

Date: Tue, 30 Jun 1998 12:00:55 -0400 (EDT)
From: Larry Rosenwald <LROSENWALD@WELLESLEY.EDU>
To: daroskies@JTSA.EDU
Subject: on some SA translations

Dear David,

Here's a first batch of responses to the translations you sent.

1) Both translations of "a vort far a vort" are, in my judgment, unusable for this edition. Their relation to the original is too loose.

And, again in my judgment, translations in this edition need to have an exact and responsible relation to the original text. That is not to say that they should be trots, but they should be helps rather than hindrances to those who wish to use them to find a way to the original. Moreover, this edition should stand for Sholem Aleykhem, for those readers who cannot read Yiddish; it should make it possible for those who read Yiddish and those who read this edition to have good conversations about Sholem Aleykhem's work, not just globally and also locally, about particular sentences and turns of phrase.

2) On terminology. I'd argue that it's better to retain as much as possible of the original terminology - Rov, Kazioner. In my experience, translating these technical terms of Jewish life produces false impressions.

3) At this point in our history, i.e., at a moment when a distinctively Jewish text doesn't need to have its distinctive Jewishness glossed over - witness the success of Everett Fox's Bible translation - I think we should also want to retain the idioms of daily Jewish life. "Lehavdl" - which one can hear in English conversations among Jews - seems to me better than "if you will pardon the comparison," and certainly better than omitting the expression altogether. When, as in "Happy New Year," the speaker refers to putting in some "loshn koydesh," I don't think this needs to be translated as "I'll throw in some Hebrew" - we don't, that is, need translations that, in the interest of making the text available for the gentile or unlearned reader, reduce the idiomatic complexity of the text.

4) Curt Leviant's "Progress in Kasrilevke" is significantly better, but again in my judgment should not be used as it is. Here the reasons have to be more complex, but stating them may be useful.

a) The translation suggests a short-breathed author, and that doesn't strike me as right about Sholem Aleykhem. In comparison with the original, Leviant's translation consistently breaks units down; single paragraphs become multiple paragraphs, single sentences become multiple sentences. I myself don't think this is necessary, and I don't think it works. Part of my pleasure in reading Sholem Aleykhem - similar to my pleasure in reading Huck Finn, to make a usual comparison - is seeing how these unoratorical sentences and paragraphs nevertheless have the heft and complexity of great formal writing.

b) In connection with point 2) above, I'd argue that it's probably important to retain some semi-technical distinctions. When SA is contrasting the *khevres* of the old Kasrilevke type with the *gezelshaftn* of the new, he's pretty consistent in his use of terms, where *Leviant* isn't - and I think this edition should strive to retain this *Leitwort*-like patterning.

c) You know more than I do about the extent to which the punctuation and typography of the *folksfond* edition were under SA's control; if they were under his control, I think our translations should probably try to reproduce them, or at least play with that possibility - I'm thinking in particular of the use of the three-dot ellipsis, and the occasional *Sperrdruck* - what's that called in Yiddish, the use of more widely spaced letters to express emphasis?

5) To the extent possible, I think SA's multilingualism should be reproduced - English for Yiddish, obviously, but - in the stories, though obviously not in the letters - maybe Hebrew for Hebrew and Russian for Russian, with notes.

6) One difficulty with all the translations I've looked at so far - and I've read all of them but "Summer Romances" - is the effect created in them by outdated or anachronistic slang. This is a complex issue - I mean, when I read *Huck Finn* or *The Big Sleep* I'm encountering outdated slang, too, and it doesn't get in the way of my experience. But I do think it creates a barrier in all these translations. The problem, I guess, is that the slang in the translations doesn't hang together - it's not a single slang, like *Huck Finn's* or *Raymond Chandler's*, but a sort of magpie's nest. I'd love to have some playwright read some of these translations over, or maybe be involved in the translation - think *David Mamet* might be interested????? - to make sure that the dialogue sounds like living speech.

7) Obviously, in assessing these particular translations, I'm ending up trying to articulate some tentative guidelines about what sort of translations this edition should be seeking. This leads me to wonder about two things.

a) There are translations, and then there are translators, who can do translations in various ways, and also who have feelings. If we all end up concluding, as seems possible, that the only existing translations we can use for this edition are *Hillel Halkin's*, is there a way to keep this from seeming like a dismissal of the work of a lot of estimable people? Might some of those who've done translations that can't be used be interested in retranslating the works they've done, according to different guidelines than the ones they worked with before?

b) At the April 1999 conference, might it be good to have a session for discussion of translation issues?

I'll send this for now, and send further thoughts as they occur to me - if this is a burden, or if I should be doing something other than this, just let me know -

al dos guts,

Date: Sun, 23 Aug 1998 16:31:37 -0400
From: Larry Rosenwald <LROSENWALD@WELLESLEY.EDU>
Reply-To: The life and work of Sholem Aleichem <L-SALIBRARY@JTSA.EDU>
To: L-SALIBRARY@JTSA.EDU
Subject: notes on SA translations, installment 3

SA notes 3

1) In my previous notes, I've commented chiefly on the relation between this or that translation and the original text. I've been reading some of the more recent translations differently, i.e., without such frequent comparisons to the original, and find I'm inclined to formulate some things differently. On the other hand, I'm finding less that's new to say; there are really only a few translators, and the issues raised by their translations remain pretty much the same from story to story - some of this will probably be repetitious.

For example - there are theoretically interesting reasons why, say, the markedly colloquial passages in Curt Leviant's translations don't work - theoretically interesting, that is, as regards general questions of translation - but it's also more simply true that these passages aren't, as literature depicting speech, very good - the colloquialisms seem bookish rather than racy, and seem drawn from multiple sources rather than coming together into a single idiolect. Reading them, and reading Leviant's translations generally, just doesn't give me the sense of reading a great writer, let alone a great writer distinguished for his mastery of the rhythms of speech. Sometimes Leviant's problem is that he feels, it seems, the need to explain unfamiliar terms rather than simply use them - so that he has to write, in the third paragraph of "Three Calendars," "during the intermediary days of Sukkoth," and use a phrase that no colloquially lively narrator in history would use - but sometimes, it seems, it's just a bad ear.

On the other hand, I've had an equally spontaneous positive response to some other translations, notably Saul Bellow's of "Eternal Life," Isaac Rosenfeld's of "On Account of a Hat," and the first two chapters of Joachim Neugroschel's *Stempenyu*. (I'll leave out of consideration chapters 3 and 4, as they're the test passage for the translation contest - and very well selected, I should say.) I have objections to these translations in principle, but they pass another test, namely, would I be willing to show them to a friend who knew no Yiddish and say, "have a look at this if you want some sense of what SA is like"?

2) In an earlier memo I half-jokingly suggested the possibility of working with a playwright, e.g., David Mamet - Anita Norich, responding to this, suggested Wendy Wasserstein. Maybe this possibility is worth pursuing. At least one recent, prestigious translation series (the Oxford Greek tragedies) is founded on the principle of collaborative translation, and is it automatically impossible to imagine working with playwrights in dealing with Sholem Aleykhem? It's great to be both a philologist and a skilled writer of living speech, and ideally the translations we'll want we'll be done by people who have both these qualities, but mightn't it also be useful to look for people who

have one of them or the other, but not both, and hook them up together? It can't be exactly an accident that several of the translations I've most admired have been done by novelists.

3) The monologues, both short and extended, that are filled with "vi zogt ir" and "ir varshtheyt tsi neyn" and "ih horkht tsi neyn" and "zogt shoyt ir aleyn" - these vividly oral, formulaic tags almost never seem well translated to me, and translating them well seems indispensable for retaining the living, oral character of the narrative. A negative example - in Herbert Paper's version of the powerful story, "Stories of a Thousand and One Nights," these tags, or Paper's mode of rendering them, is surprisingly destructive - i.e., the uncolloquial English phrases he chooses as their equivalents, plus his frequent choice to put them in capitals, make them impediments to rather than intensifications of orality. (For example: "So you too, Mr. SA, are going there like every body else/ Very pleased to meet you! Certainly not because--AS YOU MIGHT SAY--'the misfortune of many is half a consolation.' Not at all--HEAVEN FORBID! Indeed, just the opposite! Why should I say such a thing? Only it's kind of easier on my heart to know that our Sholem Aleichem--DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME? is also travelling with us etc.")

There's some discussion of these tags in Harshav's *The Meaning of Yiddish* 104-5; for me, a successful rendering of them - i.e., oral, alive, and abundant - is necessary for a successful rendering of the oral narratives in which they play a particularly prominent role, and that's a fairly large chunk of the corpus.

4) I keep coming back to the question of SA's multilingualism. I've actually been writing about this in relation to anglophone and francophone American literature, so it's a nice coincidence - or it's bashert - to come across it as an issue here. And again and again I feel that rendering that multilingualism well - my preference, as noted, would be for rendering it multilingually - is indispensable for this edition.

5) So maybe these criteria are emerging for me as central: amplitude (i.e., not a truncation, a simplification, a dissection), multilingualism (specifically the Yiddish-Hebrew internal bilingualism that Weinreich talks so much about, and that SA is the most virtuosic dramatizer of), and orality.

I'd love to hear some responses to all this - best,
Larry Rosenwald

Date: Wed, 09 Sep 1998 10:56:38 -0400

From: Larry Rosenwald <LROSENWALD@WELLESLEY.EDU>

Reply-To: The life and work of Sholem Aleichem <L-SALIBRARY@JTSA.EDU>

To: L-SALIBRARY@JTSA.EDU

Subject: Notes on SA translations, Installment 4

Herewith a fourth batch of notes and reflections on SA translations; I'm looking forward to responses, suggestions, whatever. Larry Rosenwald

1) Shlomo Katz's translation of "Dos porfolk" seems to me disrespectful to the work of a great writer, and frankly I'm surprised that it turns up both in *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories* and in *Selected Stories of SA*.

This is the first paragraph of Katz's translation: "It was a damp and dreary spring night. The world slept in darkness and in silence. It was a night for weird dreams."

SA's Yiddish text (Folksfond ed. 8, pp. 129ff.), on the other hand, begins with a Mark-Twain-like word "from the author": "the writer of the story asks the reader not to look for allegories, not to try to guess whom the author had in mind etc." Katz's translation omits this preface. It also omits the section title, "di shreklakhe nakht."

So when in SA's text do we get to "it was a damp and dreary spring night"? Well, not for a while, and in a sense not ever. This is the first paragraph of SA's text: "Dos is geven eyne fun di finstere, blotike, farpeysakhdige nekht. Alts iz geven ayngehilt in finsternish. Alts iz geshlofn. Shtil un ruhig iz geven arum un arum. Afile a fish in vaser hot gerut, moyre gehat aroysshteln dem kop af gots velt in der doziker finsterer, stiler, ruhiger nakht. In aza nakht iz faran asakh arbet farn balhakhaloymes. Er zshalevet nisht keyn farben, shit mit der fuler hand fantazyes, vos nisht geshtoygen, nisht gefloygn, un firt tsunoyf a vand mit a vand."

I'm going on at such length, and in such detail, not from Schadenfreude, but because this is the sort of thing that makes me judge, and feel, that very few of the extant English translations are usable if what we want is to give readers an accurate sense of the power of a great writer, and of how that power is manifested in details of rhythm, organization, and diction. SA's passage is wonderful, like something in E.T.A. Hoffmann. The translation suggests nothing of how SA, too, "shit mit der fuler hand fantazyes."

2) In looking over this last batch, I've permitted myself not to look at all the translations made by the translators I've already formed judgments of. I remain an admirer of Bernard Isaacs' translations (and have renewed that admiration by reading his version of "The Three Widows," which I think is a terrific story); I remain skeptical of Curt Leviant's translations (and have renewed my skepticism, I'm afraid, by looking at his translations of "Mr. Green Gets a Job" and "A Story of a Greenhorn," in which he pretty systematically eliminates the Englishisms of the two protagonists, one opportunistic and one genuinely malevolent, Englishisms like "bizness" and "komishyon" which, as SA brilliantly employs them, tell us much of what the protagonists most

care about).

3) Nathan Ausubel's translation of "Rabchik: A Jewish Dog" seemed to me almost to make fun of the principles I've been trying to articulate here - probably it was good for me to see his translation, which helps me to refine my sense of what those principles are. That is - there's plenty of transcribed Yiddish, and certainly no overexplaining of these Yiddish terms. But the Yiddish terms Ausubel retains are for the most part the ones that people know who experience Yiddish as a source of terms rather than a language: schlimazl, nasher, , epis, tzatzke, tzoress, trefeneh, takkeh (I'm giving all of these in Ausubel's spelling). To me, these seem terms that are not thematic in the story - not what Buber and Rosenweig would call Leitwoerter - and also that are not technical, in the sense that many loshn-koydesh terms are (schlimazl and trefeneh are a bit different in this connection). "Technical" may not be the right word; I know that the terms that I worry about retaining are mostly terms that feel like terms of art in the sphere of Yidishkayt.

It's a very interesting story, by the way.

4) Hannah Berman's translations of several of SA's children's stories are flawed and unusable because she does not, in my judgment, have a very good ear for the cadences of speech - she would, I think, have done better to follow SA's text more closely, since some of what makes him a master of orality is simply the way he organizes his sentences and paragraphs. Also, she frequently makes odd or maybe just careless choices in how to translate particular words - "nesiye": "pleasure," "in der groyser, brayter velt": "in the big cultivated field."

5) Golda Werman's translation of "Joseph" seems to me to do on a smaller scale what Shlomo Katz does with "Dos porfolk." The first sentences of her translation: "I'm not afraid of writers, as you can see for yourself, Mr. Sholem Aleichem. I don't break out in a sweat when I see a doctor or a lawyer, and I don't care when I'm told that someone I'm introduced to is studying engineering."

SA's text begins as follows: "Ir megt aykh lakhn fun mir, ir kont aykh makhn fun mir a felyeton, afile a buch, oyb ihr vilt, - ikh hob far aykh keyn moyre nit, zog ikh frier, vorum ikh bin, vi ir kukt mikh on, nit fun di shrekedige. Ikh shrek mikh nisht iber far keyn shrayber, ikh ver nisht botl far keyn doktor, fal nisht arop bay zikh far keyn advokat un hoyb nisht on nispoel tsu vern, az me zagt mir, yener shtudirt af inzhenir."

In other areas - in the translation or imitation of poetry, say - I'm ready to argue, at least in theory, for the compressions and reorderings Werman is doing here, but I see no reason whatsoever for doing them in relation to SA, in this text or in general. Nothing, in my judgment, is gained by leaving out so much of the verbal energy and plenitude of SA's text, and nothing would be lost, to put it mildly, by rendering it,

6) I'm not sure what to do next; I've mostly read through the translations that David and co. have so

kindly been sending me. There are of course the published translations of longer works - e.g., Aliza Shoyrin's *Marienbad* and *In the Storm*, Joachim Neugroschel's *Stempenyu*. I'd be happy to look at these, and to comment on them, but I'm wondering whether other subscribers to this list already know these translations well, and have made their own judgments on them.

7) So at the moment, this is how the situation looks to me: of the extant translations that I've read, I'd argue that we can use Hillel Halkin's work (I'm presuming that the forthcoming *Motl Peysi* will be of the same quality as the Tevye and Railroad stories - and by the way, does anyone have Halkin's postal or electronic address? I'd love to get an early look at his *Moty Peysi*) as it stands, and Bernard Isaacs' work (and a few other isolated stories, the ones I've singled out in passing) with some new annotation. I'd also argue, as I'm sure is predictable, that we cannot use most of what's extant; it simply doesn't do justice to the original text. So, in my view, there's a lot of new translating that has to be done.

That may seem a pessimistic assessment, but there's an optimistic side to it also. Translating SA is hard; but translating it in accord with the principles I've been sketching does not mean possessing once-in-a-generation translational gifts; it means, rather, simply giving full measure. I think that this is a wonderful moment to be doing this project; there are some really gifted translators around, and the reading public is ready for a more complex SA than translators have on the whole given up till now.

8) In the mean time, a gut un zis yor aykh alemen!
Larry Rosenwald

Date: ~~Fri~~, 23 Oct 1998 11:10:23 -0400 (EDT)
From: Larry Rosenwald <LROSENWALD@WELLESLEY.EDU>
To: dāroskies@JTSA.EDU
Subject: Batch 5 of notes on SA translations

Sholem Aleykhem Notes
Batch 5

This will, for a while at least, be my last batch of notes, and it will also be somewhat different from the previous batches in that it's focused on work by active translators, and on particular pieces of their work that David suggested would be interesting to look at.

1. Leonard Wolf's "The Haunted Tailor," in the Howe/Wisse The Best of Sholom Aleichem. (By the way - how will SA's name be spelled in our translations?) I thought this was terrific, and on reading it felt a wave of relief. That is - I've written in these notes about how SA translators need to retain the play between *loshn-koydesh* and *mameloshn*, and criticized translators who don't do this; and the more translators I've encountered who don't do this, the more often I've thought, well, maybe what I want isn't really possible. But then I read Wolf's translation, and I thought, yes, it is possible, and not only is it possible, it really works! Let me quote the first paragraph as an example (this e-mail version doesn't have the lucid typographical formatting of the text, where most of the Hebrew is in italics):

"ISH HOYO BE-ZOLODIEVKA, there was a man in Zolodievka, a village near Mazapevke, not far from Haplapovitch and Kozodoievka, between Yampoli and Stristch, just on the way from Pistchi-Yavadeh to Petschi-Khvoist to Tetreve and from there to Yehupetz. U'shmo shimon-Eliyohu, and his name was Shimon-Eli, but he was called 'Shimon-Eli Shma-Koleynu' because when he said his prayers in the synagogue he had a way of working himself up, putting a trill into his prayers and singing them at the top of his voice. Vehoyo hoish khayet, and the man was a tailor - not, God forbid, one of the 'ascended' tailors who sew according to the latest fashions. Rather, he was a genius patch tailor who could make a hole or a patch invisible"(2).

I love this, and I think it reproduces the counterpoint in SA's Yiddish text, plus the sheer verbal pleasure of the list of town names. I also love the fact that it says to the readers, "let me show you a multilingual text, and in fact let me perform it for you." So at least in some cases, and given translators having the necessary gifts, the best way to render SA's multilingual texts is - multilingually. (Obviously, a translation like this would have to have notes, and as I've said before, that's fine with me.)

2. Gershon Freidlin's version of passages from Motl Peysi dem Khazns, in the same collection. Here my feelings are more mixed. My reservations are along predictable lines, and I'll get to them in a minute, but first I should say that on the whole I liked this translation a lot - Freidlin has a good ear, Motl sounds impressively like a child, both innocent and perceptive, and Freidlin does a very adroit job of dealing with a lot of the surprisingly complicated phrases in SA's text. The reservations that follow, therefore, are

more intended as things I'd want to argue about with Freidlin than things that seem to make his translations unusable.

I still think that quasi-technical terms are most often better transliterated and annotated than translated, and a good example of why turns up early, when Motl refers to his brother Elye's having left "his father-in-law's table. He left the table not because his time was up - he'd been promised three whole years' board and got not even three-quarters of one year - but because of tragedy." "Table" here is translating *kest*, and the problem with doing that is that a reader ignorant of the institution of *kest* is going to be bewildered, I think, at least till the reference to "board"; "he left the table" sounds like getting up from dinner, not ceasing to be a boarder. (By the way: I keep trying to imagine a wide range of readers for this - readers who know nothing of East European Jewish life, *yeshiva bokhers*, all those in between - but imagination has its limits, and maybe at some point it would be good to show sample translations especially to some actual intelligent readers of the first class, who are, *s'farshteyt zikh*, not represented on our committee!)

Other examples - I'd prefer "Ivan" to "Russian policeman," "beheyme" to "fool" (202; "fool" has too wide a range of reference), "keynahore" to "knock on wood" (205; someone, I forget who, told me recently that the practice of knocking on wood is Christian, and has something to do with the cross - in which case I really prefer "keynahore"), and "meshumed" to "apostate" (209; it's not just that being a meshumed is a particular form of apostasy, it's also that "apostate" breaks the decorum of Motl's narrative - it's not a child's word, whereas "meshumed" is), and *makhzor* to "holiday prayer book" (again on grounds of narrative decorum - "holiday prayer book" is what Motl would say if he were explaining himself to a gentile audience, *makhzor* is what he says to the audience he's actually speaking to).

a) The other area where I could imagine an improvement in this excellent translation is in the passage where Motl's on the point of being arrested for selling soapsudsy kvass. The arresting policeman is Russian, and some Jews in the surrounding crowd give Motl advice, first "half in Hebrew" and second "in Hebrew" (199). In both cases, what seems to be happening is that Hebrew words are being used to reveal the advice to Motl and conceal it from the policeman. And it would seem, to me at least, livelier to dramatize this langue secrete rather than simply name it. The first piece of advice, for example, is "daber nisht, du narisher yold, af dayn okhi." I'm sure that Freidlin could create an equivalent English/Hebrew jargon, rather than simply saying "half in Hebrew," and that creating such a jargon would valuably thicken the texture of the work. (The second piece of advice is "rays-aroyes dem yad funem Yovn un hoyb uf di raglayim un makh pleyte." Please forgive my errors in transcription!)

3. Aliza Shevrin's work, especially in her recent Jason Aronson volume of children's stories. I have, again, mixed feelings about this. Shevrin's probably translated more of SA's work than anyone except maybe Curt Leviant - four novels, plus two previous volumes of children's stories. And the Aronson volume has on its back cover an endorsement by Bel Kaufman, who calls Shevrin "[her] favorite translator of the author into English." That's quite an endorsement! And Shevrin is clearly a thoughtful translator, who gives a full rendering of her texts.

Having said that, though, I need to say also that I have reservations about her translations.

Some of these are along lines that will by now be tediously familiar. She translates some of the stories that Freidlin has also translated from Motl Peysi, and does some of the same things he does. For the jargon passages, she gives, "'Speak not, foolish youth, concerning thy brother!' several Jews spoke in a mixture of Hebrew and Yiddish designed to baffle the policeman's understanding" (239). The explanatory account is all Shevrin's, a sort of translation-as-annotation which I'm uncomfortable with; the rendering of the Hebrew/Yiddish jargon as antiquated English doesn't seem to me to work, since it's not plausible that it would "baffle" the policeman, and for me at any rate it has a tone quite different from the macaronic jargon of the original. (As for the other words in Freidlin's translation I've commented on - she gives "dunce" for beheyme, "Russian policeman" for Yovn, reproduces keyn eynhore, drops meshumed altogether - Freidlin: "he swears oaths that would convince even an apostate"; Shevrin: "he swears up and down and you must believe him" (261) - and, like Freidlin, renders makhzor with "holiday prayer book.")

Beyond this, though, there's a more general problem, which for me makes her work less usable than Freidlin's or Wolf's. I'm not sure how to put this, so let me try a roundabout way. I teach in an English department, and I'm pretty much the only person in the department who reads much Yiddish literature, and certainly the only one who reads any Yiddish literature in Yiddish. My colleagues are, though, wide-ranging and curious readers, and when John Hollander - who's an old friend to some of them - came here to read and talk about some of his translations of Moyshe-Leyb Halpern, they were ready to appreciate those translations, and to buy Hollander's claim, based on those translations, that Halpern was a classy, interesting poet.

Now when I think about showing my colleagues Shevrin's translations of SA's works - and here I mean both the children's stories and Marienbad, which I happened to read earlier - it's hard for me to imagine that they'd find compelling an argument that SA was a classy, interesting writer. The prose just isn't good enough. Her translations, in my admittedly subjective judgment, don't have the rightness of tone, or the richness of phrasing, of Wolf's or Freidlin's, or of the other translations I've admired (Hillel Halkin's, of course, and Bernard Isaacs', and some of what Joachim Neugroschel has done, and the Sacvan Bercovitch translation of "The Pot" in the Howe/Wisse anthology).

I don't think this is a result of translational principles. It has partly to do, I think, with Shevrin's tendency to fuse and simplify long sentences and leisurely grammatical constructions, and it probably has partly to do also with the problem of SA's orality, which I've talked about before, and with the distinction I think has to be made between living speech on the one hand, and out-of-date or off-tone colloquial phrasing on the other.

Here's a small example. In "Robtshik," the story about the Jewish dog, Robtshik goes off in despair into the woods and meets a wolf, who's about to eat him up - but then Robtshik pleads and pleads, and makes himself so unappetizing, so revolting in fact, that the wolf says, "lift that disgusting tail of yours . . . and get the devil out of here, you mongrel, so I don't have to look at your ugly mug any more!" (129) (The Yiddish is, "nem tsunoyf dem paskudnem veydl daynem . . . un antloyf zu aldi shvartse yor, du kelev

shebeklovim, ikh zol dayn treyfenem partsef nit onkukn.")
Now for me, Shevrin's rendering isn't living speech - "get
the devil out of here" and "ugly mug" are prefabricated
phrases, colloquial rather than formal but, if you'll permit
me the paradox, bookishly colloquial rather than orally.
Both phrases result from rendering Yiddish idioms non-
literally, but I'm not arguing that what we want is, "and
begone to all the black years . . . so I don't have to look
at your ritually forbidden face"! I am saying that I miss
here, and often in Shevrin's translations, the accents of
living speech that I think this translation absolutely must
have.

Ober genug shoyrn! I apologize for having gone on so
long.

All the best, Larry Rosenwald

Date: Wed, 14 Apr 1999 13:07:16 -0500 (EST)
From: Larry Rosenwald <LROSENWALD@WELLESLEY.EDU>
Subject: Gratitude and some other matters
To: daroskies@JTSA.EDU
X-VMS-To: IN%"daroskies@JTSA.EDU"
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But mostly gratitude - for the extraordinarily stimulating conference, so extraordinarily stimulating that even the board meeting the next day seemed influenced by the conference - it seemed a continuation of it, an intellectual conversation in the form of practical deliberations.

Regarding those practical deliberations: as I understand it, I should write up some translational principles that we could, once we'd agreed on a final wording of them, present to translators as they began their task, by way of suggesting what our editorial standards and goals were. I'm happy to do this, eager to do it in fact, but wondered whether you could tell me how long you think this should be - I was thinking 2-3 pages, i.e., not an essay, but a kind of distillation of an essay. But I thought I'd ask you, since having a length in mind shapes how we write. I'm presuming that it would be good to have a draft version of these principles available for comment pretty soon.

yes

According to my notes, that's my only immediate task for the Library. There are some possible tasks down the road - SA in America, as a sort of spin-off volume; doing some translating of autobiographical writing. But for the moment, given that I don't think I should be an editor of a volume, not in my judgment having the expertise for that, I don't see other tasks at hand. If there's anything you think I can do to be useful, of course, I'd be delighted to hear about it.

There are some things I'd like to say about possible translators - I'd like to remind people about Saki Bercovitch (though his health is not so great - he's just been in the hospital for asthma, and isn't supposed to talk - but maybe that's just the position to be in for settling down to some thoughtful translation), and I'd like to say a bit about Ted Gorelick - but I presume that the distribution list is still running, and that I could post my remarks there.

About Gorelick - when I got back, there was a note from Ken Frieden asking what the results of the editorial board meeting had been, and specifically about what people thought about Gorelick, and also asking how public our deliberations were - and I thought I'd ask you before replying.

not public

And last (regarding the conference, at any rate) - on the agenda for the board meeting was a meeting at Beit Sholem Aleichem in the summer of 2000 - is that still going to happen? I'd eagerly seize any opportunity to make a trip to Israel, so if it is going to happen I'd like to get any precise information about it that's available.

Not regarding the conference - I should tell you that Norman's ordination was lovely and moving - Ben Gold in particular spoke very directly and touchingly about Norman, about his joy in study - Norman spoke very thoughtfully about the course of his life that had led him to the moment of his ordination, then sang "mi ha'ish," very beautifully - I had

the honor of singing a duet with him, a Jane Myers setting of "ma yakar khasd'kha elohim" - clearly his congregation appreciates him enormously, and I think it's a very auspicious choice Norman has made, and look forward to seeing what he makes of his new vocation - or rather, his new title and old vocation - in the coming years.

I think that's it - sorry to have gone on so long - again, it was an extraordinary weekend, deeply moving and exhilarating.

Best, Larry

Beth G. Weingast, AAA

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We express

our deepest sympathy to

his wife, Elsie,

who for many years guided

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through its most difficult times;

to his brother, Bryel;

to his daughter, Dina Bray;

and to his grandchildren,

David, Samantha and Isaac.

ATTENTION, TRANSLATORS

The Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc. has announced a Translation Contest for which contestants are asked to submit an original translation of Chapters Three and Four of Sholom Aleichem's novel *Stempenyu*, as found in Vol. 11 of the Folksfond edition of *Yidishe Romanen*. The contest is being held to increase the number of translators for the Foundation's projected 25-volume work, *The Sholom Aleichem Library in English Translation*, which will present all of Sholom Aleichem's writings in English for the first time. Submissions should be made in duplicate, postmarked no later than Oct. 31, 1998 and mailed to Translation Contest, Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, Inc., 1020 Park Ave., New York, NY 10028. The winner will receive \$1,000, the offer of a contract to translate a volume for the forthcoming *Library*, and will be published in *Pakn Trager*, the quarterly of the National Yiddish Book Center.

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*Jewish humorist and
writer
Sholom Aleichem
(1859-1916) spawned a
body of popular
Yiddish literature that
is about to be
translated into
English.*

Photo from "The Schocken Guide to Jewish Books"

Found in the translation

By Michael Gelbwasser
Advocate Staff

CAMBRIDGE — Tevye the Milkman's accent is about to change.

Harvard University Yiddish literature professor Ruth Wisse and Wellesley College English professor Lawrence Rosenwald are part of an international "editorial board" of scholars preparing to select, edit and publish the "Sholom Aleichem Library in English Translation."

This 25-volume collection will be "the first representative English language edition" of the tales of Tevye and other characters created by 19th-century Ukrainian Jewish humorist and Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem, according to the Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, the New York-based group supporting the effort.

The 10-year project is needed because of what Wisse describes as "language changes" and because of the fact that "every generation really wants its own translation of the major works that reflect the changes in its host language," she said in a recent interview.

Translations in general, Rosenwald told the Advocate, are often "simplifications or digests" designed to make the original text "palatable or familiar" to modern readers.

However, the success of Clark University professor Everett Fox's modern Torah translation suggests a deviation from this trend, Rosenwald pointed out. Fox's translation has been well received, he said, despite being "a pretty forbidding Bible, a Bible where there are 'slaughter sites' instead of altars."

The Wellesley College professor said he hopes the translation that the editorial board assembles conveys the "zany, rich, difficult" nature of the prose of Aleichem, born Sholom Rabinovitch in 1859 in the Ukrainian town of Peryoslov.

"People haven't talked so much about translation from Yiddish, I think, partly because you're so grateful to have a translation," Rosenwald said.

Wisse said she hopes the collection will make Aleichem — "one of the greatest Jewish writers of all time," in her opinion — as "accessible in as complete a form" in English as possible.

Stated to be included in the collection are

such works as "Motl the Cantor's Son," "Stempenyu and Yosele Nightingale," "Sender Blank and His Family" and "The Bloody Hoax."

Advancing the study

About 100 years after they were first published (Aleichem died in 1916), the tales continue to engage young modern readers, Wisse reports.

Last year, for a class assignment, Wisse recalled, one Harvard student with Spanish roots created a Tevye with Spanish flavor, "using questions in the same way [that the character did in the original story] and shrugging at catastrophe in the same way. ...

"They [students] really understand how this kind of a character would work in their own culture."

Besides collecting material for the 25-volume set, the editorial board of scholars, the foundation says, plans to "advance [the study of] the life, works and influence" of

Local scholars join in effort to translate into English works of Sholom Aleichem

Aleichem, whose writings have been translated into 63 languages.

In pursuit of that goal, the board is sponsoring what the foundation is calling "a translation contest" to increase the number of translators on the project.

Also, Wisse said, the board plans to convene an international conference of scholars next April at the National Yiddish Book Center, on the Hampshire College campus in Amherst. The foundation and the center will co-sponsor that event. Yiddish Book Center director Aaron Lansky co-chairs the Friends of Sholom Aleichem Foundation.

Joining Wisse and Rosenwald on the international scholars' team are the following professors: Jeffrey Shandler, New York University; Janet Hadda, University of California at Los Angeles; Mikhail Krutikov, University of London; Anita Norich, University of Michigan; Abraham Novershtern, Hebrew University; Joseph Sherman, University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg; and Seth Wolitz, University of Texas.

Professor David G. Roskies of the Jewish Theological Seminary is serving as editor in chief of the project. Bel Kaufman, Aleichem's granddaughter, is the memorial foundation's honorary chairman.



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The Puzzler Jews Can't Solve

Meryl Hyman's 'Who is a Jew?' throws a light on a debate that threatens to break the community apart.

SANDEE BRAWARSKY
JEWISH WEEK BOOK CRITIC

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Meryl Hyman is the daughter of a Jewish father and Christian mother. Her parents divorced when she and her brother were young and her father remarried a Jewish woman with three kids; her father and his new wife — who didn't have a Jewish divorce — had a child together. Her blended family, she says, represents "most of the permutations of heredity that face American Jews now." Although she grew up thinking of herself as Jewish, according to Orthodox and Conservative standards she is not. She points out that among all of her siblings, she is the only one whose potential children would not be considered Jewish, no matter whom she married.

"Who Is A Jew?," the puzzler central to my life and periodically to Israeli politics, now threatens to break the Jewish people apart," Hyman writes in *Who Is A Jew?: Conversations, Not Conclusions* (Jewish Lights), a timely and thoughtful complement to the ongoing debate. She interviewed 34 rabbis and scholars in Israel, the United States and England, and provides their comments to her questions, in their own-always passionate — words. She spoke to them not simply as a reporter, but as a woman with much at stake in their answers.

"It's one thing to talk about who is a Jew. It's quite another thing to look into my Jewish face and tell me I'm not a Jew. No one did it without breaking my heart or breaking their own," Hyman, a senior editor at Gannett Newspapers in Westchester, tells *The Jewish Week*.

Among her subjects are Rabbi Nachman Bulman of Ohr Somaych Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Avraham Burg of the Jewish Agency, former Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kolek, Rabbi Jonathan Magonet of Leg Baec College in London, Rabbi Eric Yoffie of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Rabbi Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Rabbi David Teutsch of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Rabbi Norman Lamm of Yeshiva University and Rabbi Avi Shafran of Agudath Israel.

The 48-year-old author says she was surprised by the "amount of rancor among various groups." People who wouldn't speak to each other were sometimes surprised when she reported what the others told her, and they responded through her, she notes. Throughout, she was treated with "kindness and dignity. On a personal level, I know that any one of these people would take me in and save my life and talk to me about Jewish issues and accept me—provided I don't marry their kid."

After all her conversations, her attitude is that "Everyone is right. From their points of view there can be no other way of looking at this issue. Every group knows — not thinks — that they have the answer of what to do to save Judaism." But, she adds, "We have to find a way to live together even if we're not going to live alike."

She says that her own family is not that unusual. "Now there are hundreds of thousands of us." Many Jewish families, she notes, "do not understand that certain members are not going to be considered Jewish in Israel." At the same time, "there's not a gentile in the world who won't say that I'm a Jew."

"I think it's all too important to be left to the rabbis. The time has come for individuals to take an interest," she says.

Meryl Hyman will speak about "Who Is A Jew?" as part of New York Is Book Country at the Brooklyn Public Library,

Midwood Branch, 975 E. 16th St., Brooklyn, on Sunday, Sept. 27 at 3 p.m.

He was "our Shakespeare, our Ingmar Bergman, our Philip Roth, and yes, even our Steven Spielberg, all rolled into one," Professor David Roskies of the Jewish Theological Seminary reports, referring to Sholom Aleichem.

Roskies serves as the newly named director and editor-in-chief of The Sholom Aleichem Library in Translation, a new initiative of The Sholom Aleichem Foundation, whose plan is to make all of the work of the distinguished Yiddish writer available in English. The project is expected to take more than 10 years, with all new translations. In explaining why so much effort and resources are going toward a single writer, Roskies describes Sholom Aleichem as the first thoroughly modern Jewish writer in terms of style and substance who was also a champion of the common man. "The great consoler," he not only chronicled anti-Semitism and czarist repression but "helped place these disasters in the continuum of Jewish life. He was a profoundly anti-apocalyptic writer, the very opposite of Isaac Bashevis Singer. He believed, despite all odds, that there was hope for both the individual Jews, facing off against the forces of history, and for the community of Israel, transplanted to the new promised lands."

An international editorial board, headed by Roskies, includes Professors Janet Hadda of UCLA, Abraham Novershtern of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Joseph Sherman of the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa and Ruth Wisse of Harvard. Bel Kaufman, author and granddaughter of Sholom Aleichem and the only living family member who knew him, is honorary chairman of the Foundation.

The foundation is anticipating 25 volumes, including two volumes of plays. Each volume will be the "creative collaboration" of a translator and scholarly editor, with an introduction by the editor, as Jeffrey Shandler of New York University, a member of the editorial board, explains.

"Making his best work available in the best possible translations will provide a powerful stimulus for other writers, poets and playwrights; for filmmakers, painters, and artists in every media; for cultural historians, ethnographers, and philosophers to decipher a lost world uncannily similar to our own." Roskies notes.

Additional efforts to advance the study of Sholom Aleichem's life work announced by the foundation include a translation contest and an international conference in April 1999 at the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Mass. For further information, contact the Sholom Aleichem Memorial Foundation, 1020 Park Ave., New York, NY 10028.

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman provides travelers to Israel with information they won't get from most travel agents: His new book explores the Jewish nation's spiritual landscape.

Israel: A Spiritual Travel Guide (Jewish Lights) is "a companion for the modern Jewish pilgrim." Unlike other travel books that emphasize practical issues, here the emphasis is on creating a more deeply felt experience. The author describes 25 tourist sites, including the Kotel, the Jezreel Valley and Safed, and provides information on spiritual preparation, with related

readings, contemporary poetry, specific blessings and biblical references. For example, in the section of Kibbutz Deganya, the first kibbutz, Rabbi Hoffman describes the spirit of Israel's pioneers; includes excerpts from the writings of A.D. Gordon and a poem, "Toil" by Abraham Shlonsky "to be said, perhaps, in the field of a kibbutz"; and concludes with the blessing for establishing "the work of our hands."

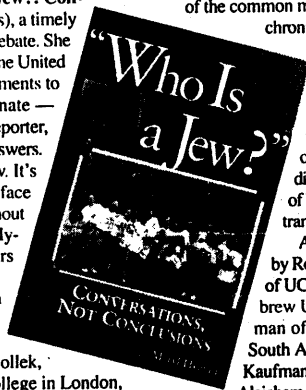
The guide will well serve first-timers and seasoned travelers alike (and armchair travelers will enjoy the selections too). Rabbi Hoffman, who contributes to the Jewish Week's "Sabbath Week" feature, is a professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union College.

For young readers, a new book features a familiar tale, beautifully retold, with a message of healing and tolerance between peoples.

King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba by Blu Greenberg and Linda Tarry, illustrated by Avi Katz (Pitspopy) describes the meeting between King Solomon and Queen Makeda, as the Ethiopian people refer to her. At the invitation of King Solomon, the Queen, much beloved by her people, sets out for Jerusalem to fulfill her father's command on his death bed "to search for wisdom wherever it may be." With a series of riddles, she tests the King's wisdom, and comes to appreciate his insights and outlook, particularly monotheism. They fall in love and marry, but eventually she must return to her own people. Back in the land of Sheba, she gives birth to their son. In Katz's appealing illustrations, the Queen is a dark-skinned beauty.

The authors, Greenberg, a Jewish scholar and activist, and Tarry, a theologian and activist in the African-American community who was responsible for sending thousands of black dolls to South African children and also to Ethiopian children in Israel, see this book, with its story of a shared past, as a bridge of understanding between their two communities.

The book, which received an award from the American Storytelling Association, includes afterwords by Barbara Ribakove Gordon, director of the North American Conference of Ethiopian Jewry, and Natan Kebede, a young Ethiopian Jew now living Israel where he feels he "has come home." Also available is a paper doll kit featuring the King and Queen and colorful outfits. □



Memorandum

To: Sidney Gluck
Fax: 929-9851
From: David G. Roskies
Date: January 6, 2000
Subject: The Sholom Aleichem Library

Thank you, Sidney, for your gentle reminder. As you recall, the Weisel fund-raiser preceded our annual conference of the Association for Jewish Studies in Chicago. There I ran all the Yiddish sessions and did quite a bit of running around. Among other things, I had an hour-long meeting with Ms. Janet Rabinowitch of Indiana University Press concerning the possibility of becoming our publisher. We can expect to receive a formal proposal.

There has also been much activity on the editorial front. I am now ready to propose the following four volumes:

1. *Wandering Stars*, Sholom Aleichem's major novel, translated by Gershon Freidlin and edited by Nahma Sandrow.
2. *The Collected Plays*, edited and translated by Joel Berkowitz.
3. *The Short Novels*, edited and translated by Joseph Sherman.
4. *The Annotated Tevye*, translated by Hillel Halkin and edited by Ruth R. Wisse.

You will note that two out of the four are not collaborative volumes, as we had originally intended. This is because rules that are made in heaven are invariably adapted for mortal consumption. Even the Torah works in this way. The rationale for collaborative volumes was to vouchsafe accuracy and to maintain the very highest standard. So, for example, our good friend Aliza Shevrin, should we sign her on, must be paired up with an academic specialist. But we are extremely fortunate to have in Berkowitz and Sherman someone who is both a seasoned translator and a recognized scholar. It would be wrong-headed and counterproductive to saddle them with a make-work editor, especially since the Editor-in-Chief is the final arbiter and court of appeals. Nothing will be published without my careful supervision. When we meet, I will show you Sherman's latest handiwork. He has edited and translated a novella by David Bergelson, which was published by the Modern Language Association. The first Yiddish work ever published by them, it sets a gold standard. We are dealing here with professionals, and with people whom I know and trust. Trust is the final arbiter.

So let's meet for breakfast, or any other time that is convenient. Please call me at 678-8914 to set a date.



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June 30, 2000

Dear Sidney,

It pains me to write this letter of resignation. Much effort, good will, and good times have gone into the Sholom Aleichem Library, and I am the last person on earth to break up a party. But as outlined below, there has been a pattern of unilateral action that seriously undermines our stated goals -- indeed, the very viability of our project -- and that increasingly impinges upon my area of responsibility. I cannot go on as Editor-in-Chief.

1. **The available pool of translators.** On 7 June, you sent a letter out to all members of the Editorial Board, save for one, the Editor-in-Chief. To this letter was appended a list of translators "gathered over a period of time" by Fishl Kutner, which you "had asked David Roskies to relay," but he failed to do so, apparently because it fell "through the cracks." I was not asleep at the switch, however. In my judgment, most of the names on the list were of retirees and rank amateurs. Looking at this list, I realized with absolute clarity what a terrible mistake we had made at the very beginning by not following through with our own initiative to locate and evaluate the best available translators. Although Professors Shandler and Rosenwald put a good deal of work into evaluating the submissions to our Translation Contest, and an impressive number of people submitted their work, you decided, unilaterally, and on the very day of the conference, not to award a prize. What would have happened had we completed the process, and compiled our own (very) short list of finalists and winners? These potential translators would then have received a copy of Prof. Rosenwald's exacting "*Takones*" in order to judge whether they were willing to commit to such an arduous job. In other words, we blew it. To now expect that Fishl Kutner will set things right is both absurd and demeaning.

2. **The available funds.** You have all along professed to me that the Sholom Aleichem Library represents the capstone of your dreams for the Foundation, the most lasting legacy you wish to leave behind. At our recent luncheon at the National Arts Club, and in the presence of our donor and Board member, Dr. Joshua Gurin, you proudly displayed the checks you received for \$400,000. This sum would cover all our costs, and then some. Yet, to my surprise, you hastened to explain that only \$100,000 of these monies will be earmarked for the Library. The other \$300,000, presumably, will go toward underwriting your latest initiative, to run free cultural programs at the Center for Jewish History. Where, then, will the rest of our money come from? From the NEH. Again, on your own initiative, you have rehired David E. Thomson to redraft the proposal. Only this time, the rules have changed, because the feedback we received from the NEH states explicitly that the proposal must go out under my name, not under yours; that it be written in sober academic prose, not in promotional hype; and that it include samples of the kind of translations we are seeking. This, as I have said to you before and now repeat for the record,

represents a huge time commitment. As academics, the members of the Editorial Board have only two currencies: our time, and our scholarly reputation. I refuse to commit either to a grant proposal that, in my judgment, has little chance of success.

3. **The available editors.** Four volumes are currently in the works:

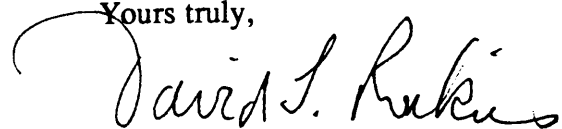
1. *Wandering Stars*, translated by Gershon Freidlin and edited by Nahma Sandrow.
2. *Selected Plays*, edited and translated by Joel Berkowitz.
3. *The Short Novels*, edited and translated by Joseph Sherman.
4. *The Annotated Bilingual Tevye*, translated by Hillel Halkin and edited by Ruth R. Wisse and Abraham Novershtern.

Two weeks ago, you held a private meeting with Professor Rosenwald at which you expressed concern about this line-up. Why, you asked, were volumes being entrusted to a single person who will act both as translator and editor? This is ground we have covered before, Sidney, not once, but on numerous occasions. Most recently, I even rehearsed the decision of our Editorial Board to enlist -- if need be -- a professional playwright, of the calibre of Wendy Wasserstein or David Mamet, to review the translation of the *Selected Plays*, in the interest of achieving the highest level of performability. I also explained to you that some later volumes, like *The Selected Letters*, to be edited by Mikhail Krutikov, may require the collaboration of several translators: from Russian, Yiddish, and Hebrew. If you still remained uncertain about our editorial policy, the person to talk to was me.

Instead of entrusting this most difficult and sensitive task to the members of the Editorial Board, you finally took matters into your own hands. Last week, you called Aliza Shevrin and invited her to translate a volume of *Children's Stories*. Is Ms. Shevrin aware of our editorial guidelines? Does she know who will edit this volume? Do you? More to the point: Why are you managing someone's else's portfolio?

I cannot continue working in this confused and erratic environment, trying to second guess what you will do next. I cannot run a project in which the President of my Foundation takes actions that undermine my authority and contradict our stated goals. I have lost confidence, furthermore, in his commitment to raise the necessary capital. I am therefore resigning as Editor-in-Chief. I do so without rancor or recrimination and with no intent to prejudice the actions of the other members of the Editorial Board. My decision is final and irrevocable.

Yours truly,



David G. Roskies

cc. Editorial Board of the Sholom Aleichem Library