

Subject: Re: The Translation Contest
To: daroskies@JTSA.EDU

Dear David,

Here's the text of my comments. I'm assuming you have the numerical rankings - if not I could fax them to you (can't send them by e-mail - they're handwritten on the form I was sent). I've included at the end a sort of discursive footnote on Neugroschel etc., which was part of the original text. I'm including because the other judges have seen it, and because I think it's pertinent. And unfortunately, I think it's maybe more pertinent now, if you're going to be involved in the judging, than it was before. I hope you don't regard the note as a criticism of you; I've come round to your view of Joachim's translation, and as noted in the text I think you did a terrific job of picking a sample text.

All the best, Larry

Dear Bel and Jeffrey,

I thought I should add some comments to the numerical rankings I gave - there's a space on the form for comments, but my handwriting is dreadful, and some of the comments I want to make concern not so much individual entries as more general matters.

1) I found it very useful to know that Bel would only be reading the entries marked 7 or above. (I assume that means entries marked with a 7 or above by either Jeffrey or by me, not just entries marked with a 7 or above by both of us.) The effect of knowing this was to make me ask myself, in reading a given entry, not just where it fit on the scale of 1 to 10, but also, and more simply, whether it was really good.

The result of posing this second question was to help me single out, by my own judgment at any rate, the three or four really good entries. An unintended side effect of posing that question was that I was probably less careful than I should have been in ranking entries that were clearly not "really good" - it was hard for me to figure out exactly what the difference was between a 3 and a 4.

2) I'd rank the best entries as follows, starting with the one I most admired: Gorelick; Sherman; Neugroschel; Weiner. A few particular comments: a) Gorelick's struck me as the most successful overall, and really the only successful translation of the musicians' jargon section. I don't always agree with his strategies, but he's a virtuoso. b) Sherman's rendering of the jargon section is less successful, and in general he has a less good ear for Sholem Aleichem's colloquial register than he might, and than Gorelick does; but his rendering of chapter 4, where a different, loftier register is in play, is really excellent, in my judgment the best in the whole contest - 9.5, I'd say, if we were doing decimal rankings. c) Neugroschel's version is highly competent throughout, though I don't think

the musicians' jargon section works any better here than in his earlier, published version - it's entirely the same, in fact. [see note at end] d) Weiner's translation isn't in my judgment as good as the others I've listed here, but I have the impression - I could be totally wrong, of course - that he's new to translating, and young, and if that's the case, I'd like to do something to encourage him to continue - there's some good stuff in his version, and he's got some talent.

3) Aside from the Neugroschel complication, I'd say this was an excellent text to choose for the context. It asked translators to deal with some very particular, knotty problems (the musicians' jargon), but also with a wide variety of registers, among the comic enumeration of the wedding guests and their motives; the ingeniously diversified complaints made by groom's side and bride's side; and the soaring, lyrical account of Stempenyu's playing and the meditations it evokes. David wrote me about the text that it would test the translators' mettle, and I think he's exactly right.

Ober genug shoy! I look forward to working with you further to decide the winner or winners - all the best, Larry Rosenwald.

Note:

There's something a little weird about his entry - it's almost, though not quite, identical to his published version, with no particular direction to the occasional revisions.

But aside from that, David's choice to pick a text that Neugroschel had translated as the contest text - thus implying, I think, that Neugroschel's translation was inadequate - plus David's remarks about that translation in the Forverts interview - seem to establish an official position about Neugroschel's translation. David's not one of the judges, of course, but he's not exactly unconnected with this process.

I'm not sure where this leads - as Jeffrey suggested in a note, this would be less of a problem if we didn't know who the competing translators were. But we do.