

**2002 AJL BIBLIOGRAPHY AWARD
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH**

***Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Bibliography of His Works in Yiddish and English,
1960-1991***

Roberta Saltzman

<p>Roberta Saltzman was born and raised in the Astoria section of New York City. She received her B.A. and various awards for Greek translation from New York University, an M.A. in Latin and Greek from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and an M.L.S. from Queens College, also of the City University of New York. She started working at The New York Public Library as a page in the General Research Division while pursuing her histrionic obsessions at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts and in 1985 began her full-time commitment to the Library's Dorot Jewish Division, where she worked first as a technical assistant and then as a cataloger of Hebraica and Judaica in nine languages. Since 2000, she has been the assistant chief librarian, or, in the picturesque antique parlance of The New York Public Library, the "first assistant" of the Dorot Jewish Division.</p>
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I'd like to tell you briefly how and why I compiled my bibliography. My work was prompted by several readers in the Jewish Division who asked whether we could find the original Yiddish version of a story or novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer. We thought that the works of a Nobel Prize-winning author would surely be available in book form in the language in which he wrote. But this is not the case; only nine separate Singer titles have been published in Yiddish in book form. (Singer was aware that the market for Yiddish books was limited. In *Enemies, a love story*, a shopkeeper says, "New York is full of thieves, but I don't have to worry about the store ... my only fear is that some Yiddish author might break in at night and put in some more books"). The overwhelming majority of Singer's enormous output was published not in book form but serially in the Yiddish *Forverts* (Jewish Daily Forward), as well as in a few other Yiddish periodicals. The *Forverts* is not indexed; this means that most of Singer's work was essentially unavailable in its original language. I was intrigued by this; what other major modern author publishes his novels in a newspaper? It was as if Singer were a nineteenth-century writer in late twentieth-century America.

I learned that during the last third of his life, Singer was using three pseudonyms: "D. Segal" for topical pieces, theater and movie reviews, and some children's stories, such as the Chelm tales; "Yitshak Varshavski" for literary criticism, memoirs and some fiction; and "Yitshak Bashevis" for fiction. I surveyed over thirty years of microfilms of the *Forverts* and found more than 1,100 separate pieces by Singer. He was a tremendously prolific writer, and it was quite common for him to publish more than one article in a single issue of the *Forverts*. There are even instances where Singer had more than one article on the same page: on February 17, 1968, for example, there is an installment of the novel *Der sharlatan* by Yitshak Varshavski; in the upper left corner of the same page there is a piece by D. Segal, "Vos tut men mit der tsayt?" (How do you spend time?). Clearly, Singer spent a lot of time writing.

One of my aims was to identify the original Yiddish title of an English story, which wasn't always easy. For example, "A kroyn fun federn" means "A crown of feathers", and that is indeed the title of the English translation of this story; but "Dray shvester" ("Three sisters") was translated into English as "A dance and a hop". "Dray in a tsimer" ("Three in a room") was translated into English as "The bishop's robe".

All together, I found fifty-five short stories, eleven novellas and eleven novels that have not yet been translated into English. I didn't read these works as I was compiling the bibliography, so I can't vouch for their literary quality. It's entirely possible that Singer himself did not think highly enough of these works to translate them; it's also possible that he simply did not have the time for the exacting task of translating and revising all of his fiction, as he insisted on being involved in the translation of all of his work. In any case, I believe that students and admirers of Singer should have the opportunity to judge his work, and that, essentially, is why I wrote this bibliography.