Yitskhok Bashevis' *Feuilletons in Forverts* 1939-1945

After emigrating to the US in May 1935, Yitskhok Bashevis was a freelance writer at the *Forverts* until he joined the staff in 1942. The war-years were very difficult for Yitskhok Bashevis on a personal level. Artistically, however, this period was a breakthrough for him, and 1943 his *annus mirabilis*. Bashevis married Alma in 1940 and became an American citizen in 1943. The following year, his eleven-year older brother and literary mentor I.J. Singer died of a heart attack. Later that year, Bashevis received the devastating news that his mother and younger brother--who had fled Warsaw at the war's outbreak--had perished in the Gulag.

*Forverts*, the Jewish Daily Forward was the primary Yiddish daily newspaper during the war. *Forverts* employed many Yiddish writers who contributed *feuilletons* and serialized fiction to the newspaper. An important segment of the newspaper was devoted to fiction, criticism, and life-writing by Yiddish writers.

I have selected two *feuilletons* from the *Forverts* published under Bashevis' pseudonyms Yitskhok Varshavsky and D. Segal. They demonstrate how Bashevis created the *feuilleton* to perform Jewishness (*yidishkeyt*) in order to reach a mass Jewish readership:


Yitskhok Varshavski, ‘Backward countries whose men still have several wives; their life and customs.’. *Forverts*, Dec.10, 1939, Sunday, section 2.
Summary: ‘Even Jews in those countries have several wives, because they don’t recognize ‘Rabbi Gershom’s prohibition.’ How women live in a harem and how they are guarded. The ‘liberal laws’ which the remaining Jewish polygamists (fil vaybernikes) follow in recognition of the human rights of the woman.’

2. From 1944, Bashevis began to use another pseudonym, D. Segal for lighter and shorter feuilletons about human interest stories. An example:

D. Segal, ‘People who like to ask questions.’ Forverts July 7, 1944, Friday, p.5.
Summary: ‘There are many such people among Jews. Hundreds of questions which adults cannot answer. The Jewish ‘speculative thinker’ who speculates in difficult problems.”

3. During the final years of the war, Yitskhok Bashevis published some of his best short stories about the Polish Jewish shtetl in the journals Tsukanfi, Shive and Yidisher kemfer such as ‘Gimpel the Fool’, ‘Spinoza of Market Street’, ‘Short Friday’ etc. He also published a reprint of his debut novel Satan in Goray and five new stories in the volume, Sotn in goray un andre dertseylungen (Matones 1943).

Hillel Rogoff, Der gayst fun Forverts (The Spirit of the Forwards, 1953): 228-229:

‘The name Bashevis is ‘sacred’ to him. He only uses it to sign his literary creations: novels and stories. For other pieces he has two other names: Y. Varshavski for his serious publicist articles, reviews and criticism of writers and books and also feature articles about literary themes. His third and most popular name is D. Segal, which he uses for his light articles and feuilletons.’

‘His light articles, the Segal articles, are easy reading and he writes them quickly. Bashevis will frequently enter the editorial office and tell the editor: “I will give you a Segal article”, and before you know it, the article is ready. In the manuscript there is rarely a crossed-out word, a corrected or rewritten sentence.”
‘We, on the editorial board, cannot stop marveling about Bashevis’ prolific output. He produces more than two other writers who work full time at the newspaper. His weekly installments of a novel that appear every Saturday are almost a full week’s work according to the regular measure of Yiddish newspapers. In addition, he publishes several Segal articles and Varshavski articles. And let’s reveal a secret from the editorial board, if the editor had asked for more, he would surely have written more.’

Yitskhok Varshavski, *Fun der alter un nayer heymm* (From the Old and New Home), serialized in the *Forverts*, 1964-1966:

‘After almost nine year as a ‘freelancer’ paid by the article, Abraham Cahan (the *Forverts* editor) finally decided that I would receive a weekly salary, one of the smallest, as a staff writer.’ *Forverts*, March 26, 1965.

‘I had only two stories which I considered good enough for inclusion in a book: ‘The Jews from Babylon’ and ‘The Old Man’. I threw out all other stories which I wrote in Poland and which the *Kletzkin Farlag* had already typeset for publication (in 1929). I was an even more severe critic of myself than of other writers.’ *Forverts*, March 19, 1965.

‘How much suffering that I went through (during the war) only god knows. During that time, my brother died. In that time my mother and younger brother perished...No, I cannot write about those years, and also skip them in these memoirs.” *Forverts* March 26, 1965.
Yitskhok Bashevis’ Fiction and

Yitskhok Varshavski’s and D. Segal’s Feuilletons

in the Forverts and the Journals Tsukunft, Svive, Der yidisher kemfer, 1939-1945


1939: B68-B102 = 35 pieces
Y. Bashevis - Tsukunft: Reviews –B68 (Ven yash iz geform), B69, B72, B75, B82, B89, B93
7 articles

1940: B103-159 = 57 pieces
Y. Varshavski Forverts (weekly - Sunday) - 51 articles
Y. Bashevis Tsukunft: B103, B113, B119 (Emil un Karl), B128, B133 (Yonah Rozenfeld), B145
(Leivick) – 6 articles

1941: B160-208 = 49 articles
Y. Varshavski Forverts (weekly – Sunday) - 49 articles

1942: B209-264= 55 pieces
Y. Varshavski Forverts (weekly – Sunday) - 55 pieces

1943: B265-B322 = 56 pieces
Y. Varshavski, Forverts (weekly – Sunday) - 52 articles

Y. Bashevis, Svive: B265 (Zaydlus), B276 (Problemen fun der yidisher), B294 (Der roye),
Tsukunft  B301 (Arum der yidisher proze in poyln, Aug) – 4 articles

Reprint of the novel Satan and Goray (Warsaw 1935) and 5 stories: 'Der khurbn fun kreshev’, ‘A
fun bovl’.
1944: B323-B430 = 107 pieces
Y. Varshavski, Forverts (biweekly) 79 articles
D. Segal - 27 pieces
Y. Bashevis, Tsukunft. B366 (Der spinozist, July 1944)

1945: B431-B152 = 120 pieces + 7 novel installments = 127 pieces
Y. Varshavski, Forverts (biweekly – Sunday and Monday) - 64 articles
D. Segal, Forverts, 45 pieces
Y. Bashevis, Forverts, Di familye mushkat (weekly Saturday), Nov.24- Dec.31, (7 installments)
Y. Bashevis, Tsukunft B431 (‘Kurtse fraytik’ January.), B466 (‘Di kleyne shusterlekh’, April)
Y. Bashevis, Yidisher kemfer B464 (Gimpl tam, March), B513 (Katlen, Sept)

Yitskhok Varshavski’s Feuilletons in the Forverts 1939-1945
Serie 1: Dybbuks and split personalities – July 30- August 27, 1939
‘What is a Dybbuk? Prominent Rabbi Tells How a Demon Entered a Young Man.’
July 30, 1939. B81
‘Rabbis Tell About Boys and Girls Possessed by Demons’. Aug.6, 1939. B83
‘Dybbuks among Superstitious Christians are even Worse than by Fanatic Jews; a famous case of a Dybbuk in England’. Aug.13, 1939. B84
‘Split Personality – a person who led a double life: A famous case of a girl who had such a character’. Aug.20, 1939. B85
‘The sick girl Doris who in different times lived and acted as four different people.’
Aug.27, 1939. B86. ‘Regardless of how the facts -- which have been described here -- are explained, they are very unusual, and convey a lot about the deep, complicated processes which take place in the human consciousness and unconsciousness.’ (Aug.27, 1939).
Serie 2: Polygamy (‘vilvayer’) – 1939
Serie 3: family life – 1940-1941
Serie 4: The war – 1940-1941
Serie 5: Jewish Poland Past and Present - 1943-1945
Serie 6: Jewish Names - 1945
Serie 7: Yiddish literature – 1945
D. Segal's Feuilletons in Forverts, 1944.

'Men and women who keep their marriage secret.' B324. Jan.7, 1944
'A simple woman can be happy with a simple woman but not the other way around.' B326. Jan.16, 1944.
'Persons who only notice others' faults.' B329. Feb.2, 1944.
'People who like to ask questions.' B370. July 7, 1944.
'Men and women who marry for revenge'. B373. July 13, 1944.
'Many people like to gossip about their best friends.' B376. July 19, 1944.
'One does not tease animals -- or humans.' B379. July 27, 1944.
'She is incensed that religious men feel themselves superior to women.' B382. Aug.3, 1944.
'Why the prohibition against marrying close relatives?' B385. August 9, 1944.
'How strong is the human sense of justice?' B388. Sept. 4, 1944
'What goes on in the sky overhead?' B389. Sept. 11, 1944.
'Ashamed to admit they come from a small town. B390. 13 Sept. 1944.
'His family gets every cent but his wife says he is a miser.' B395. 29 Sept. 1944.
'Men who turn romantic in old age.' B399. Oct. 6, 1944.
'A simple woman is the intellectual of the family.' B405. Oct. 18, 1944.
'The war will leave many grass widows.' B408. 28 oct. 1944.
'The desire to play -- among children and adults.' B411. Nov.3, 1944.
'The belief in evil spirits was widespread among Jews.' B413. Nov. 10, 1944.
'Shocking movie about a Ukrainian village under Nazi terror.' B415. Nov. 14, 1944.
'Family troubles in later years -- their causes.' B418. Nov. 23, 1944.
'Goodhearted but ill-mannered.' B423. Dec.8, 1944.
'The story behind Chanukah candles.' B424. Dec.12, 1944.
'Her husband's no good or too good, never just good.' B427. Dec.22, 1944.
'Decadence is dangerous to the Jews.' B428. Dec.24, 1944
'Charlie Chaplin's trial raises the issue: Why are so many artists decadent?' B430 Dec.27, 1944.