

people to the exclusion of others. Only when it does reflect the community will every guy on the street receive a fair shake.”

Yortsayt, jahrzeit, jahrzeit: oy, yiddish

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Like all Jewish languages, Yiddish has been traditionally written in the Hebrew alphabet. At various times, however, and for various reasons, it has also been rendered in the Roman script: after the Holocaust, several romanized books and periodicals were published by Jewish DP's in Germany; both before and after the war, romanized songsters, brochures, collections of poetry, etc. have appeared from time to time in several countries; and in the 1930's, Soviet Yiddish linguists toyed for a while with the idea of doing away entirely with the Hebrew alphabet and replacing it with the Roman one.

Why romanization at all, one may ask, if Yiddish-speakers have used the Hebrew alphabet for almost a millenium? Each of the three cases cited above illustrates as many motivations: the Soviets considered it for practical (read anti-Hebrew and anti-religious) reasons; most, if not all, Hebrew type having been destroyed by the Nazis, the DP's had no alternative but to use Roman type; finally, the growing number of people who understand or speak the language but cannot read it has greatly increased the use of romanized Yiddish. One might also mention the citation of Yiddish words or phrases in other languages — or their very incorporation into the vocabulary of many English-speakers — which has also lead to more widespread romanization.

Unfortunately, however, Yiddish in her present Roman garb is no esthete's delight. A glance at almost any Jewish or non-Jewish publication immediately reveals a hodge-podge of chaotic, inconsistent transcriptions; even within one issue of the same periodical, two writers may not agree on the transcription of one and the same word. More significant, however, is the mangling of Yiddish in the hands of Germanizing, Hebraizing, or Slavicizing transcribers. The “argument” runs something like this: “since Yiddish really isn't a language, let's at least restore the ‘true’ pronunciations of the ‘real’ languages whence these words come.”

Transliteration: system or sentiment

A Yiddish-speaking *balebos*, therefore, doesn't read *krishme*; the *bal-habayis orbal-habayith* reads *krias-shema* or *kriath-shema*; a *yeshive-bakher* doesn't say *gut yontef*; a *yeshiva-bachur* says *gut yomtov*; we don't pray in a *shtibl*, reminisce about the *shtetl* or eat *gefilte fish*

but in a *stiebel* one can talk about the *stetel* (or *schtetle*) while eating *gefullte fisch*: a Jew doesn't wear a *yarmlke* or a *shtrayml*, but a *yarmulka* or a *streimel*: etc., etc. Many of these faulty transcriptions are of course also used by people whose attitude towards Yiddish is irreproachable; the chaos in Yiddish romanizations, in other words, has simply become “standardized” in the absence of any well-known rules. Yet, as I heard someone recently say, “a Jewish community which now has enough self-respect to reclaim Yiddish as its own should care enough about its proper transcription.” Though a systematic, coherent romanization, elaborated by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in the 1940's, does exist, it has unfortunately remained largely unknown outside philological circles.

Interest in the proper romanization of Yiddish and in bringing it to the attention of a broader range of potential users, has nevertheless recently come from unexpected quarters: after working on several Hebrew romanizations for four years, a five-man group of linguists, editors and librarians working under the auspices of the American National Standards Institute has turned to two Yiddish linguists associated with the YIVO for advice on a romanization for Yiddish. The broadened seven-member team is now working on a brochure that will make the Standardized Romanization more accessible to those who want it. Here is how the first stanza of Hirsh Glik's *Partizaner-himen* looks in romanization:

*Zog nit keyn mol, az du geyst dem letstn veg,
ven himlen blayene farshteln bloe teg.
Kumen vet nokh undzer oysgebenkte sho,
es vet a poyk ton undzer trot: “mir zaynen do!”*

*Don't ever say: “For me this is the final way”
Now that clouds of lead conceal the blue of day —
Because the day for which we yearn will yet appear
And our footsteps loud proclaim that we are here!*

... but others say ...

A contemporary question

This is the season of the year when we beg God to pardon us. Our pleas are not based on our virtues or our good deeds, for as the Prayerbook constantly repeats, “We have no deeds to plead our cause.” Should we not, therefore, praise those who pardon others whether they have “deeds” or not?

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No to unconditional amnesty

The draft dodgers and deserters of the recent Vietnam conflict did nothing for either their country or their religion and therefore they do not deserve an unconditional amnesty.

It is said of the draft dodgers and deserters that "most of them have made the decision to leave their homeland in agony of conscience, with few material possessions." Most of us who chose to serve in Vietnam certainly left the United States in agony of conscience, especially because we did not know whether or not we would come back whole, and we certainly left with few material possessions. Indeed, the "hootch" that I lived in during my two years in Vietnam would have been condemned as unfit for human habitation probably anywhere in the United States. But without any high-falutin rhetoric which opposed combat I went off to Vietnam to serve my country as I was called upon to do. Those who openly opposed serving in combat and fled actually turned down numerous opportunities to serve their fellow man in non-combatant roles. The draft dodgers and deserters chose to flee from responsibility and now they wish to reap all of the benefits that this country offers at a time when there is no personal danger to themselves. This is a travesty of justice.

Ex-Mayor Lindsay of New York City in May 1970 said that "The people who have refused to go into the military service and who have accepted the legal consequences of it are the real heroes." Are draft dodgers and deserters real heroes? Hardly. Let me briefly narrate the stories of two men, a Christian and a Jew, that I served with in Vietnam who were really heroes:

Dee Hyden: Helicopter Warrant Officer from Texas died in December 1969 while commanding a helicopter that

was attempting to rescue a seriously wounded man;

Ben Nelson: Specialist E-5 medic from California won the Silver Star for single-handedly rescuing an entire helicopter crew and passengers (all of whom were wounded) when their chopper was shot down. He died when our dispensary (the 14th Combat Aviation Battalion Dispensary, American Division, Chu Lai, Vietnam) in which he was serving as a combat medic was rocketed by the enemy.

Dee Hyden, Ben Nelson and many thousands like them are real heroes. They served their country and themselves with the highest form of responsibility. I must therefore say absolutely NO to proposals for unconditional amnesty. Let the draft dodgers and deserters be required to perform several years of arduous service which would still only approach the dedication and service to their fellow human beings for which Dee Hyden and Ben Nelson gave their lives.

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