

APPROBATIONS

Miller, David Neal. *Bibliography of Isaac Bashevis Singer, 1924-1949.*
New York: Peter Lang, 1983.

— *A Bibliography of Isaac Bashevis Singer, January 1950 - June 1952.*
New York: Max Weinreich Center for Advanced Jewish Studies
of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1979.
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Significance of the Bibliography

Critics and researchers of Isaac Bashevis Singer's writings have recently benefited from important research aids, with the appearance of two bibliographies of the author's publications, edited by David Neal Miller. The first list, which covers the years 1924-1949, has just recently been published, while the other, which is a continuation of the first list, covering publications up to June 1952, appeared as a separate pamphlet in 1979.

Isaac Bashevis is a very prolific writer. His many works, which were written in various genres (including those collected in his English books), were usually originally published in Yiddish, in periodicals and in daily newspapers. They are scattered in serials that have appeared on three continents. Until his immigration to the U.S. in 1935, he published in Poland, in periodical publications and in daily newspapers which appeared in Warsaw. Bashevis' serialized novels also appeared in Paris in a Yiddish daily newspaper. From 1935 until today, most of his writings of all types are published in the New York Yiddish newspaper *Forverts* (*The Jewish Daily Forward*), and in magazines that appeared and are still appearing in N.Y., such as *Di Tsukunft*, *Yidisher Kemfer*, and *Svive*. Since 1955, he also publishes in the Tel Aviv magazine *Di Goldene Keyt*. All this is without taking into account the reprints of his works in newspapers issued in Buenos Aires, Paris, and other places. It is

no simple task to encompass bibliographically such a multitude of publications which are scattered in such diverse newspapers and periodicals.

The importance of the bibliographic coverage of Bashevis' oeuvre also stems from the fact that relatively few of his publications were ever included in a book, in any language. It is common knowledge that he wrote stories, memoirs and novels; however, in certain periods he also produced a great many publicistic writings and works of literary criticism. The stories, memoirs, and novels were only partially collected in books, and a considerable number of his fictional writings are still hidden in newspapers and periodicals, some of which are very rare. As for the publicistic writings and literary criticism — not only were they never collected in books, but also their very existence is barely known — even to the critics and researchers of the author's fictional writings.

An indicator of the scope of these matters is the fact that from the period of 1924 until the middle of 1952, Miller succeeded in gathering more than 1200 entries. We shall already note that this does not encompass everything, even in this limited time period. We therefore conclude that were we to add all of his publications from the thirty plus years of creativity that are still awaiting bibliographic coverage, i.e., from the middle of 1952 until the present, we would get a very large body of material that could

not be easily controlled from a bibliographic point of view. We therefore understand Miller's reasoning for dividing his work, albeit in an arbitrary manner, into rather limited chronological periods. We hope that he will continue in this difficult and important task and complete it. The following comments are designed to assist him in the continuation of this honorable and comprehensive bibliographic project, and to explain the nature of the existing portions of this bibliography to its users.

Structure of the Bibliography

Miller divided his bibliographic list(s) into four formal sections:¹ [*Translator's Note: The Lang Publication contains only three. The two lists are being reviewed as a unit.*]

- A. Bashevis' books in Yiddish;
- B. Contributions to newspapers, periodicals, and anthologies;
- C. Books by other authors that Bashevis translated into Yiddish, in various languages;
- D. Bashevis' books in English translation.

In the period from 1924 until the middle of 1952, sections A, C, and D are very sparse. In the first section, only two books are actually recorded: *Der Sotn in Goray* — which appeared for the first time in Warsaw in 1935 — and two other editions of it in Yiddish: N.Y., 1943 and Jerusalem, 1972; *Di Familye Mushkat*, which appeared for the first time in Yiddish in N.Y., 1950. In the last section, only one book is listed until 1952, and that is the English translation of *Di*

Famlye Mushkat which appeared in N.Y., 1950. This was Bashevis' first book in English. The third section, listing eleven books translated by Bashevis into Yiddish, is very interesting. Ten of the books appeared in Warsaw in the years 1929-1932; they are translations of fiction by K. Hamsun, G. D'Annunzio, K. Michaelis, Stefan Zweig, E.M. Remarque, Thomas Mann and M. Smilansky (the only book translated from Hebrew — no. 10). Only L. Glazer's book of memoirs, which was translated from German (no. 11), appeared in N.Y. in 1938. This section seems to be complete. It is most definitely helpful for anyone interested in bringing to light the literary contacts of Bashevis in his youth.

The second section of the bibliography, in which are concentrated publications in newspapers, periodicals and anthologies, is the most extensive; it is also very rich in important but largely unknown information, even to many of the critics and researchers of Bashevis' work.

The cataloging of the items is as a rule precise and accurate. Miller's cataloging method can be demonstrated by using an example — the entry for Bashevis' famous 1945 story "Gimpl Tam" (no. 464): after the romanized Yiddish title of the story, the English translation of the heading appears in parentheses; followed by details of where it appeared in *Yidisher Kemfer*, and an indication of the pseudonym Isaac Singer used in signing this work. (More about this below.) To these are added precise details about the reprints of the Yiddish story in Bashevis' books, and details on the publication of the story in English translation, by Saul Bellow, in a periodical in 1953, and again, in a collection of the writer's stories in English.² This example is not typical of most of the entries in this section, because the vast majority of the entries were not reprinted in his Yiddish books and were not translated into English. However, Miller's bibliography does indeed appear to be exhaustive in covering the several dozen stories that were reprinted or translated.

Isaac Singer usually signed his canonical fictional works with his best-known pseudonym, Isaac Bashevis, which has essentially become his second name. However, there are published works without any signature, such as the sensational novels which appeared in installments in daily newspapers.³ The other pseudonyms that he used in Warsaw are Yitskhok Tsvi, Tse, and Yud Beyz. It is nearly certain that entries no. 14 and 16, signed Y.B.T., and designated by Miller as "doubtful entries," are not by Bashevis. In contrast, there is no question that "doubtful entry" no. 36 is in fact by Bashevis, because

it is explicitly mentioned in the chapter of the author's memoirs "Fun der Alter Un Nayer Heym" in the newspaper *Forverts* of June 5, 1964. When he was in N.Y., in addition to the pseudonym Bashevis, the author used two other pen-names — Yitskhok Varshavski and D. Segal. He usually employed these in signing his publicistic writings in the *Forverts*. Miller did well to record the signatures for every entry, because these provide a primary indication of the character of the work: the pseudonym Bashevis generally points to canonical fictional works or criticism; D. Segal served almost certainly only for publicistic writings; and Yitskhok Varshavski was used for publicistic writings, memoirs and fiction — in works that did not get the deserved attention in terms of language, according to the author's assessment.⁴

Comprehensiveness of the Bibliography

The two periods in Bashevis' life, the Warsaw Period and the New York period, were not covered in an equal manner from a bibliographic standpoint. Whereas the N.Y. period seems to approach a complete listing,⁵ the bibliographic coverage of the Warsaw period is flawed by substantial omissions. This period was given a primary survey in 1978 by the late writer Moshe Yungman,⁶ whose review has since been used by all those interested in Bashevis' writing in the Warsaw period.⁷ Obviously, everything recorded in Yungman's survey also found its way into Miller's bibliography; however, in the latter, there was almost no addition to the publications noted by Yungman. In his introduction, Miller alluded to some works from the Warsaw period which he did not include in his entries. He knew that Bashevis published in the Warsaw newspaper *Unzer Ekspres*, but it is not clear why he neglected to check this newspaper and to list Bashevis' writings published therein. I have in my possession a list of twenty-two stories that Bashevis published in that newspaper from only April to September of 1930, not included in Miller's bibliography.⁸ If we keep in mind that this section of the bibliography records only forty-seven individual items from the Warsaw period, we conclude that the amount of missing material is quite considerable. In addition, the non-canonical publications of Bashevis and the sensational serialized novels that he published in the newspapers *Varshever Radyo* and *Parizer Haynt* in the first half of the thirties, are only mentioned in the introduction to the bibliography and not recorded within it. Likewise, it is regrettable that to date, the novel adapted from German entitled *Flamen fun*

Laydnshaft, which Bashevis explicitly mentioned by name, has not been discovered.⁹

In various versions of his memoirs published in the *Forverts*, of which only a few were collected and published in books in English translation, Bashevis reveals quite a few details about his writings. From these memoirs, we know of the existence of his sensational novels and of other publications. It appears that Miller did not check all of Bashevis' memoirs,¹⁰ because we do not find any entries for Bashevis' Warsaw interviews with Meir Balaban, Hillel Zeitlin, Yitskhok Schiper, and others who are mentioned in the series of memoirs entitled "Fun der alter un nayer heyim," (*Forverts*, June 5 and July 3, 1964). Yungman doesn't mention them either.

What all this amounts to is that the bibliography under review is plagued by gaps regarding Bashevis' writings during the Warsaw period, and it requires completion in all the areas indicated above.

As stated, Bashevis' writings in his New York period merited comprehensive coverage in the bibliography. Here, researchers of his oeuvre may find a wealth of highly instructive parallels between his publicistic discussions and the well-known topics of his fictional works. A few examples will suffice. In July and August of 1939, Yitskhok Varshavski published publicistic essays in the *Forverts* on the following topics: "What is a Dybbuk? Prominent Rabbi Tells How a Demon Entered a Young Man" (no. 81); "Rabbis Tell About Boys and Girls Possessed By Demons" (no. 83); "Christian Demonic Possession Harsher than Jewish — Famous Case of a Dybbuk in England" (no. 84); "Split Personality — Famous Case of a Girl Who Led a Double Life" (no. 85); "Doris, A Sick Girl with Four Distinct Personalities" (no. 86). Who cannot recognize in these dybbuk records and in these essays on split personality, themes that are prevalent throughout Bashevis' fictional writings?¹¹ The same applies to the essay by Yitskhok Varshavski on "Customs in a Backward Land Still Polygamous" (1939, no. 99) and to the essays of D. Segal, which had the shortest but very specific titles "Two Names and a Double Life" (1947, no. 640); "Marriage Cheat Who Shook Up America" (1949, no. 867.17). In these essays, Varshavski-Segal put into publicistic writing situations that are very familiar to the readers of Bashevis' stories and novels.¹²

In order to understand Bashevis' literary method and his ideas about literature, the critical essays entered in the bibliography under review are most important. The majority are reviews of new books, but we

also find among them general essays on literary problems, e.g., "Words or Pictures" (1927, no. 28) and "On Poetry and Politics" (1932, no. 41). Bashevis was the first to deal with summing up the period of Yiddish literary achievement in Poland between the two World Wars through the publication, as early as 1943, of his instructive but controversial essay: "Yiddish Literature in Poland" (and not "Prose" as is recorded in the bibliography; no. 301).

The Index

At the end of the 1983 book, there is an alphabetical index of titles, the purpose of which is to direct the user to the chronologically arranged entries which are grouped under bold-faced section headings for the year. However, in the bibliography itself everything is all mixed together, without breakdown, and with no prominence given to the fiction or criticism within a sea of publicistic writings. It would have been very useful to have greater detail in the description of the essays whose titles do not reveal about whom they were written, e.g., "Who Was He — Holy Man, Phony or Madman?" (no. 102); "An Amazing Rabbi: Scholar and Playboy" (no. 120); "He Was a Great Scholar, Great Thief and Great Murderer" (no. 236).¹³ Without much effort, Miller could have revealed the subject of these pieces. Likewise, it would have been desirable to add an index of authors and books about which Bashevis published essays or reviews. In the index as it is arranged now, it is impossible to identify these, even if we know the name of the author about whom Bashevis wrote, unless the name appears at the beginning of a title. For example, there are two essays by Bashevis about Y.L. Perets listed in the bibliography (nos. 468 and 701); however, in the index, one cannot find them under Perets' name.

Romanization

Miller's bibliographical lists are presented in English, with the title of Bashevis' Yiddish publications Romanized.¹⁴ Unfortunately, this procedure has of late become so widespread that even an institution like Yivo in New York is no longer faithful to its glorious tradition, and it, too, participated in the publication of Miller's Romanized bibliographical list. The question may be asked: For whom are these bibliographies intended? If for those who do not know the Hebrew alphabet and, therefore, obviously cannot read Yiddish unless it is Romanized, then it is clear that there is no value in the bibliographies for them, because they will not use the bibliographies as an access tool for

Bashevis' Yiddish publications. Miller's precise cataloging and the translation of titles into English will also be of no value, unless there exists an English translation of the story or essay listed by him. And such is indeed the case with more than one thousand entries listed in these bibliographies. This practice of Romanization perhaps involves an element of capitulation to the critics and researchers of Bashevis' works who find it possible to delve into his oeuvre without knowing the language in which he writes, with a deliberate and astonishing disregard of everything written by the author that was not translated into English.¹⁵ However, even the benefits these people will derive from Miller's bibliographies are, at best, only marginal. Therefore, if Miller will reach the point of publishing a new edition of the bibliographic lists at hand — and their continuations (as promised on p. 17 of the introduction) — it would be worthwhile to consider publishing both in the original language and alphabet of the author and of his primary readers. [See *Dina Abramowicz' remarks on another Romanized Yiddish bibliography in Judaica Librarianship, vol. 1 no. 1, p. 15 — Ed. (B.H.W.)*]

Notes

¹The sections are indicated by the letters A, B, C, D, with each section beginning with new numbering preceded by the letter indicating the section — A1, B1, C1, D1.

²It might have been possible to add additional printings of the story in various types of collections, e.g., *Great Jewish Short Stories*, ed. and introd. by Saul Bellow, (New York, 1962), pp. 232-247. This is not so essential; however, it was obligatory to refer to the largest anthology of his stories in English: *The Collected Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer*, (New York, 1982), pp. 3-14.

³On the sensational novel that was adapted from German to Yiddish and printed anonymously in the newspaper *Varshever Radyo*, see: Isaac Bashevis Singer: *A Young Man in Search of Love*, (New York, 1978), p. 168.

⁴Concerning Isaac Singer's pseudonyms, see Miller's introduction, pp. 14-15. The last words in the paragraph about Yitskhok Varshavski are based on a letter from Bashevis to me, cited by C. Shmeruk in "The Variety of Monologue Forms in the Stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer," introduction [in Hebrew] to a collection of Bashevis' stories: *Der Shpigl un Andere Dertseylungen*, (Jerusalem, 1975), p. xxi.

⁵Nevertheless, I have not found in Miller's bibliography Y. Bashevis' thorough review of Y. Perle's book *Yidn fun A Gants Yor*, (Warsaw, 1935), from which there were extensive quotations in the weekly publication *Literarische Bleter* (Warsaw), issue no. 22 (629), 1936, p. 352. It is stated there that the quotations were copied from the "Literatur Baylage fun Nyu Yorker Forverts." However, it appears that this omission is the exception and not the rule.

⁶Moshe Yungman, "The Polish Period in Isaac Bashevis-Singer's Work — 1924-1935" *Ha-Sifrut*, 27 (December 1978), pp. 113-133.

⁷See, for example, Miller, p. 42. E. Schulman's survey is also based largely upon Yungman's essay: "Di Ershte Tsen Yor fun Yitskhok Bashevis-Zingers Shafung," *Di Tsukunft*, July-August 1983, pp. 96-100; October 1983, pp. 152-155; November-December 1983, pp. 185-188; January 1984, pp. 28-30.

⁸I wish to thank Dr. Yechiel Scheintuch for this list.

⁹Concerning the writing of these novels, there is much information scattered throughout Bashevis' memoirs (see note 3), and also C. Shmeruk, "Ben otobiyografiyah le-roman bi-yetsirat Bashevis," *Molad* 41 (251), (Spring 1982), pp. 182-186. In English translation this article appeared with the title "Bashevis-Singer — In Search of his Autobiography," *The Jewish Quarterly* 4 (108), (Winter 1981/82), pp. 28-36. Also indicated there is the source for the novel's name in the publication *Varshever Radyo*.

¹⁰See details about this in my essay mentioned in the previous note, especially in the appendix on p. 186 (in the English version, p. 36). To the items listed there, one must already add his stories about his family "Di Mishpokhe," *Forverts*, 12.II.1982-4. II.1983.

¹¹Concerning this matter see, for instance, my comments related to Dybbuks in the introduction to *Der Shpigl* (note 4) on p. ix, and note 7 there.

¹²About Bashevis' great interest in polygamy and on the concept "Heyrat-Shvindler" (Marriage Swindler) in his fiction, see my article in *Molad* (note 9).

¹³This is listed correctly in 1942, but through some error also found its way to the year 1943, no. B296.

¹⁴The series of errors in transcription is regrettable, e.g., (B104) *Farblundzhet*, (B121) *Shivigers*, (B123) "Dan Zhuanen", (B288) *Kupernik*, (B323) *der Shevreshiner*.

¹⁵Again, as an example only, see what is written on this matter in the books of P. Kresh, *Isaac Bashevis Singer, The Magician of West 86th Street*, (New York, 1979), p. XVIII; E. Alexander, *Isaac Bashevis Singer*, (Boston, 1980), p. 9.

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