhouette nature, are mirrored by shadows, a dynamic that is also mentioned in Alfa's essay. The shadows belong to another world and they provide mystical, frightening overtones. In Manger's ballads, shadows can be actual actors who can move and talk by themselves, as we will see in the analysis below. The indeterminate nature of the shadow attracted the poet's attention. The silhouette and the shadow both conceal something; they hint at the presence of something, but do not name anything directly.

Manger turned away from concrete social criticism in his works. When he wrote about beggars, orphans, or poverty, the poet used these themes as sources of universal tragedy. The paradox of Manger's poetry is that, despite the poems' universalism and concrete visuality, the reader nevertheless feels detached from the scene. Suffering, death, and dramas are deeply aestheticized, filled with the ballad poetics of darkness and madness.

3. The Image of the Prostitute in Manger's Ballads

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[13] Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache*, 195.

[14] See Alfa E, "Architipim nashiim beshirat itsik manger" (PhD diss. in Hebrew, Ramat Gan, 1995).

The image of the prostitute appears in Yiddish literature relatively late, as a reaction to urbanization and the encounter with other cultures (e.g., urban, secular, Gentile).[15] When we read Yiddish classics (Abramovitch, Perets, Sholem Aleichem), we find that characters from marginal circles are abundantly present on the pages of their works. As a case in point, the whole novel *Fishke der krumer* by Mendele Moykher Sforim is centered around the different kinds of Jewish beggars and panhandlers; all sorts of paupers appear in Sholem Aleichem's stories; and madmen and impoverished characters are repeatedly mentioned in Perets' works, but prostitutes seldom appear. It seems that the sex worker exists as marginal even to the margins; we can presume that among the beggars in *Fishke* there were also prostitutes, even though this fact is not mentioned explicitly. Mendele mentions a circle of sex traffickers in *The Magic Ring* (*Dos Vintshfingerl*). A similar example is Sholem Aleichem's short story "Der mentsh fun Buenos Ayres," where the main character is involved in sex trafficking. In twentieth century Yiddish literature, sex workers appeared more often. The works of Sholem Asch and David Bergelson engaged with questions of gender and sexuality. Sholem Asch depicted prostitution in "*Di geshikhte fun der sheyner Meri*," *Got fun nekome*, and *Motke ganev*; and Oyzer Warshawski depicts prostitutes in *Shmuglars*.[16]

Manger was the first Yiddish poet to aestheticize the image of the streetwalker. In "*Di balade–di vizie fun blut*," the prostitute is mentioned among other traditional ballad characters: "*Durkh der harbstnakht blondzhet a gasn-meydl*," ("Through the autumn night wanders a prostitute").[17] She walks through rain, alone on the street. Suddenly she calls out to somebody "Come!" and a shadow answers her call. The inclusion of this image in Manger's programmatic essay means that Manger saw in the figure of a prostitute the same metaphor of human tragedy as he saw in the images of homeless wanderers, abandoned children, and madmen. In fact, the figure of the prostitute was one of his earliest ballad visions: the poem "*Gasnmeydl"* was among two of Manger's poems published in 1921 in a Romanian Yiddish magazine *Kultur*, which was Manger's debut in the Yiddish press. The poem was later edited and reappeared in 1929 in *Shtern oyfn dakh*.

The image of the prostitute is central for Manger's poetics, despite it being relatively rare. In *Shtern oyfn dakh*, there are only two ballads about prostitutes: *Di balade fun der zind* ("The Ballad About Sin") and *Di balade fun gasn-meydl* ("The Ballad of a Prostitute"). It is possible to interpret the poem *Meydl-portret* ("A Girl's Portrait") as a poem about a prostitute as well, although she is never specifically identified as a sex worker. *Lamtern in vint,* the ballad *Di balade fun der zoyne un dem shlankn huzar*

[15] For more on the historical aspects of prostitution in Europe during the long 19th century, see: Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Devil's Chain: Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Laurie Berstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and Their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Mark Steinberg, *Petersburg Fin de Siecle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); and Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[16] For discussions of depictions of prostitution in the Jewish press, see Aleksandra Jakubczak, "Pogrom alfonsów" w Warszawie 1905 roku w świetle prasy żydowskiej," *Studia Judaica* 18, no. 36 (2015): 339-357.

[17] See Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache,* 308.

("The Ballad of the Prostitute and the Slim Hussar") and the poem *Sifilis* ("Syphilis") include prostitute characters, as well.

Sifilis is emblematic of the image of a prostitute becoming more pronounced in Yiddish poetry after the First World War and the October Revolution, when the waves of migration and displacement intensified, and many Jews from Eastern Europe moved to Western European cities. The Soviet Yiddish poets who spent several years in Berlin during the 1920s listed prostitution as one of the features of the decadent society they encountered there. Referring to the theme of prostitution, they often spoke of venereal diseases, only suggesting the connection via synecdoche.[18]

Sifilis depicts the meeting of a young lieutenant and a young woman in a park at night, where the young woman is followed by a visitor to a bar: *a shlanke dame flatert im antkegn, / aheftn zikh di shotns oyfn trotuar. / In ire oygn blit a blonder tsar* ("a slim lady flutters in front of him, the shadows intertwine on the pavement"). *Sifilis* encapsulates the details characteristic of Manger's ballads about prostitutes in general, yet this sonnet does not reach the same level of tragedy as his ballads; rather, it is a cursory sketch of an urban scene. In his ballads, Manger aestheticized the image of the streetwalker and elevated it to the symbolic and profoundly tragic realm by subverting the usual hierarchies of subjects in poetry.

3.1. The Ballad About Sin

An example of this tragic treatment of the streetwalker figure is *Di balade fun der zind*, which was first published in 1924 in the Czernowitz journal *Shoybn* and became the only published poem from his cycle "Cross in Wind" from the same year.[19] The poem opens with a row of prostitutes, which the narrator observes from his window. Excluded from the scene, he watches them from the side, as if in a theatre:

Shtile blaykhe froyen, gehilt in shvartse zeydns,
Shvebn durkh der tunkl – di kep aropgeboygn.
S'hot di nakht in groe kelers zey gefunen,
Un far di tsep di lange in gas aroysgetsoygn.
Zey shteyen bay mayn fenster. Antbloyzt di dare bristn,
In zeyere oygn tsitert a shtiler tifer vey.

("Silent pale women, wrapped in black silks,/ soar through the darkness – their heads bent down. / The night has found them in grey cellars and pulled out by braids to the street. They stand by my window. The thin breasts are bared, / silent deep pain trembles in their eyes")

[18] For instance, Moyshe Kulbak wrote in his poem, "Disner Chayld Harold" ("Child Harold from Disna," 1933) that among the integral features of a European are "a dog, a gonorrhea, and a pajama." Leyb Kvitko described a typical Berlin cafe as a place where "gonorrheas drink grog" and "syphilis dances" (Kafe "Goldener frak").

[19] Gal-Ed, *Niemandssprache*, 172.

The image of the prostitute in black clothes is quite unusual; prostitutes are typically depicted as wearing bright, flashy, seductive colors and cheap, kitschy dresses that aim to draw the attention of men. Later we will see that the prostitutes in Vogel's ballads align with this image: they wear bright and seductive red and lilac clothes. But Manger's prostitutes look like widows or nuns, especially when we consider the unusual verb *shvebn* (to soar, float) that emphasizes that these women are not real people, but tragic ghosts who move without touching the ground. The naked breasts of the women do not add any eroticism to the picture; instead, they add to the tragic nature of the image and recall clothes torn apart in lament—the Jewish tradition of mourning over the dead, which hints at the women's spiritual death alongside the mention of *yortsayt* candles.
From the first line of the poem, the reader can sense a decadent flavor: the image of prostitutes is sorrowful, but at the same time elegant and aestheticized. The women are passive: without raising their heads, they stand helplessly and wait for men to approach. In contrast to them, the male figure is active: "*a bokher kumt pamelekh, af a zayt dos hitl, nemt eyne untern orem, farlirt zikh in der vayt*" ("A guy comes slowly, hat on his side, he takes one of them by the elbow and disappears into the distance").[20] The author intends to evoke compassion for the sex workers in his ballad. To that end, he mentions lonely children lost in the darkness, and grandmothers who light up *yortsayt* candles for their granddaughters who are considered to be dead.

In the last two stanzas of the ballad, Mary Magdalene and the crucified Jesus appear among Jewish characters:

> "But when they [the grandmothers] fall asleep, grey shadows take
> These *yortsayt*-candles and bring them on a field.
> On the cross hangs the crucified liberator,
> And carries in his soul the suffering of the world.
>
> And on the side of the cross stands a pale woman,
> And her black hair flutters wildly in the wind.
> It is Miriam from Magdala – she stretches slowly the hands,
> And murmurs something sad and blesses the candles of sin."

Christian symbols and imagery can be frequently found in Manger's works: the poet saw in Jesus another perfect metaphor of pure tragedy. Moreover, "the ambiguity of Jesus who was both a Jew and the image of all that was Christian, offered Manger the possibility of making a connection that went beyond the differences between two religious systems for stating something universal."[21] Janet Hadda proclaims that "this use of Jesus and Christianity [...] is central to [Manger's] career."[22] But if Jesus is a frequent guest on the pages of Manger's works, Mary Magdalene is a rare one. Her name

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[20] Cf. the meeting of a young man and a prostitute in the poem *Sifilis*.
[21] Efrat Gal-Ed, "The Local and the European: Itzik Manger and his Autumn Landscape," *Prooftexts* 21, no. 1-2 (2011): 44.
[22] Hadda, "Christian Imagery and Dramatic Impulse in the Poetry of Itsik Manger," 12.

is almost never mentioned directly, though there are certain hints to her image in other poems.[23] However, the appearance of *Miriam* of Magdala is not coincidental.

Mary Magdalene is arguably the most well-known prostitute in world culture. Manger draws a parallel between the helpless and miserable streetwalkers, and the saint and prostitute. At the same time, Mary Magdalene symbolically blesses and protects the women. In the poem Mary Magdalene looks impressive and strong, she resembles a witch with her loose black hair, and her quiet murmur can be interpreted as both a prayer and a spell. The black hair is a remarkable detail because, in traditional iconography, Mary Magdalene is usually blonde or red-haired, but Manger changed Mary's hair color for heightened dramatic effect and the associative connection with black dresses of prostitutes.

Notably, Manger uses the Hebraized form of Mary's name: Miriam. In this way he emphasizes Mary Magdalene's Jewishness, both historical and cultural. The poet thus takes this Western Christian image and places it in a Jewish context.

Besides the Christological motif, an important literary context for Manger's ballad is the Book of Lamentations with its complicated Biblical imagery of "the transformative relationship between Eros and Thanatos with regard to laments, the transformation of stored-up erotic energy into the power that can produce a lament so effective that it will move even the angry and despotic Divine Majesty."[24] The major theme of lament and allusions to the Book of Lamentations appeared in the Yiddish poetry of the 1920s at the time of Manger's publication of the ballad.[25] Female images are crucial for the Book of Lamentations, and different metaphors of defiled or sinful women, as well as mournful mothers and widows, are abundantly present. As demonstrated in the analysis of Manger's ballad, the theme of lamentation is intertwined with the image of the prostitute. This theme also underlies a strong connection between sexual impulses and death; hence it is possible to say that Manger continues the Jewish poetic tradition of interpreting the prostitute as a tragic figure.

Di balade fun der zind demonstrates that Manger sees the image of the prostitute in relation to the general concept of suffering and tragedy. The passivity and silent despair of the characters in this ballad render them akin to the virgins from other ballads by Manger. The color palette of the poem underlines the difference. Instead of the "white shine of death" from *Di balade funem vaysn shayn*, the color black is dominant in this poem. *Di balade fun der zind* is full of contrasts between black (night, darkness) and white (candlelight), with grey (twilight) as an intermediate shade. This treatment of color recalls the theatre of shadows and Manger's fascination with silhouettes.

The black clothes of the prostitutes contrast with their pale faces, and the setting of a field on a dark night is illuminated by the candles that the shadows carry. The children

[23] Ekaterina Kuznetsova, "Święta prostytutka, a potem ladacznica," *Midrasz 204*, no. 4 (2018), Warsaw, 15-19.

[24] Galit Hasan-Rokem, "Bodies Performing in Ruins: The Lamenting Mother in Ancient Hebrew Texts," *Lament in Jewish Thought: Philosophical, Theological, and Literary Perspectives*, De Gruyter (2014): 57.

[25] The theme of lamentation was especially pronounced in relation to Jewish suffering during the Civil war in Ukraine and mass pogroms. Different interpretations of the related apocalyptic motifs became widespread in the works of Yiddish modernist poets Uri-Zvi Greenberg, David Hofshteyn, Peretz Markish, and others. Unlike these poets, Manger stepped aside from the implications of Biblical images as metonymies for contemporary sufferings of Jewish people.

in the darkness spin *a heylike shayn vos tsitert arum mide kep* ("a holy shine that trembles around tired heads") reminiscent of the nimbuses that encircle the heads of Christian saints. Finally, when the prostitute comes back from her client *di bristn ire glien* ("her breasts are glowing"), as if she was not touched by sin, but rather as if she encountered something holy, or is perhaps holy herself. The sin stays on her clothes, not extending to her body. The opposition between black and white reflects the opposition between depravity and holiness: every prostitute in this ballad is Mary of Magdala – a holy harlot.

3. 2. The Ballad About a Streetwalker

The mysterious character of the shadow appears again in Manger's other poem from the *Shtern oyfn Dakh* collection, *Di balade fun gasn-meydl*. The plot of this ballad is similar to *Di balade – di vizie fun blut*, but *Di blade fun gasn-meydl* elaborates the plot in more detail:

Durkh der tunkler osyen-nakht
Blondzhet um a meydl shtum.
Tsu a shotn fun der erd
Vinkt zi: "Kum!"
Un vi vild zi tsitert oyf,
Hot der shotn zi derhert?
Langzam, langzam heybt er zikh
Fun der erd.
Un er shtrekt di shotn-hent
- *Meydl, kum!*
Un er nemt mit hent – tsvey shleng
Zi arum.
Un di nakht farshlingt ir vey,
Un ir klog.
Vayt in mizrekh tsitert oyf
Shtil der tog

(Through the dark autumn night / a girl wanders silently. / To a shadow from the ground / She says "Come!" / And how wildly she trembles, / Did the shadow hear her? / Slowly, slowly he rises / from the ground. / And he stretches the shadow-hands / - Girl, come! / And with hands – two snakes / He embraces her. / And the night swallows up her pain / and her lament. / Far in the East trembles / quietly the day)

In this poem the image of a shadow—dark, unearthly, and mysterious—paradoxically turns into a tender consoler, who comforts the prostitute and eases her suffering. Consolation is "one of the fundamental longings of human existence,"[26] and, both in this poem and in *Di balade fun dem zind*, Manger offers a

[26] Eli Schonfeld, "Ein Menachem: On Lament and Consolation," *Lament in Jewish Thought:*

sympathetic image of a character who cannot find compassion among the living. In *Di balade fun dem zind*, the shadows mediated between the women, the crucified Jesus and Mary Magdalene, while in *Di balade fun gasn-meydl,* the shadow acts on its own. The image of the prostitute in Manger's ballads incorporates tragedy, suffering, and loneliness because prostitutes are abandoned and rejected by everyone. *Di balade fun dem zind* clearly demonstrates that the streetwalkers' relatives think about them as if they were dead daughters. Thus, the question arises: who would be able to understand the prostitute's pain and comfort her? Only a shadow, because both the shadow and the prostitute belong to "another" world; they always stay unnoticed, though everyone knows about their existence.

3.3. The Ballad About a Harlot and a Hussar

Now let us turn to Manger's later poem *Di balade fun der zoyne un dem shlankn huzar*, which was first published in 1931 in *Literarishe bleter* and was included in *Lamtern in vint*. This ballad belongs to the sub-genre of murder ballads. Furthermore, it bears distinct traces of popular *shund* plots from the tabloid press in interwar Warsaw.

The ballad is nine stanzas long and has a clear plot, unlike the other more mystical ballads analyzed above. *Di balade fun der zoyne un dem shlankn huzar* has formal ballad features like refrains and a frame narrative. The last stanza includes the following statement: "this story happened in Iasi in 1908, my mother sighed and cried about it for the whole night, and I wrote this poem in memory of these two events." Manger staged the story as if it were based on real-life events by giving the exact place and time, but of course the story is purely fictional. By persuading the reader that the story is true, Manger in fact makes it closer to legend, where the listener's credulity is a part of the genre. The ballad's last stanza also hints at a certain mockery, Manger's sophisticated game with the reader – the poet acknowledges that he described a sentimental plot, like those in *shund* novels, that would make women cry. As will become apparent from the ballad's plot, the whole story reflects the cheap tabloid literature prevalent at the time.

Nathan Cohen states that, in the titles of 1930s Jewish popular novels in interwar Poland, words like "'suspenseful', 'sensational', 'thrilling', and 'erotic'"[27] were extremely widespread. Even though Manger does not provide any sensational qualifiers in the ballad's title, he gestures towards the sensational attributes of *shund* potboilers by mentioning (not without irony) that the author's mother "sighed and cried" over the events described in the ballad.

As mentioned above, prostitution belonged to the criminal sphere, which was left largely unexplored by the classical Yiddish writers. Following Sholem Aleichem's statement in the essay *Shomers mishpet* ("Shomer's Trial," 1888), Yiddish fiction was to serve an important didactic and enlightening function, and the usage of criminal elements, which was characteristic of the popular mass, or *shund*, literature, contradicted this mandate. Shomer, a writer of popular Yiddish fiction, was perceived by

Philosophical, Theological, and Literary Perspectives, De Gruyter (2014): 11.
[27] Nathan Cohen, "Shund and the Tabloids: Jewish Popular Reading in Inter-War Poland," *Polin* 16 (2003): 202.

Sholem Aleichem as to have included the motif of the sexual "fall into sin" in his novels, which prompted Sholem Aleichem to put Shomer's works on "trial." Sholem Aleichem was not alone in his outrage.

Traditionally, sexuality and its socially disapproved forms were especially tabooed in Yiddish literature; even love and romantic plots were less developed in Yiddish literature than, for instance, in Russian and European literatures.[28] To a great extent it follows from the fact that classical Yiddish literature was perceived to be a literature of the shtetl[29]. Prostitution was not completely unknown to shtetl inhabitants, yet many writers preferred to circumvent this topic, since it did not necessarily fit into the idealized literary image of the shtetl.

Even though prostitution in the shtetl was rarely represented in Yiddish classical prose, the "vice" of prostitution as part of the urban landscape began to be explored in Yiddish theater in the early twentieth century, as the process of Jewish movement from the shtetls to cities intensified. In 1907 Sholem Asch published his scandalous play *Got fun nekome* (*The God of Vengeance*), which grapples with just this theme. The action of the play is set in "one of the largest towns of a Russian province." One of the characters, Basya, has just arrived from a village where she grew up and now works in the brothel. She symbolically embodies the clash between cities and the countryside, violent processes of modernization, and commodification of the female body.

The publication of Manger's ballads was parallel to Asch's work and to the rise of the sensationalist Yiddish press in Poland, which, remarkably, was itself "compared to a prostitute sitting in her brothel and counting her profits."[30] Tabloid newspapers published scandalous stories and *shund* potboiler novels, for which the themes of love for sale, fallen women, explicit eroticism, seduction, and crimes of jealousy were integral features. While some Yiddish writers, like Israel Rabon and Yehoshua Perel, participated in the production of boulevard literature, others—Itzik Manger among them—explicitly denounced such subject matter.[31] The turn to the image of the streetwalker and to plots that verge on *shund* literature represents an attempt to process popular material and transfer it to the field of modernist poetry.

Manger's ballad about the harlot and the hussar starts with the dialogue between a prostitute who stands by the window and a handsome hussar on the street. The setting is theatrical, and the reader can vividly imagine the scene near the window, which is similar to the scenes in the ballads discussed above. The prostitute lures the hussar by describing her beauty ("my breast is white as snow", "my hair is pure gold"). The man is lithe (*shlank*—far from an obvious epithet for a man), with eyes that "sparkle hot and sharp," a phrase that is repeated twice. In short, the main characters of the prostitute and the hussar have the clichéd features of the physically attractive, seductive, and

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[28] See: Naomi Seidman, *The Marriage Plot, or How Jews Fell in Love with Love and with Literature* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016).

[29] Even though all the three above mentioned classical writers lived most of their lives in large cities like Odessa, Kiev, and Warsaw, they extensively used the microcosm of shtetl as a macrocosm in their works. Their shtetls, however, hardly reflected the realities of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement. The shtetls that we find in the works of Yiddish classics "are expurgated and, in a certain sense, unhistorical." See Dan Miron, "The Literary Image of the Shtetl," *Jewish Social Studies* 1, no. 3 (1995): 4.

[30] Cohen, "Shund and the Tabloids," 191.

[31] Itzik Manger, "Shomeriade...," *Getseylte verter* 2, no. 4, Krakow (1930).

passionate heroes of *shund* novels. There is strong sexual tension between them: the prostitute wants to persuade the hussar to come in not exclusively because she wants to earn some money, but also because she is attracted to this man. The hussar offers the prostitute a bead necklace, but she refuses, so the man offers his mother's golden tear instead. The tear fell on the hussar's head when he was drafted into the army. The prostitute takes the hussar inside the house, looks at him, and the shocking truth comes out as she remembers him: he is her brother. But his reaction is far from a happy family reunion: he says that she must pay with her head (for the shame she brought on the family) and decapitates her. Finally, the horrifying head rolls and the lips of the dead prostitute say, "Thank you, hussar, for liberating me."

Un s'blutikt ir kop tsu im aroyf:
"Huzar, shlanker huzar!
Dayn meser un trer hobn mikh derleyzt –
A dank, a dank derfar."
Un s'shtorbn ire lipe op:
"A dank, a dank, huzar."

(And her bloody head [rolls] down to him: / "Hussar, lithe hussar! / Your knife and tear have liberated me - / thank you, thank you for this". / And her lips die: / "Thank you, thank you, hussar")

The strange and unrealistic way to murder somebody by cutting off their head with a knife is reminiscent of folk horror stories and scandalous (and sometimes fake) news from tabloids that make sentimentally inclined readers "sigh and cry," while perceptive readers may only laugh.[32] However, the ballad goes beyond being a mere parody of *shund* literature. Intriguingly, the poem contains a reverse plot about Salome, the image of the virgin-harlot who beheads a man and then dies. The motif was popular with the Symbolists; the story of Salome, for instance, provided the basis for Oscar Wilde's 1891 play Salome. In his ballad, Manger inverts the Salome narrative, making the harlot a victim of the man she wanted to seduce. The archetypal connection between sex and death, as well as the themes of shame and restored honor, can be equally characteristic of *shund* novels and of sophisticated literature, and Manger balances on the edge between these forms.

Using symbolic details, mainly the symbolism of color, Manger creates a suspenseful gothic atmosphere in the poem, like the atmosphere in Edgar Allan Poe's stories (another favourite of Manger's). Almost every ballad stanza references color: in the first stanza it is white that is associated with detachment and death; in the second stanza, red. The hussar offers "blood-red beads" to the prostitute, which foreshadow the blood drops shed at the end. In the third and fourth stanzas the prostitute's gold hair becomes connected to the hussar mother's golden tear. In the fifth stanza red wine appears on the

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[32] It is possible that Manger hints at an exact novel *Der shreklekher sod fun an opgehaktn froyenkop: a roman fun libe, laydnshaft, mord un raykhtum* ('The Terrible Secret of a Severed Woman's Head: A Novel of Love, Passion, Murder, and Riches') that was published on the pages of Warsaw tabloid Varshever kuryer in 1929.

table; this second mention of the color red increases the tension and anticipation of the dramatic finale. In the poem's seventh stanza "death – the black raven" appears, which recalls Poe's *The Raven*.[33] Finally, in the eighth stanza, real blood is shed.

Manger uses a relatively limited spectrum of colors, but all of them are strong (there are no semitones). All the colors are full of symbolic meaning: white, red, gold, and black (plus the silver mirror of the river and the shine of the hussar's knife, which can be considered variations of white). These deep, intense colors create bright visual images and strengthen the dramatic effect. They are also strikingly different from the black-and-white images from the earlier ballads about prostitutes.

The hussar and the prostitute have a complicated relationship: the hussar is simultaneously the murderer and the liberator of the prostitute. Unlike the women in the two ballads from *Shtern oyfn dakh*, the prostitute in this poem is an active agent. She herself invites the hussar to her house, inviting death at the same time. While in the first stanzas she looks like a vicious seducer, in the middle of the poem she reveals her suffering soul, and in the end thankfully accepts her death.

In the approximately ten years that passed between *Di balade fun gasn-meydl* and *Di balade fun der zoyne*, Manger moved from aestheticism to more "radical," sensational *shund plots*. This departure is evident in the dramatic finale of *Di balade fun der zoyne un dem shlankn huzar,* which is markedly different from the subtler endings he previously favored. Although each of these three ballads treats the tragic element differently, they are linked by the figure of the prostitute. Now we will see how the theatricality of the ballad genre and gender become central to the image of the streetwalker in Debora Vogel's ballads written a few years later.

4. Debora Vogel's Ballads: Overview of the Genre

Debora Vogel's relationship to Jewish artistic and textual traditions is attributed to the author's engagement with the ballad genre. In an essay on Marc Chagall, Vogel characterizes the artist's vision of "life" as that of a banal and shoddy, yet at the same time, eternal ballad.[34] This statement could be Vogel's definition of the ballad: a genre that incorporates both lasting elements, and those that might be deemed vulgar or inconsequential. Banality and shoddiness are intertwined with refinement in Chagall's work, and, as we will see, in Vogel's writing.

Vogel authored thirteen ballads and six poems in the ballad tonality, which were published in her second poetry collection *Manekinen lider [Mannequins. Poems]* in

[33] The last sentence in "*Di balade – di vizie fun blut*" is "In the shine of this wild black crown [i.e. ballad] the black raven tears apart the blue delicate soul of Edgar Allan Poe." Apparently, Manger used the raven to allude to Poe's poem, thereby making a connection between his Yiddish writing and the broader Western literary tradition. It is also interesting that the red wine and blood-red beads recall Oscar Wilde's "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" ("He did not wear his scarlet coat, for blood and wine are red"), which Manger knew and admired.

[34] See "Marc Chagall (Z okazji 50-lecia urodzin)," Żydowski Uniwersytet we Lwowie, Jednodniówka, Lwów (1937): 19-20. Vogel also authored another essay on Chagall where she discussed the artist's work in terms of literary motifs and visual formal qualities, "Teme un forem in der kunst fun shagal. Pruv fun estetisher kritik." ["Theme and Form in Chagall's Art from the Perspective of an Art Critic"] Tsushtayer, no. 1-2 (1929, 1930).

1934.[35] In her sophisticated Modernist poems, Vogel explicitly connects the ballad to lowbrow, *shund* literary production. The thirteen ballads make up the poetry cycle *Shundbaladn [Bawdy Ballads]* (1931–1933) within *Mannequins*. The other six poems that are not titled "ballads" nevertheless share many similarities with the genre. They make up another poetic cycle, *Trinklider [Drinking Songs]* (1930–1932). These drinking songs are numbered and do not have additional titles besides the generic title, *trink lid*. To further suggest the proximity of these drinking songs to the poems entitled "ballads," two of the ballads we will discuss, *Balade fun a gasn-meydl I and II,* are also numbered. The numbering and generic titles—quite unusual in Vogel's writing—underline Vogel's experimentation with the ballad as a genre located at the intersection between authorial and anonymous creativity, which lends itself to additional experimentation of incorporating *shund* popular culture into Modernist aesthetics.

4.1. Drinking Songs

Notably, Mendel Neugroschl, a compiler of the anthology of Galician Yiddish poets, included Vogel's *Trink lid,* a poem with a repeated refrain and other features of the ballad, as the poem to represent the author in the anthology.[36] Karolina Szymaniak, a pioneering scholar of Vogel, discussed the place of *Trinklider* in Vogel's oeuvre.[37] We might use Debora Vogel's characterization of Chagall's work (i.e., his treatment of life as a banal, shoddy, and yet eternal ballad) for our discussion of *Trinklider*. Life, love, and death form a triad in the cycle's organization. Love poems[38] are interspersed between the drinking songs, reflections on life and its fragility, and poems about death. [39] Love is a *shund* poem itself, "sweet and shoddy like life…"[40] In turn, life and death are marked by an elegiac mood and sadness: "Our drinking song is sad. /Like life. And death."[41] In addition to the simplified thematic organization (*libe-troyer-lebn-toyt*), the poems are punctuated by a streamlined syntactical form with an internal rhythm, which is characteristic of the ballad form.

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[35] Vogel attempted to publish a selection from *Shundbaladn* before publishing the poems in the book form. The author sent them in 1933 to the Bessarabian-born editor and critic Ezekiel Brownstone. Letter from June, 12, 1933. See Ezekiel A. M. Brownstone Collection, RG 344, Box 5, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York. A resident of Los Angeles at the time, Brownstone was the editor of a few periodicals, such as *Los andzheleser yidisher byuletin* [*Los Angele Yiddish Bulletin*], *Yidishe shtime* [*Yiddish Voices*], *Proletarisher Gedank* [*Proletarian Thought*], *Kalifornyer yidishe lebn* [*California Yiddish Life*], as well as a monthly journal *Lid. Shrift far lid un iber lid* dedicated to poetry and issues of poetics. The two poems appeared in *Lid. Shrift far lid un iber lid*, vol. 2, 1934, p. 15.

[36] See *Kleyne antologye fun der Yidisher lirik in Galitsie, 1897-1935 (*Vin, 1936). See also *Di moderne Yidishe literature in Galitsye* (Nyu-York: Altveltlikhn Yidishn Kultur Kongres, 1955).

[37] See Karolina Szymaniak, *Być agentem wiecznej idei. przemiany poglądów estetycznych Debory Vogel* (Krakow: Universitas, 2006), 134-136.

[38] "Libe-ferzn 1920 [Love Verses 1920]," "Libe-lid [Love Poem]."

[39] "Matseve oyfshrift [The Inscription on the Matzevah]," "Shikh [Shoes]."

[40] "di libshaft is shoyn a klayn lidl/zis un tandetne vi dos lebn…" See "Balade fun parizer pletser [Ballad of Parisian Squares]," Manekinen, p. 51.

[41] "unzer trinklid iz troyerik/vi dos lebn. vi der toyt," in "Trinklid III [Drinking Song III]," *Manekinen*, p. 29; and in "Trinklid V [Drinking Song V]: "vozshe blaybt unz mer in lebn/ vi dos vos iz enlekh tsu toyt:/vi der tog un di nakht un der tog," *Manekinen*, p. 22.

4.2. Bawdy Ballads

Shundbaladn—like *Trinklider*—are examples of "decorative-consumerist worldview."[42] Banality and shoddiness, both decorative aspects of life, take center stage here:

> Sadness is a decorative element in life. All of life can become decorative. It happens when a heroic raw schema — to which the multiplicity of events is reduced — reveals the arch-scheme of monotony. Then one must return to interpretation, the "superstructure" of a couple of raw facts in life. In effect, the surface of life is filled with events. It becomes an ornament that does not leave any space for monotony. The raw concentrated three-dimensional block of life becomes flat two-dimensional décor. However, with the decorative arrangement of life without the residue of events, there emerges a psychological constellation of reckoning with the somewhat available ready-made things that "should happen." Hence, the only possible state is waiting for the ready-made possibilities and "experiences" which can happen, yet do not.[43]

In appreciating the "ready-made" and available decorative and consumerist elements of life, Vogel also reevaluated *shund,* or shoddiness, and its excessiveness, theatricality, and ornamentality, out of which truth, objectivity, and matter-of-factness may arise. This reevaluation began with *Shundbaladn* and continued in Vogel's prose.[44] In a letter to the New York poet and critic Aaron Glantz-Leyeles, Vogel writes: "My new poems move in the direction of reportage and objectivity. And a specific genre, which I call "shoddy ballad," is born out of this meeting, out of the clash between straightforwardness and pathos."[45] It is of note that the author who singled out *Shundbaladn* as a specific genre, also added a subtitle to her poems: *khronik*, a chronicle. The words "chronicle," "reportage," and "objectivity" imply a semblance of that which is true-to-life, based on facts. However, there is another side to the ballads that Vogel offered up for publication to A. Leyeles. The factuality collides with pathos; the fact presented is marked by sensationalism, sentiment, *shund*. As mentioned above, Itsik Manger also nods to the tabloid coverage of events like murder in his framing of *Di balade fun der zoyne and huzar* as a faux genre of such a chronicle, or reportage in the press. While for Manger the semblance of facts is a ploy, Vogel puts all her cards on the table and exposes truth as a sham.

Vogel modernizes the ballad genre by utilizing this "collision of simplicity and pathos." The author uses *shund* in a way that does not dismiss it as a source of pleasure

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[42] See Debora Vogel, "Afterword to Manekinen," *Manekinen: Lider.* (Lemberg: Tsushtayer, 1934), 71.

[43] See "Afterword to the *Mannequins* Collection" in *Blooming Spaces: The Collected Poetry, Prose, Critical Writing, and Letters of Debora Vogel,* ed. Anastasiya Lyubas (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 287.

[44] The writer also suggests an affinity between *Shundbaladn* and the third part of her 1935 prose montage collection *Akatsies Blien* [*Acacias Bloom*]. Debora Vogel, "A por bemerkungen vegn mayn bikhl 'akatsies blien' [A few remarks regarding my book Acacias Bloom]," *Shoybn*, no. 5 (1937): 38.

[45] Letter from February 27, 1933. A. Leyeles Collection, RG 556, Box 4, Folder 5, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York. The English translation is in Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 357.

for the masses, yet does not reaffirm it as such: in her work *shund* does not become entertainment but rather a challenge to itself.

In her *Shundbaladn,* Vogel comments on the simplified plotlines of literary potboilers and the decorative aspects of theatrical crowd pleasers. Modernity transmits *shund* across multiple other media and Vogel channels the shoddy sentiments of popular film,[46] fashion,[47] and travel[48] into her poetry.

The author also engages with s*hund* in journalism, that is, sensationalist crime chronicles and their flat narratives. In "*Balade fun a shlekhtn roman* [A Ballad of a Trashy Novel]," Vogel meditates on the genre and the projected readership of pulp fiction, and deconstructs a "typical pulp novel plot" with its main characters' intense longing for happiness—a happiness that seems to be out of reach. The venue of the poem's publication, *Literarishe bleter*, is also not coincidental. This reputable publication featured editorials that covered issues such as "ongoing war against noncanonical literature known as *shund* ("trash")" which was abundantly serialized in many publications in Warsaw and other cities.

A Ballad about a Trashy Novel[49]

And so it came about
as they write in potboilers
with invented ludicrous fates...

He remained forever
the best memory of her life.
Yet he was always
her life's greatest misfortune.

Couldn't live with him — couldn't live without him...

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46 The visual paradigm of *shund* is rendered through the medium of film, as for instance, in "Shtot-groteske Berlin [City Grotesque Berlin]," where there is a reference to a popular mass production of the German UFA Studio, "=ufa=the=chaste=Susana=the chaste=Susana=the=." "=ufa=kino=di=koyshe Susana=di koyshe susana=di." *Manekinen*, p. 23.

47 Fashion, fleeting trends and materials become markers of urbanity in the same way as the bridges and other more durable landmarks in "Shundbalade Pariz" [Shoddy Ballad Paris], "un men kon fargesn dem kolir/dem fason un afile dem shtof/ fun dayne kreln dayne kleyder dayne shikh/ pariz du shtot fun bunt-farbikn shund," Manekinen, p. 56. See more on Paris as the city of *shund* in Anna Misiak, "Bänklein aus Nebel, Luft und Stroh": Paris in den Schundballaden Debora Vogels ["Benches of blue air and yellow straw": Paris in Debora Vogel's Bawdy Ballads]." *Metropolen der Avantgarde. Métropoles des avant-gardes*, eds. Thomas Hunkeler and Edith Anna Kunz (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 75-92. The scholar focuses on the variety of topoi that make up the collective topos of Paris in Vogel's oeuvre. Vogel's *Shundbaladn* and *Trinklider* present an elaboration of the theme of monotony and repetition, as well as alienation and sensibilities of urban dwellers living in an age of advertisements, technologies, and other phenomena of mass society.

48 The third way Vogel approaches the regime of visuality and *shund* is through a typical postcard, a token of the tourist economy in which representations and signs circulate, both sentimental and cheap, as in "Di balade fun dem sene taykh [The Ballad about the Seine]," "un der sen-paysazh geven an ansikhts-kartl/ mit a royter shif sentimentaler/ un a taykh fun ultramarine," *Manekinen*, 54.

49 Originally appeared in *Literarishe bleter*, vol. 10, no. 11, p. 171.

Why did you break my heart…
And the heart is forever broken
as they write in cheap novels…

….and life is squandered. Long as melancholy
as they describe in these stories.
What does the word "squandered" mean…
Yet everyone understands it.

In every street and house
delicate ladies, stiff gentlemen carry
shards of broken hearts
cut out from trashy novels…

And sweet ladies cut out from wood
and stiff wooden gentlemen
imitate a shoddy novel
its title: life, happiness, and death.[50]

The title Vogel suggests for a potboiler is "Life, happiness, and death," which is reminiscent of the simplified thematic range in the *Trinklider*. In addition to commenting on the straightforward plotline of unhappy love, the lyrical persona in Vogel's poem poses a rhetorical question about the meaning of trite expressions like "squandered life" only to declare that its sense must be universal, since everyone understands the notion. The collision of matter-of-factness and pathos creates Vogel's "highbrow" Modernist poem out of the material of the "shoddy novel".

5. The Image of the Streetwalker in Vogel's Ballads

Like Manger, Vogel too found that the prostitute was a particularly important figure for the ballad. The streetwalker appears in Vogel's *Shundbaladn* sequence in two ballads "Balade fun a gasn-meydl I" and "Balade fun a gasn-meydl II." The identical titles, differing only by a Roman numeral, suggest that the ballads are part of a diptych. The diptych treats the theme of urban prostitution from multiple angles.

5.1. Ballad of a Streetwalker I

The first line of the "Balade fun a gasn-meydl I" mentions Bertold Brecht's play *The Threepenny Opera* and alludes to the character of pirate Jenny who is unnamed here:

[50] "un s'iz take azoy gekumen/vi geshribn in shlekhte romanen/mit di oysgetrakhte lekherlekhe mazoles…/ geblibn iz er take vi tomed/ geblibn iz er take vi tomed/ di shenste dermonung fun ir lebn./ un geven iz er vi tomed/ dos groyse umglik fun ir lebn./ nisht gekont mit im lebn nisht on im…/farvos hostu tsebrokhn mayn harts…/un dos harts iz oyf tomed tsebrokhn/vi geshribn shteyt in shlekhtn romanen…/…un farshpilt iz a lebn. lang vi umet/vi farshribn shteyt in yene geshikhtn./vos heyst den do vort farshpilt…/ober ale farshteyn dos vort./ […]/un fun holts oysgeshnitene damen zise/ un hiltserne hern shtayfe/ makhn nokh a shlekhtn roman/ vos heyst. lebn un glik un toyt.", "Balade fun a shlekhtn roman," *Manekinen*, 47. English translation in Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 264-266.

"and why a ship with eight sails/which should come for you from afar,/ a red-haired streetwalker from *The Threepenny Opera*"[51] ("un farvos grod a shif mit akht zeglen/ vos darf kumen tsu dir fun der vaytns/royt gasn-meydl fun der "opera far dray groshn"…). In Brecht's play, Pirate Jenny sings a song that tells a story of a lowly maid—the song in which we might recognize the prostitute herself. Awaiting a ship with "eight sails," a pirate ship that will take her away, the maid makes beds in "a crummy old hotel" in a port town for men who do not even know her name. The two lines "a ship with eight sails,/ And with fifty canons" are repeated four times as part of refrain in Brecht's original, with the third line changing to reflect the ship's progressive imaginary action and its conclusion,

And a ship with eight sails,
And with fifty canons,
Will lay by the docks…/Will fire at the shore…/Will raise up her flag…/Will disappear with me…

Brecht wrote for the theater; his works were performed on stage, and this fact is reflected in the author's language. *The Threepenny Opera* was accompanied by multiple songs and ballads. Brecht used sensationalism for its possibility to level sharp criticism at the socio-political and socio-economic conditions of the time. By referring to Brecht's "a shif mit akht zeglen," Vogel does not merely engage in intertextual play, but also stresses the theatrical functions and possibilities of her own ballad.

The ballad's second stanza intertextually comments on the fashion of prostitutes since time immemorial and introduces its modern variations. The unnamed red-haired prostitute is clad in black, "dressed in black scarf—the scarf is very much like satin;"[52] the woman's outfit is complemented with "the long black shimmering socks/with red suspenders to be taken off…"[53] The next line appears in quotation marks: "dressed in silk and satin." This unattributed quotation may allude to the archetypal dress of the fallen women and create a contrast to the modern elements of the streetwalker's attire, which is composed of socks and suspenders. Vogel brings the image of the historical harlot and that of the modern streetwalker together in this poem. The line is all the more striking since the direct quotation from Brecht's *Threepenny Opera,* included in the previous stanza, is not in quotation marks.

The contrast between black and red intensifies in the last line of the stanza: "and black was her color of choice" ("un shvarts iz geven it kolir iber ale kolirn").[54] The black scarf adds a tragic tinge, alluding to the prostitute as a figure in mourning. It also recalls the prostitutes in Itsik Manger's ballads, "shtile blaykhe froyen gehilt in shvartse zeydns" ("silent pale women, wrapped in black silks") in *Di balade fun der zind*, with their black clothes akin to the dress of widows or nuns. Manger makes a connection

[51] See "Ballad of a Street Walker I" in Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 277.
[52] "in shvartsn klot-shtof […] ingantsn enlekh tsu atlas," *Manekinen*, 60. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 277.
[53] "lange shvartse zokn mit a glants/un mit royte zokn-bendlekh.." *Manekinen*, 60. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 277.
[54] See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 277.

between the women's clothes and sin: one of the streetwalkers comes back after being led away by her client: "in ire kleyderfaldn nestet zikh di zind" ("the folds of her dress nest sin"). Towards the end of Manger's poem, the grandmothers light *yortsayt* candles for the fallen "daughters" and Mary Magdalene, the archetypal prostitute, blesses "the candles of sin." The prostitutes' clothes are "of sin," while the mention of *yortsayt* candles refers to the Jewish tradition of mourning. Returning to Vogel's ballad, the author does not mention any other objects besides the prostitute's dress. Jewish tradition is not invoked. Rather, the streetwalker's dress itself represents the tension between erotic energy and the suggestion of death or mourning, encompassed in the line "black scarf—very much like satin." At this point in the poem it can be inferred that the prostitute mourns for herself.

The next stanzas disclose a possible other reason for the streetwalker's sorrow—a lover who has forsaken her, "days pass by on the plush red sofa/ the sofa can be like a loved one [...] he forgot her [...] with another girl [...] in purple pajamas."[55] Vogel uses the phrase "*lila-pidzhame*" which suggests lilac or light purple pajamas of the other girl, which contrasts with the "plush red" of the sofa on which the streetwalker in question rests. While there is no direct mention of the brothel, the modern attributes of "sin"—the color of the pajamas, the pajamas themselves, and the "plush-red sofa"—suggest this decadent setting. In her powerful diction, Vogel makes three gestures simultaneously: towards the traditional dress of prostitutes and the attire of sex workers in urban brothels in modernity; towards the difference in the materials and colors between the two; and towards the dress of sin and the dress of mourning.

Manger's color palette in "*Di balade fun dem zind*" contrasts white and black, while Vogel's color palette consists of purple, black, and red, which signify death or tragedy and eroticism. Vogel's tragic and dignified image of the streetwalker clad in age-old black satin contrasts with the "other" "girl in purple pajamas," an image of modern frivolity and vice. The archetypal harlot, an invocation of the traditional tragic image, collides with the sentimental heroine of pulp fiction:

Mit der frayndin hot er zi fargesn
in der lila-pidzame di frayndin
punkt azoy, loyt a bilikn roman.

A "biliker roman," a potboiler, with its formulaic plot and the characters of a "gelibter in a heln palto" and "frayndin in der lila pidzame," borders on the highbrow fiction about the tragedy of the lower class, socially marginalized Jenny and her imagined revenge for the misery inflicted on her by the patriarchal society. The stanzas that follow return the reader to the Brechtian dialectical theater and reintroduce the theme of the female character waiting through repeated reference to the ship as an anchor of hope and promise.

However, Vogel remakes pirate Jenny's ship into a ship with "white sails," which is "a ship with sails and cannons" in Brecht's text. This gesture grants the prostitute even

[55] "teg fargeyen oyf a plush-royter sofe/die sofe ken zayn vi a gelibter[...]er hot zi fargesn[...]mit der frayndin [...] in der lila pizhame." *Manekinen*, 60. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 277-278.

more agency and stages waiting and boredom as subversive actions that in themselves may change the woman's fortunes: "O, sweet happiness of waiting/for the ship with white sails/which still promises everything/like days on the plush red sofa/when no guest comes to visit..."[56] The possibility of such a reading is further amplified by the prostitute being called a "queen," even though she was abandoned by the "Apache"[57] (another allusion to Brecht). The "radical inhabiting" of waiting and boredom "when no guest comes to visit," rather than liberation from suffering by external forces, grant agency to the prostitute.

Vogel's intertextual engagement with Brechtian theater and the incorporation of the stylistic specificities of *shund* literature, such as characters, plotlines, as well as hackneyed expressions like "o, sweet happiness of waiting...," attest to Vogel's genre subversion and movement towards a *shund* ballad as a genre, or rather a mélange of genres, that performs social criticism born out of the "clash of straightforwardness and pathos." By reevaluating shoddiness, and its theatricality, ornamentality, and fictive nature, Vogel posits that her ballads are, in fact, *shund* chronicles, a genre out of which truth, objectivity, and verisimilitude may arise. This also reminds us of Manger's reverse stylistic technique in *Balade fun der zind*, where the place and time of the prostitute's murder by the hussar are provided in an attempt to make fiction appear credible, a chronicle of events. Yet at the same time, this very technique actually makes this fictionalized account closer to what it is—a piece of lore where the listener's credulity is a part of the genre.

5.2. Ballad of a Streetwalker II

While the first ballad about the streetwalker indirectly refers to epic theater through quotations from the Brechtian *Threepenny Opera* and its famous song by Pirate Jenny, as well as a universalized plot and characters of the *shund* novel, the second ballad in the series, "Balade fun a gasn-meydl II," takes place on the stage proper. The ballad is framed as *shund* theater. In transferring the image of the streetwalker into the ballad genre,Vogel and Manger each reinterpreted the figure. While previously the image belonged to a socially problematic sphere shunned by the classical prose writers, Yiddish theater treated it as an important locus for staging the tension between the city and the country, bringing to light the economic and societal injustices of life in urban centers. Vogel and Manger incorporate the theatrical aspect of the treatment of the prostitute character from the Yiddish theater into their poetics.

The ballad's first stanza reads like a theatrical poster with an announcement of the play, its title, and the price of the ticket,

A ballad of a street walker
with a brass name Maia

[56] "o zis glik tsu vartn azoy/oyf a shif mit zeglen vayse/vos zogn nokh tsu altsdink/vi teg oyf der plush-royter sofe/ven keyn gast kumt nisht tsu bazukh." *Manekinen*, 61. See English translation in Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 278-279. Vogel and Brecht here misuse the term "Apache" which refers to a member of a Native American group and imbue the notion with racist and derogatory connotations.
[57] Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 278.

who showed her body
and her very sad heart
in a suburban play in Paris.
Admission: three francs and higher…[58]

The title "A Ballad of a streetwalker / with a brass name Maia / who presented her body / and her very sad heart" recalls the long-winded and sentimental titles of *shund* plays and novels. As a rule, the element of pathos was foregrounded in these works; the streetwalker's "very sad heart" becomes an object of commerce on display and for sale just like the objectification of her body.

Unlike the nameless streetwalker in the first of Vogel's ballads, the streetwalker in this ballad has a name—Maia. The use of a proper name is very rare in Vogel's poetics. Maia is the only name present in the whole poetry collection. Anna Maja Misiak suggests that this name could be traced to the paintings of Francisco Goya.[59] Misiak indicated that the titles of Goya's paintings *La maja desnuda* and *La maja vestida* (where *maja* stands for a beautiful young girl, a Spanish city dweller of the XVIII-XIX centuries) were incorrectly translated into Polish in Vogel's contemporary translations as "The Nude Maja" and "The Clothed Maja."[60] If one takes into account that Vogel was an art critic who was certainly well acquainted with Goya's work, this might be a plausible explanation for her choice of name.[61] The name "Maia" has an epithet associated with it, "*meshene*" (copper name). From this qualifier, we could infer that this is a reference to the red-haired woman from the first ballad about a streetwalker. The detail of the streetwalker's "red hair" is of note because the color also has an association with copper money paid to the streetwalker later on in the ballad, thus linking the bodily and the monetary economy, the female body and its exploitation: "o gray paper box with copper florins."[62] In a revealing gesture of refusal of such a mercenary relationship, the streetwalker "cut her hair after the first kiss on the neck."[63] The woman is defiant: she does not wish for any riches, expensive jewelry, or clothing. Her desire is for "a piece of ordinary happiness / just a bit of ordinary life…"[64]

The ballad has a parallel here to Itsik Manger's *Di balade fun der zoyne un dem hussar*. The staging of the meeting between the prostitute and the hussar is theatrical.

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[58] "balade fun a gasn-meydl/mit dem meshenem nomen Maia/ vos hot prezentirt ir layb/ un ir zeyer troyerik harts/in a forshtot-spektakl fun pariz/ayntrit: dray frank un hekher…" English translation in Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces,* 279.
[59] Debora Vogel, *Die Geometrie des Verzichts. Gedichte, Montagen, Essays, Briefe* (Wuppertal: Arco Verlag, 2016), 610.
[60] Debora Vogel,. *Die Geometrie des Verzichts. Gedichte, Montagen, Essays, Briefe*. (Wuppertal: Arco Verlag, 2016), p. 610.
[61] Debora Vogel,. *Die Geometrie des Verzichts. Gedichte, Montagen, Essays, Briefe*. (Wuppertal: Arco Verlag, 2016), p. 610.
[62] "un itster fun dem geld/ vos men hot batsolt ir", "o, papir-shakhtl groe mit gildns royte." *Manekinen*, 62. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 280.
[63] *Manekinen*, 62. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 280.
[64] *Manekinen*, 62. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 280.

The prostitute refuses the gift of the beaded necklace, and only upon the mention of the hussar's mother's "golden tear" does she invite the man inside her quarters.

The next stanza of Vogel's "Di balade fun a gasn-meydl II" leads into a discussion of the setting. Stage directions establish that this scene of "the suburban play in Paris" takes place in a port (a beloved *topos* in ballads):

> It is a port. Perhaps Marseille. A lantern.
> An illuminated window and a door.[65]

The color black appears only as a half-shadow, half-darkness or grayness of the sea and port: the lantern that illuminates the darkness, the dress owned by the prostitute opens like a door („*a roze kleyd*"), the coins in the gray box that the prostitute dreams of spending not on dresses or lingerie, but on a "piece of the usual happiness."[66] The dress that "opens" and especially the invitation "come" ("*kum*"), with which the prostitute seduces her client, recalls Manger's "Di balade fun gasn-meydl [Ballad of the Prostitute]" and his essay "Di balade – di vizie fun blut [The Ballad, the Vision of Blood]". The red color of the prostitute's hair, money, and clothes dominates, unlike the previous ballad where black was dominant.

The story of Maia is universal: "a sweet woman with her hopeless life / more or less like all of us."[67]Her tragic—yet simultaneously cheap and sentimental—story is interrupted by the Apache's murder of the "girl in purple pajamas" mentioned in the first ballad. The image of lifeless "mannequins" in windows intensifies the tragic tone. This image suggests streetwalkers who are absolutely alienated from their labor and bodies and who await their clients: "In sticky middays and out of nowhere / wax girls sit in the windows / crochet pink tender bras: / ...two stitches and three...."[68] The prostitutes are likened to the mannequins, which are simultaneously immobile and mobile in their machine-like movements of knitting bras. This image shows the self-alienation from one's sex labor, as well as the possibility of overcoming this alienation.

The epic nature of the tragedy is interrupted by the banality of repeated life events featured in *shund* novels and street songs. Throughout the two ballads about the prostitute, trite expressions are repeated, such as "o where does one get happiness, foolish happiness..."[69] and "everything could still happen."[70] Vogel called these hackneyed expressions "white words," a term she borrowed from the Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid to designate banal expressions that circulate anonymously and have empty signification. These expressions serve as anchors: despite everything, "life goes on." Vogel theorizes "white words" for their radical potential when they are used in

[65] "S'iz a port, efsher Marseil. A lamtern/a baloykhtn fentster un a tir." See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 279.
[66] "a shtikl gevaynlekh glik/bloyz a tropn fun a gevaynlekh leben..." *Manekinen*, 62. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 280.
[67] "a zise froy mit a farshpiltn lebn/ nisht mer un nisht veyniker vi bay undz ale." See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 280.
[68] "in mitogn klebike un fun gornisht/zitsn vaksene meydlekh in fentster/haklen roza brust-helters tsarte:/ tsvey oygn oyf di drotn un dray..." *Manekinen*, 63. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 280.
[69] "o vu nemt men dos glik dos umkluge..." *Manekinen*, 63. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 280.
[70] "altsdinkhot badarft nokh geshen." *Manekinen*, 60. See Lyubas, *Blooming Spaces*, 278.

poetry in order to rehabilitate banality that belongs to life. They are given the same status as the more elevated aspects of poetry. Vogel reinforces her point that 'newness' may arise out of 'making do' with the imperfect material of language which becomes 'cheapened' through daily use. She "rehabilitates" *shund*, on the level of both linguistic expression and the practices of daily living, making the banal and *shund* "eternal". Vogel's ballads produce readings of the realm of *shund* as a politicized space of female embodiment and agency, as well as tragic theatricality.

6. Conclusion

Our analysis has demonstrated the evolution of the ballad genre, and specifically of the image of the prostitute in Itzik Manger and Debora Vogel's poetry. From early experiments with mysticism, Christological allusions, and an aestheticized approach to tragedy, Manger moved to a sophisticated poetic method full of irony and the incorporation of *shund* elements. From black silhouettes on a grey background to bright colors, rough details, and explicit theatricality, the combination of low, even vulgar plots with multi-layered literary allusions and masterful poetical techniques was a crucial step for the process of the poet's artistic maturity that manifested itself later in his *Khumesh-lider* (1935) and *Megile-lider* (1936). Like his early ballads, these works were inspired by the traditions of Jewish folk theatre – *purim-shpiln*. From the radical rejection of *shund* literature as expressed in the *Shomeriade* essay, Manger moved to the idea that certain *shund* elements can enrich Yiddish literature and are even necessary for its development.

Manger's image of the prostitute evolves from subtle symbolism, passivity, and asexuality to a different emanation of tragedy: explicit sexuality that rapidly brings a character to death. The character remains lonely and abandoned, helpless against all kinds of aggression coming from men, although in his later interpretation a prostitute embraces her death as a liberation.

The formal characteristics of ballad genre's theatricality, as well the themes of female embodiment and gendered agency, were foregrounded in our analysis of Vogel's ballads. The ready-made nature of *shund*, an element of consumption, is acknowledged as a part of the lived experience in modernity. Vogel's "rehabilitation" of *shund* and its excessiveness, theatricality, and ornamentality out of which truth, objectivity, and matter-of-factness may arise is most apparent in her ballads about streetwalkers. Theatricality is best exemplified in the universally tragic figure of the streetwalker who embodies the decorative-consumerist aspects, as well as sentimentality and alienation of modernity that lends itself to Vogel's "new ballad" in Yiddish literature, a "ballad" at once infused by Modernity and resistant to its negative aspects. Manger modernizes the ballad via collision with tradition, and Vogel does so via a clash with modernity.

As shown above, Vogel intertextually alludes to Manger, with citations from his ballads and allusions to the motifs and images characteristic of his poetics, such as color contrasts and similarities in their respective depictions of streetwalkers. References to Manger are not direct, but are rooted in the network of broader intertextual experimentation, including references to Bertold Brecht's work. These references pay their dues to the tradition of ballad with its half sad, half dramatic tone. Vogel utilized the theatricality of repeated gestures and situations staging happiness or sadness very

much akin to typical s*hund* scenarios in the treatment of the prostitute. Although Manger and Vogel treated the image differently, they demonstrated how modernist Yiddish poetry explored new ways of merging the influences of the Yiddish theater, moving beyond the silences of Yiddish prose, and offering new structures of treating female embodiment and the gendered experience of modernity.