Acknowledgments

Walking with my family up the main street of Wengen, a mountain resort high in the Swiss Alps, in the summer of 1983, I swore I had just seen Isaac Bashevis Singer pass us by. My wife—an economist—scoffed. What would he be doing here? She slyly suggested I must be affected by the pure mountain air. In fact I had just delivered a paper at Oxford on Bashevis Singer’s occult novel *Satan in Goray*. No! It was Bashevis Singer, I insisted, and ran off to find him. But he was nowhere to be seen. Gone! Disappeared—as in his own stories! Did my eyes deceive me? Was I prepared to return crestfallen to my attentive wife and mumble: “You were right, darling”? No! I *did* see him. But where did he go? Desperate, I looked up and down this one long street and suddenly noticed a small alley. I raced into the alley, which soon opened into a small square where the Hotel Victoria stood like some half-Gothic horror. I dashed in and asked, “Is Herr Singer here?” “Yes,” replied the clerk. “He just went up in the elevator.” Hotel Victoria indeed! I immediately wrote a note in Yiddish explaining that I had given a paper on Bashevis Singer’s novel *Satan in Goray* and his use of parody (actually I had called it creative plagiarism) and would be honored to meet him. He called shortly later and invited me to join him for dinner—vegetarian—at the hotel.

Bashevis Singer was in good form, but his wife, Alma, was ill. He liked to hide in Wengen, he told me, so that he could write in peace and correct proofs. He wanted to know in great detail what occurred at the Oxford conference of Yiddish Studies, who was there, and the quality of the papers and the Yiddish. He was delighted to learn that there was a movement to study his writings from the Yiddish and not from the English. I promised him that one day I should like to publish a book of critical articles based entirely on the texts written in Yiddish. He wondered if that would be possible given the passing of Yiddish. But he wished me well, and we pursued other topics such as why he would never set foot in Germany or Poland and why he believed in vegetarianism. The memory of the days spent at Wengen

seeing him twice more has served as a goad to produce this first volume of critical studies entirely based on his original Yiddish texts.

The idea became feasible when my friend and colleague Professor Joseph Sherman of the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, came to the University of Texas to organize the manuscripts of Isaac Bashevis Singer housed in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. These rare manuscripts and realia were obtained through the active support of the HRC director, Thomas F. Staley; the ingenuity of Robert King, the former dean and specialist in German and Yiddish linguistics; and the generous donations of Texan philanthropists.

I proposed to Professor Sherman, who was already well known as a superb translator of Bashevis Singer, that if he were to translate some unpublished material and perhaps write a critical article, I would bring together other Yiddish scholars to create and publish new interpretations of Isaac Bashevis Singer based finally on the original texts, many of which were now available at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas. Professor Sherman was most enthused and took up this idea. He also performed a splendid task in clarifying the contents of the Bashevis archives. I wish to acknowledge fully how often he volunteered his help and services for this volume, which is as much an expression of his profound appreciation of Yiddish literature as of my own and that of our colleagues. His is perhaps of a special intensity, for he has toiled with Singer's works not only in manuscripts but in translations, in ordering his archives but also in editing his works and those of others. Indeed, Joseph Sherman is a scholar who joins other unsung heroes in Jewish history like Professor Nissan Babalishvili of Tbilisi, Georgia, and Professor Alexander Scheiber of Budapest, Hungary, engaged in the bitter task of closing the intellectual and cultural accounts of their dying communities. His work for South African Yiddish literature and Yiddish literature in general places his name in the Scroll of Righteous Men.

It was Thomas F. Staley who gave the green light to proceed on such an undertaking, for he supported my efforts to create this volume, which underscores that Bashevis Singer is unique as a Yiddish writer who instinctively provides the mental imaginary both of Polish Jewry and of immigrant American life in Yiddish, which belongs to a new class of literature called American literature in a non-English language. Much has been translated, but more remains to be brought into English, and much that was deleted from the English needs to be restored. Thomas F. Staley, therefore, must be acknowledged for his advanced vision in collecting the

manuscript works of Isaac Bashevis Singer and his constant encouragement for this volume.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the Slavic Department of the University of Texas at Austin and especially to its staff for constant support in so many ways to bring this book to fulfillment. The staff members took on tasks which added to their already heavy secretarial burdens. I should like to single out particularly Clint Schneider, who brought his computer skills to the fore and his diplomatic skills to happy conclusions.

I want to thank the various personnel in the University of Texas Libraries, who have unstintingly helped me acquire texts over the years, who have tracked down rare materials, and who have provided support and encouragement in every way possible. Let me thank especially the Hebrew cataloguer, Nathan Snyder, who has found rare and difficult texts and helped elucidate them whether in Aramaic, Greek, or rabbinic Hebrew. For this volume, he made special efforts to find the sources of Bashevis's religious allusions and kabbalistic lore. The library has also provided a most generous man by the name of James Wieferman who helped track down rare maps of Poland, which have proved invaluable.

Let me express my special appreciation to Professor Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska of the Marie Curie-Skladowska University of Lublin, Poland, who has supported this project from the very beginning, offering information obtainable nowhere else, and whose friendship I hold dear.

Each contributor to this volume sensed the historical importance of this critical undertaking, and I wish to thank them all for their devotion and constancy in completing this noble task: scholars and archaeologists of Yiddish culture.

I should like to conclude these acknowledgments with a special expression of appreciation to the Gale family of Beaumont, Texas: to the memory of Edwin Gale and to his widow, Becky Gale, who have been the major initiators and benefactors of the growth of Jewish Studies on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin and have helped underwrite most of the lectures, programs, and international congresses treating Jewish subjects which have taken place at the university.

Seth L. Wolitz
Gale Chair of Jewish Studies
University of Texas at Austin

THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK