

# Alfred Kinsey and the Remaking of Jewish Sexuality in the Wake of the Holocaust

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## ABSTRACT

*Until the work of William Masters and Virginia Johnson, which explored the science of the individual's sexual response, Alfred Kinsey's work on sexual behavior in males and females, which described population behavior, was not only the landmark reference on sexology but also the source of tremendous and varied reaction among moral leaders in America. In spite of the common moral ground implied by the newly popular "Judeo-Christian tradition," Jewish and Christian responses to Kinsey revealed fundamental differences in attitude. Christians felt generally threatened, whereas some Jews found much that affirmed their traditions. Substituting Nazi ideology's stereotypes of the carnal Jew (a stereotype with an ancient tradition) with an image of the sexually inhibited Jewish male, Kinsey's portrayal of the Jewish approach to sex was almost as damning as what it replaced. Yet rather than attack Kinsey, a few Modern Orthodox voices used the occasion of his popularity as an opportunity to champion a Jewish approach to sex that spoke as much to Cold War heteronormativity as it did to post-Holocaust desires for a vital Orthodox Judaism.*

*Key words: sex, Modern Orthodoxy, Kinsey, post-World War II, Holocaust*

**I**n a section designated "Love and Marriage" in his 1959 best-selling primer on Judaism titled *This Is My God*, the novelist and self-described Orthodox Jew Herman Wouk recounted the uproar created by Alfred Kinsey's reports on human sexuality in the 1950s:

A respectable, opaque scientific study of sex manners in the United States, it became a best-seller, much to the surprise of its sober publishers. . . . Not

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one purchaser in a thousand, I imagine, read the whole report. . . . They rooted hopefully through the wadded prose and the puzzling charts, graphs, and tables, sniffing—often in vain—for a few tasty truffles of fact. What they mainly learned was that it took science to make sex uninteresting.<sup>1</sup>

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Wouk's observations echo what later cultural historians recognized as Kinsey's special legacy—that Kinsey was both scientist and celebrity and that the influence of his science had in fact made him a celebrity. In her study of the impact of Kinsey's reports on American identity, historian Miriam Reumann writes of Kinsey's two volumes, "In 1948 and 1953, the United States was rocked by events that observers compared to the explosion of the atomic bomb."<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, historian Paul A. Robinson's study of twentieth-century sexologists notes that Kinsey "is important because he has been influential, more influential probably than any other sexual thinker of the last thirty-five years."<sup>3</sup>

Yet, there has been little scholarly investigation into Kinsey's influence on religion,<sup>4</sup> and on Orthodox Judaism in particular. Kinsey's reports, in fact, implicated Orthodox Judaism for much of what was repressive in Christian American attitudes toward sex, and as a result, Wouk and others used the occasion of Kinsey's popularity in the United States in order to respond to the scientist's characterization of Orthodox views on sex, explore the connections between religion and sex, and offer a distinctively Orthodox Jewish view of sex. In his influential 1959 article "Separate Pews in the Synagogue: A Social and Psychological Approach," the Orthodox rabbi Norman Lamm wrote, "We are indebted to Dr. Kinsey for recording the intriguing paradox of, on the one hand, the openness and frankness of Jews in talking about sex, and on the other hand, their relatively greater restraint in its full biological (and especially illicit) expression."<sup>5</sup> To Orthodox writers such as Wouk and Lamm, Kinsey had in no way adequately explained the Orthodox view of sex. Of course, he had not set out to do so—but Kinsey had, with scientific legitimation, initiated a conversation about religion and sex and noted significant distinctions between Jews and Christians. At a time when many mainstream (that is, Reform and Conservative) American Jews appeared to be inching toward an embrace of the commonalities between Jews and Christians by championing the country's Judeo-Christian tradition,<sup>6</sup> a few postwar Modern Orthodox thinkers used the topic of sexuality to highlight vital differences between Judaism and Christianity. Wouk and like-minded Orthodox thinkers were not thereby positioning Judaism within the growing postwar movement

known as American conservatism but rather were arguing for Modern Orthodoxy's distinctive and superior approach to an issue of growing import in American society.

Historiography on the postwar American Jewish experience is only beginning to examine American conceptions of sexuality, despite the fact that sexuality and gender have become increasingly integral to the literature of postwar American history over the past 20 years.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Riv-Ellen Prell's *Fighting to Become American: Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Men and Women*, published 15 years ago, heralded a growing understanding of how gender and sexuality were bound up with the negotiation of Jewish and American identities. Affecting the relationship between sexuality and American Jewish identity is the fact that the sexual revolution no longer "belongs" to the 1960s; historians now locate its roots in a postwar psychological turn apparent in the writings of mental-health providers and liberal religious leaders.<sup>8</sup> The time is ripe for asking how our understanding of American Jewish history and culture change when we apply ideas from the history of sexuality and gender. Sexuality has always been central to notions of American citizenship, perhaps especially during the 1950s, when the virile, heterosexual white man became emblematic of what it meant to be a "good American." So, too, has sexuality influenced Jewish Studies.<sup>9</sup> Kinsey's portrayals of Orthodox Jews in his reports on human sexuality in fact challenged and transformed stereotypes of Jews as oversexed. He substituted this image with the ascetic or undersexed Jew. But rather than attacking Kinsey (and contrary to Kinsey's portrayal of them), a few Orthodox Jewish voices embraced the reports and actively participated in an invigorated—albeit highly gendered—discussion about sexual norms in the postwar era.

To novelist Herman Wouk, religious responses to Kinsey by both Christian and Jewish religious groups shared common mistakes: "Ministers and rabbis by and large attacked the report as libel on the human race and especially on American morality," Wouk reported of the mainstream religious response to Kinsey's findings about adultery, sodomy, incest, and bestiality.<sup>10</sup> But these clergymen had missed an opportunity to use Kinsey's findings as a defense of religion, according to Wouk, who argued that the reports actually served the goals of biblically based religion by proving that the Bible's sex codes were not obsolete but related to facts of human nature (substantiated by the latest science) that continued to require the Old Testament's moral guidelines. "I cannot quite understand why they did not perceive that a weapon had fallen into their hands," Wouk mused of American clergy.<sup>11</sup> If his reader agreed that Kinsey's disturbing findings about

the prevalence of aberrant sexuality—namely, adultery, pederasty, incest, and sodomy—were immoral, Wouk posited, then “I must press him to find a basis for Western morality outside the eye of God; that is, outside the Bible and the faiths built on it.”<sup>12</sup> To Wouk, Kinsey’s reports had the benefit of alerting readers to the importance of religion in providing the surest safeguard against the sexual corruption of society.

In addition, Kinsey’s reports became occasions for Wouk to argue for Orthodox Judaism’s status not only as a religion that upholds sexual morality but also as a religion conducive to pleasurable, albeit moderate, living. That sexual choices were also central to the shaping of American character—as Wouk’s novel *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955) portrayed it—was a sentiment widely expressed during the 1950s, as Alfred Kinsey’s observations found their way into discussions of American society and national identity.<sup>13</sup> It is not surprising then that Jewish leaders sought to show how Jewish conceptions of sex were imbricated with those that had become central to postwar ideals about American identity.

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### **Wouk’s Perspective on Kinsey**

Immersed in the craft of writing and selling popular plays and novels (by 1955, he had authored three plays, a movie, and four novels), Herman Wouk was well on his way to becoming a celebrity author by the time that Kinsey’s reports were published and entered public discourse. Kinsey’s two major volumes, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), were “the publishing sensations of their day and roused zealous if discordant responses across the country, indeed the world,” historian R. Marie Griffith notes.<sup>14</sup> Wouk, too, knew what it meant to be a publishing sensation. With a Pulitzer Prize for his recent novel *The Caine Mutiny*, Wouk had appeared on the cover of *Time* in 1955 and during that decade was an invited guest on television quiz shows such as *What’s My Line?* He was familiar with the means by which best-selling books transformed their authors into household names and culture shapers. As an example, after the success of *The Caine Mutiny* (1952) as a novel, Broadway play, and Hollywood film, *Time* reported, “Like many a giant industry, the Caine even spawned byproducts, e.g. the manufacture of ‘Queeg balls,’ modeled on the two steel bearings that the skipper of the Caine obsessively rolled in his left palm whenever his nerves were shaky.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Wouk’s *Marjorie Morningstar* quickly

became synonymous with a new archetype of the American Jewish woman. To speak of a Marjorie Morningstar-type was to invoke a set of postwar American Jewish middle-class values and associations that had gained their currency, in part, through Wouk's novel.

Born in 1915 in New York City to Russian Jewish immigrants, Herman Wouk was the grandson of an Orthodox rabbi and the son of a successful laundry-chain owner who had been a socialist agitator in tsarist Russia before immigrating to America.<sup>16</sup> Like the Morgensterns in *Marjorie Morningstar*, Wouk's family had moved from the Bronx to West End Avenue during his teenage years. At the age of 15 he entered Columbia University, where he majored in philosophy and comparative literature. Wouk's most influential teachers, he later wrote, were his grandfather and the Columbia University philosophy professor Irwin Edman, who had been a disciple of John Dewey and George Santayana. Wouk's literary aspirations flourished at Columbia, and connections established there enabled him to find a job writing for the radio comic Fred Allen upon graduation. Coinciding with the golden age of radio comedy and the careers of such stars as Milton Berle, Abbot and Costello, Jack Benny, and Ed Wynn, Wouk's career as a radio humorist made him keenly aware of the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture. Among postwar American Jewish writers, Wouk displayed a rare interest in both forms of cultural influence. This kind of open-mindedness toward America's wide-ranging "cultural conversation" was consistent with Wouk's inclusion of Kinsey in *This Is My God*.

Wouk's reference to the sexologist was in keeping with his project, in *This Is My God*, of presenting traditional Judaism as relevant to modern life. After the Holocaust, efforts to prove that despite Hitler's horrifying destruction of Jews, Judaism remained a "living faith"—rather than the "fossil" its critics labeled it—could be found across the Jewish denominations.<sup>17</sup> If the Reform movement's 1951 dedication of its new Fifth Avenue headquarters with the name "House of Living Judaism" on its façade was an architectural effort to present Judaism as still "living" after the destruction of the Holocaust, *This Is My God*, and specifically Wouk's response to Kinsey within it, was another means of displaying the contemporary relevance of postwar Judaism and the status of Jews as part of the "brotherhood under God" essential to Cold War American identity. After *This Is My God's* publication, sales figures confirmed that American Jews and Christians were eager for the kind of clear exposition of Judaism that Wouk delivered.<sup>18</sup> Among the many introductions to Judaism that appeared in the immediate postwar years, Wouk's was one of the few with strong appeal for Jewish and non-Jewish readers.

For Wouk, writing *This Is My God* fulfilled both civic and Jewish responsibilities: “The Nazis spent millions to portray us to the world as subhuman in a prologue to the attempt to destroy our people, man, woman, and child,” Wouk wrote in the prologue. “I intend to speak of my faith and my people as well as I can.”<sup>19</sup> Both the Holocaust and Cold War ideology thus inspired Wouk’s efforts to explicate Judaism.

Wouk was in a unique position to write this kind of explanation. Alone among mid-century American Jewish writers and celebrities for publicly identifying as an Orthodox Jew, Wouk’s credibility as a committed, religious Jew among American readers was likely strengthened by the “conversion” story of his return to Orthodoxy, which he publicly shared in interviews and in *This Is My God*. He wrote of his early years in show business,

Even as I lived this conventional smart existence of inner show business, and dreamed the conventional dream, it all seemed thin. I was not sated or revolted. But I found myself unable to believe, deep down, that hits plus random pleasure would ever add up to a life. It left out my identity. . . . It left out my grandfather, the most impressive man I knew. It left out most of the sensible books I read. I began to read again. . . . Without reaching any conclusions, I moved into a freely chosen observant life.<sup>20</sup>

Among the thousands of young American Jews who received *This Is My God* as a bar-mitzvah or confirmation gift, the book likely held extra value because it was written by a Jew who had succeeded in mainstream American society and then chose an observant, Jewish lifestyle—a rare path in the mid-twentieth century but one that resonated with American readers who understood religion as a choice. Indeed, *This Is My God* was an Orthodox example of the post–World War II American Jewish effort to present Judaism “as a religion” and thus in terms that would be understandable to most Americans.<sup>21</sup> Along with the turn to the social sciences,<sup>22</sup> it was the turn to religion among postwar Americans that strongly affected mid-twentieth-century discourse around Jewishness. In his 1955 book *Protestant–Catholic–Jew*, Will Herberg observed that this renewed interest in religion resulted from a loss of social location. Americans’ consequent retrieval of elements of their grandparents’ world, especially religion, in order to forge a meaningful identity, according to Herberg’s theory, was borne out by Wouk, who held up his grandfather as a guiding light in his own life.<sup>23</sup> As Wouk’s biography (woven throughout *This Is My God*) made clear, finding a religious identity was fully consonant with his feeling at home in America— just as Herberg had argued in *Protestant–Catholic–Jew*.

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It was from a prominent position in American culture that Wouk provided his perspective on Orthodox Judaism. At a time when Jewish intellectuals often struck an alienated and ambivalent tone, Wouk's commitment to Judaism came as a welcome balm to many readers.<sup>24</sup> In 2011, Wouk explained that it was only after the mainstream success of his first four novels that he could write about his lifelong interest in Orthodox Judaism in America.<sup>25</sup> *This Is My God* did, in fact, help put Modern Orthodoxy on the map of American religions and in a more positive light than did Jewish fiction in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>26</sup> Wouk's example suggested that in American culture, when a celebrity is openly religious, his religion, too, garners celebrity. Indeed, unlike Kinsey, whose publications about human sexuality had made him into a household name, Wouk used his celebrity as a platform from which to publicize Orthodoxy. As *This Is My God* was serialized in newspapers across the country in 1959, Americans who had never met an Orthodox Jew read about aspects of Judaism such as dietary laws and laws of family purity over their morning coffee.

### Wouk's Paradox

Wouk's goal of normalizing Modern Orthodoxy aligned with that movement's ethos. An interpretation of Orthodox Judaism with roots in the nineteenth century, Modern Orthodoxy developed in North America before World War II as a reaction to the Orthodoxy of the Yiddish-speaking immigrant generation.<sup>27</sup> At that time, the use of English in sermons became a major dividing line between so-called immigrant and Modern Orthodoxy. In the post-World War II years, under the leadership of Rabbi Joseph D. Soloveitchik, the movement flowered, and its seminary, Yeshiva University, developed "a program for the Jew's harmonious—if challenging—engagement with secular culture and modern society, while maintaining allegiance to far more than the core of traditional Judaism."<sup>28</sup> As historians of the movement have noted, Modern Orthodoxy did not actually gain large numbers of adherents in the late 1950s and 1960s. But its leaders did develop a new bravado. Jeffrey Gurock observes of Modern Orthodoxy in the 1960s and 1970s, "Beyond standing tall as a respectable minority, it was emerging as a self-respecting and sometimes aggressive group, perceiving itself as decidedly on the upswing."<sup>29</sup>

Wouk contributed to the movement's image burnishing with his own observations about postwar Orthodoxy and "the power of the

river of Judaism to run uphill.”<sup>30</sup> In *This Is My God*, Wouk’s intimations of an Orthodox comeback in the postwar years often took the form of observations about Orthodoxy’s embrace of American consumer culture, such as this comment about ritual pools: “In many cities of the United States new ritual pools have recently been built or are going up, handsomely tiled, with something like beauty parlors in their anterooms.”<sup>31</sup> Choosing Modern Orthodoxy did not mean sacrificing the benefits of a modern American lifestyle, Wouk argued.

Thus, whereas Soloveitchik cast himself as the “lonely man of faith . . . striving to be at home in two incompatible worlds,” on a quest “to combine a commitment to traditional Jewish law with an openness to modern secular culture and society,”<sup>32</sup> Wouk deemphasized the struggle of Modern Orthodox experience and presented it instead as a *choice* for a more meaningful life. The demands and disciplines of Orthodoxy did not detract from a fully American life in Wouk’s telling. Rather, he described moving seamlessly between the glamorous world of Broadway rehearsals and his religious home. Like Wouk’s beloved navy, with its strict discipline, observance of the Jewish commandments enhanced the American way of life, providing its own commitments and rewards:

Are the sailors and officers less American because they are in the navy? They have special commitments and disciplines, odd ways of dress, sharp limits on their freedom. They have, at least in their own minds, compensations of glory, or of vital service performed. The Jews are not cut off from mankind by their faith, though they are marked different. They have their special disciplines, and—at least in their own minds—their rewards.<sup>33</sup>

If Soloveitchik was the central religious authority for American Modern Orthodoxy, Herman Wouk was one of the movement’s glamorous poster children. His example demonstrated that an Orthodox Jew could fully participate in the postwar middle class. Socioeconomically far ahead of the majority of Orthodox Jews (indeed, with the Hollywood purchase of two of his novels and the success of the Broadway play based on *The Caine Mutiny*, Wouk was closer to the “1 percent” of American Jews of his time), Wouk was unique among American Orthodox Jews. In their 1955 cover story on Wouk, *Time* took note of Wouk’s exceptional status and the seeming paradoxes that it presented: “He is a devout Orthodox Jew who has achieved worldly success in worldly-wise Manhattan while adhering to dietary prohibitions and traditional rituals which many of his fellow Jews find embarrassing.”<sup>34</sup> They said it couldn’t be done, *Time’s* story implied of Wouk’s

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secular success as an Orthodox Jew, demonstrating that the 1950s were still an era when Jewish Orthodoxy (and other religious orthodoxies) seemed incompatible with mainstream American culture and when their combination—as in the person of Wouk—evoked surprise and incredulity.

Despite Wouk's observance of the old rites of Judaism, it was his "fellow Jews" with their "embarrassment" over their more observant coreligionists who were cast in a shameful light in the *Time* article. The magazine's profile of Wouk might be interpreted as another sign of postwar American culture's increasing acceptance of Jews, but the subtext of the article suggested that there were "good" and "bad" Jews and that Wouk had earned his spot on the magazine's cover through good behavior. "Although he is a highly sensitive member of a religious minority, he is one of the few living U.S. writers who carries no chip on his shoulder and who gives the U.S. straight A's in his fictional report cards."<sup>35</sup> *Time* did not have to mention the House Committee on Un-American Activities for readers to understand that Wouk was not one of *those* American Jewish writers. In fact, the article provided no discussion of why a Jew might be "highly sensitive." Belonging to a minority group and yet having only positive things to say about America was a mark of good citizenship.

During the postwar years, whether a Jew could fit into mainstream American society often seemed of greater significance than delving into the reasons why society proved unaccepting of individuals from certain religious, racial, and ethnic groups. Wouk's popularity, in part, stemmed from his affirmative answer to the question of Jewish integration. By not dwelling on the hardship of being born a Jew—not only in *Marjorie Morningstar* and *This Is My God* but also in his interviews—Wouk broke ranks with most Jewish authors of his time and found himself embraced by much of the mainstream American media.

Glossing over the topic of antisemitism, the *Time* article suggested that it was better (and more American) to proudly live one's faith (no matter the obstacles), as Wouk did, than to be embarrassed about one's religious difference from the mainstream. Pride in his individualism was something that the wealthy, successful, and award-winning writer likely had an easier time embodying than did the average Jew. Wouk also exemplified a more American lifestyle; he was a man of broad influences and experiences, as the *Time* profile showed. Like the subject of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" ("Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes"), Wouk embodied several contradictory forces. After observing Wouk's Orthodoxy and his worldly success, *Time* reported: "He is an

ex-radio gagwriter who severely judges his own work by the standards of the great English novelist. He is a Columbia-educated (class of '34), well-read intellectual with an abiding faith in 'the common reader' ('They're good enough to elect our Presidents, aren't they?')."<sup>36</sup> Of a piece with Wouk's catholic approach to American culture and capacious style of Modern Orthodoxy, then, was his interest in the latest findings of America's most influential sexologist.

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### **Kinsey on Orthodox Jewish Sex Practices**

In the context of Modern Orthodoxy's postwar integration into American life, Kinsey's portrayal of Orthodox Jewish attitudes toward sex must have been particularly troubling to Orthodox figures like Wouk. Replacing the longstanding stereotype of the Jew as over-sexed with the stereotype of a more sexually inhibited Jew, Kinsey's reports presented the Orthodox Jewish conception of sex as purely for the purposes of procreation and as displaying a repressive attitude toward nudity. "Marital coitus is accepted primarily because it may lead to procreation; and in both Jewish and Catholic codes, and in some others elsewhere this is taken to be the prime function of marriage and of coitus in marriage," Kinsey wrote.<sup>37</sup> In his 1948 volume on male sexuality, Kinsey's chapter entitled "Religious Background and Sexual Outlet" differentiated between three religions: Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. That division was typical of this era, although Kinsey did add, "It is to be hoped that religious groups which are not yet sufficiently represented may be included in the future development of this survey."<sup>38</sup> Within each denomination, Kinsey further distinguished between the more and the less devout: "Active or devout in this classification has been taken to mean regular attendance and/or active participation in organized church activities, and/or frequent attendance at the Catholic confessional or the Jewish synagogue."<sup>39</sup> More-devout Jews were labeled Orthodox in Kinsey's study. Significantly, Kinsey's volume on male sexuality called Orthodox Jewish men the least sexually active (compared with Protestant and Catholic men), and he cited Orthodox Jews as being among the most opposed to masturbation; both of these assessments, according to Kinsey, suggested lower sexual health and happiness.<sup>40</sup> "Of all religious groups they are the sexually least active, both in regard to the frequencies of their total sexual outlet, and in regard to the incidences and frequencies of masturbation, nocturnal emissions, and the homosexual," Kinsey wrote of the Orthodox. "Whatever other

sources may have contributed to the Christian church's objections to masturbation, certainly the Jewish traditions must have provided a considerable impetus to the perpetuation of this taboo in the Christian religion."<sup>41</sup> In Kinsey's formulation, then, Judaism's prohibitions were to blame for both Jewish and Christian sexual repressiveness.

Coming as it did in the wake of the Holocaust, Kinsey's volume on male sexuality took note of the contrast between his findings about Jewish sexuality and the Nazi stereotype of oversexed Jews: "This relative inactivity of the Orthodox Jewish males is especially interesting," Kinsey wrote, "in view of the diametrically opposite opinion which recently stirred a considerable portion of Europe against the Jews as a race."<sup>42</sup> Yet, those familiar with "the pervading asceticism of Hebrew philosophy" would not be surprised by Kinsey's findings on lower frequencies of sexual activity among Orthodox Jews, the sexologist wrote. Even less devout Jews, Kinsey maintained, "may still be controlled to a considerable degree by the Talmudic interpretations of sexual morality."<sup>43</sup> According to Kinsey, the Talmud was to blame for much of what was repressive in all of American sexual culture. In a speech before the National Probation and Parole Association in 1952, Kinsey revealed his inclination to associate Orthodox Judaism with America's puritanical sexual ethic. Criticizing American sex laws as impracticable, Kinsey posited that much of the American pattern of law regarding sex "merely preserves Talmudic tradition"—a comment that suggests both Kinsey's ignorance about the Talmud and the quandary that Jews faced when it came to sex.<sup>44</sup>

Amidst this tension between Judaism's seeming embodiment of both sexual license and repressiveness, Wouk intervened to provide an alternative perspective on the Orthodox Jewish approach to sex: "Judaism regards sex as the cord that secures the union of two lovers for life: for shared strength, pleasure, and ease, and for the rearing of children"<sup>45</sup> Even the Talmud, Wouk explained,

treats sex with candid and sometimes sardonic clarity, not blinking at the overripe variations that Greece, Rome, and Italy were so fond of (and that enjoy some slight vogue again today). Its handling of such topics indeed might have given Proust himself pause, had he looked so far into his own Jewish background."<sup>46</sup>

Sex was the nexus of Wouk's desire to present Orthodoxy as emblematic of both traditional religious morality and progressive thinking. In contrast to other religions, Orthodox Judaism aligned with the pleasurable life:

What in other cultures has been a deed of shame, or of comedy, or of orgy, or of physical necessity, or of high romance, has been in Judaism one of the main things that God wants men to do. If it also turns out to be one of the keenest pleasures in life that is no surprise to a people eternally sure God is good.<sup>47</sup>

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For Wouk, as for many Jews and Christians, “other cultures” did not extend beyond the other half of the Judeo-Christian tradition, suggesting that, in part, this paradigm served to frame the parameters of diversity. Unlike Christianity, “the marriage of Jewish prophets, saints, and plain people, from Abraham and Moses onward, has had no trace of concession to some supposed frailty or evil of the flesh,” Wouk explained, adding that Judaism interprets the prescription of Genesis 1 to “be fruitful and multiply” as part of its statutory law.<sup>48</sup> Wouk noted that “[t]he Talmud says that in the world to come the first three questions asked of a man are, ‘Did you buy and sell in good faith? Did you have a set time for study? Did you raise a family?’”<sup>49</sup> Thus it was possible to argue, as Wouk did, that married sex was central to Judaism—as it was to the American way of life during the Cold War. Sexuality, the family, and national security were seen as linked during the Cold War, and sexual dysfunction became a sign of social maladjustment and the moral decay of society.

In his presentation of Orthodox Judaism in *This Is My God*, Wouk mediated between these two poles—namely, traditional religious morality and a progressive, healthy sexuality informed by the latest science—suggesting the ambivalence and sense of possibility characteristic of postwar Modern Orthodoxy. The title of Wouk’s book, drawn from Exodus 15:2 (“This is my God and I will glorify Him”), also signaled the alignment of Orthodox values and the post-Kinsey approach to sex. Yet, at the same time that the book revealed Wouk’s distinctive understanding of religion and Judaism, the title also represented a divine cultural pluralism. Others might believe in a repressive divine force, but Wouk’s god commanded lives filled with goodness.

From the perspective of several Orthodox leaders, whatever correspondence had existed between societal and Jewish approaches to sex evaporated as the late 1960s revealed a loosening in sexual mores that in turn triggered increased conservatism within Orthodoxy. In the pages of *Tradition* in 1968, Irving Greenberg, then a rabbi at the Riverdale Jewish Center and an associate professor of history at Yeshiva University, attributed this shift to the newly affluent postwar society in which fun and the pursuit of happiness had become primary objectives.<sup>50</sup> Published two years after Greenberg’s widely read interview in

Yeshiva's *Commentator*, in which Greenberg criticized contemporary Orthodoxy's approach to modernity,<sup>51</sup> the *Tradition* article explained how the "emergence of the 'fun morality'" had affected American culture. The wider society's replacement of the Protestant ethic of doing good works with a hedonistic orientation that valued enjoyable activity above all else had clear implications for how modern Americans viewed sex and required some safeguards within Orthodoxy. By the time Rabbi Norman Lamm, who had praised Kinsey's work in the 1950s, published *Hedge of Roses* (1966), which became the standard Orthodox marriage manual, the author looked out onto an American society that seemed to be spinning away from the morality of traditional religion. Lamm wrote disdainfully of the culture makers who now appeared to be the enemies of Orthodoxy:

The novelists of depravity, the enthusiastic college instructors, the unqualified "teams" of sex-therapists, the smut salesmen who appear in court as the champions of free speech and free press—all the preachers of permissiveness—these are [the] priests and prophets [of the "sexual revolution"]; the casual and the "cool" approach its official theology; the inhibitions of traditional morality its Devil; the stream of heavily annotated statistical studies of the breakdown of sexual morality, the documented "proof" of the truth of its revelation; the unmarried state of maximum bisexual opportunities and unrestrained scatology, its eschatological vision.<sup>52</sup>

Signs of change in societal mores proved too threatening for Orthodoxy to maintain its embrace of the culture's openness toward sex. In 1969, the *New York Times* reported on Lamm's condemnation of the sexual mores expressed by Columbia University's chaplains, who defended an off-campus male-female undergraduate living arrangement. These chaplains, Lamm commented, "[r]evealed the bankruptcy of the moral relativism showing underneath their ecclesiastical cloaks."<sup>53</sup> For Lamm, these were signs of a loosening of moral standards. They also suggested the need for Orthodox leaders to stand in protest against the "new morality."<sup>54</sup>

Yet, for a brief window of time, and contrary to popular stereotypes, a few Modern Orthodox writers made use of Kinsey's findings in order to reimagine a life- and pleasure-affirming Jewish approach to sex. Embodied experiences of American Jewish life had not heretofore found expression in American religious discourse, which focused on Protestant, interior modes of being religious. To write or to speak openly about "Jewish sex," before Kinsey, would have been to further marginalize Judaism by revealing what would likely seem its

foreign and overly carnal nature. Discussing sex and religion in public also constituted a double violation of the assumptions of public and private spheres: both religion and sex were generally consigned to American private spheres. But Wouk brought them both into public discourse by writing a bestseller that included discussion of the religious and sexual practices of his subculture. With the publication of Kinsey's reports, Orthodox leaders had found a modern American context in which they could present Judaism's perspective and remain within the mainstream.<sup>55</sup>

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### **The Orthodox Jewish Male, according to Wouk**

Wouk's invocation of Kinsey in *This Is My God* was in keeping with the book's strong heteronormativity—that is, “the notion that the gender and sexual performances of heterosexuality constitute the only legitimate expression of self, desire, and identity.”<sup>56</sup> As Carolyn Herbst Lewis writes in her history of “sexual citizenship” in Cold War America, heterosexual Americans “became emblematic of what it meant to be an American” in the 1950s, “providing a fortress against the anxieties provoked by the Cold War.”<sup>57</sup> Wouk found opportunities throughout the book to shore up the connection between Jews and heterosexuality and thus between Jews and Cold War American identity, particularly in his portrayals of Jewish men. If the healthy sexual lives of married couples were considered vital to a secure nation, *This Is My God* offered readers a view into how Orthodox Judaism offered guidance for the happily married life, and it self-consciously portrayed its author in a heteronormative light. For example, in describing a conversation with the daughter of friends about religion and conformity, Wouk wrote: “This particular argument was pleasanter than most, because the person setting me straight was a pretty seventeen-year-old girl, a college sophomore, and it was no strain to smile at her with good humor as she went about her work.”<sup>58</sup> Here, as elsewhere, Wouk paired right sexuality (heterosexuality) with right religiosity (Orthodoxy). Similarly, in describing synagogue attendance, Wouk wrote, “Even the most convinced unbeliever is likely to have an occasional religious mood or fancy, no matter how much he may disapprove of it; as the most devoted husband feels an unwanted stir of pleasure now and then when a pretty girl passes by. Nature will out.”<sup>59</sup> Jewish men were just as prone to heterosexual urges as other American men were, Wouk asserted. In the context of Kinsey's findings about devout Jewish men being the least sexually active, Orthodox

Jewish thinkers like Wouk were especially eager to present such arguments for Orthodox virility.<sup>60</sup>

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Nevertheless, differences between the Orthodox and the average American approach to sex were apparent too. With their laws of sexual purity and a greater openness to American culture than more insular Orthodox sects, the Modern Orthodox constituted a unique audience for the Kinsey reports. Accustomed to thinking about sex as integral to religious life, the Orthodox were, in a sense, primed as discussants of Kinsey's findings, and certain Orthodox leaders, in the wake of Kinsey's publications, were keen to show that their sexual ethic was distinct from that of Christianity. Writing in the pages of the popular Orthodox journal *Jewish Life* in 1954, Rabbi Morris Max asserted Kinsey's ignorance "of the fundamental difference between the traditional Jewish and the traditional Christian concept of sex life. The two cannot be combined and spoken of as similar codes. They are diametrically opposed to each other."<sup>61</sup> To speak of a Judeo-Christian sex code, as Kinsey did, was to ignore vital differences, including the fact that Judaism provides an "approach and attitude to sex life which can help bring more happiness to both husband and wife, and which eliminates the need of experimenting with sex as suggested by Kinsey."<sup>62</sup> Max also took note of the confluence of Jewish openness toward the topic of sex and Kinsey's frank treatment of the subject. "We Jews, who have never censored any discussion of sex as indecent, should also have something to say about this objective treatment of human behavior in sexual matters," Max wrote after the publication of Kinsey's volume on female sexuality.<sup>63</sup> "We must not forget that our Talmudic sages said of normal sex life . . . it is part of the Torah of G-d which I must study."<sup>64</sup> Orthodox Jews antedated the sexologists in their "scientific," frank discussion of sex, Max implied. It was, indeed, because of this Jewish commandment, Max explained, that Kinsey's books should also be "studied." Through an understanding of the aberrant sexual behavior that was beginning to encroach on American society, Orthodox readers could help prevent an objectionable moral code from further overtaking their own community.

Max's article responded to a more emotional statement by Young Israel national president Pincus Iseson deploring the advance publicity given to Kinsey's book on American women. "These advance releases and, judging by them, the book itself, will do incalculable harm to the morals of adolescents and adults alike," Iseson stated. "A book of this kind belongs properly only in the hands of clergymen, physicians, and educators. The laity will see in this book only another addition to an already too extensive pornographic literature and will infer from the statistics contained in it justification for immoral

actions heretofore properly condemned.”<sup>65</sup> Isezon thereby revealed the intrinsic linkage he saw between sex and morality and the primarily religious nature of sexual mores and practices. More skeptical than Max that sex could be translated into public discourse, Isezon’s remarks suggested that to the “unlearned” masses, sex would always be read as smut. To dismiss the book as pornographic literature, Max wrote in response, “is as irresponsible as proclaiming it the ‘new Bible’ for American youth.”<sup>66</sup> Max thereby distanced himself from Young Israel’s more insular perspective on Kinsey. In between the permissiveness denoted by Kinsey’s findings and the reactionary views of Young Israel (and conservative Christian groups), Max proffered a Modern Orthodox response that acknowledged the significance of Kinsey’s findings even as it pointed to the superiority of time-honored principles of Jewish family purity for creating fulfilling sexual lives. Kinsey’s findings about the sexual behavior of women (Max’s article was written in response to this second Kinsey volume) were not wholly relevant to Orthodox Jews, as Kinsey used the insufficient sample size of 108 interviews with “devout” Jewish women.<sup>67</sup> Still, in the pages of *Jewish Life*, Max registered an Orthodox awareness that Kinsey’s recent book had made female sexuality newly important to the wider culture, as “the American people [were] more conscious than ever before of the ‘second sex.’”<sup>68</sup> History has taught that the customs of the non-Jewish environment also affect Jews, Max explained, “and it is very possible that if we are not on the alert, the non-Jewish environment may ultimately make serious inroads into the sacred sanctuaries of our own homes.”<sup>69</sup>

The value of Kinsey’s reports was primarily as a cautionary publication, then, “especially to parents and youth directors who must be aware of any new trend if they are to guide the youth of today away from the pitfalls of sexual promiscuousness and other sexual aberrations.”<sup>70</sup> Still, Max maintained, it was possible for Jews to resist negative trends: “The Jews who are loyal to the traditions of our faith have at their disposal the means of fortifying their families against any proposed or implied deviation from our moral standards.”<sup>71</sup> Whereas Kinsey’s reports suggested that Judaism and Christianity were equally flawed (although Judaism seemed to be the source of Christianity’s problems with sex), Max objected to the idea of shared weaknesses.

According to Max, Kinsey’s reports had the benefit of highlighting the value of the Jewish approach to sex. When husbands and wives lead religious lives, Max explained, they “have the Divine presence between them.”<sup>72</sup> Sex, therefore, becomes “the basis of a companionship, in which one complements the other and which brings satisfaction to

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both.”<sup>73</sup> Elevated to the higher, godly plane in Judaism, the marriage relationship included the blessings of God. Max contrasted this Jewish “more healthful and natural approach to sex life” with 1 Corinthians’ conception of marriage as a concession to animal instincts in which the godly person remains celibate.<sup>74</sup>

The possibility of holiness was not the only benefit of applying Jewish law to sexual life, according to Max. Responding to Kinsey’s findings that extramarital affairs stemmed from the desire for new and allegedly more satisfying sexual experiences motivated these affairs, Max wrote, “How effectively our Divine Law prevented husbands and wives from becoming bored with each other in their sexual behavior,” thereby connecting rabbinic wisdom and contemporary norms. “The Torah reveals a knowledge of the fact which Kinsey ‘discovered’ from his figures—namely, that the female does not require as frequent sexual outlets as the male.”<sup>75</sup> Although he ignored the male need for sexual outlets, Max showed that Jewish law took female sexual needs seriously, thereby preserving marital happiness. It is interesting, then, that it was on the topic of female sexuality—which Orthodox thinkers like Max and Wouk believed mainstream Protestant American culture had ignored—that certain Modern Orthodox leaders felt their movement had something to contribute to an American conversation about sex. Gender would become a more challenging issue for Orthodoxy in the coming decades, as egalitarianism took hold in other movements of American Judaism. But in the 1950s, Modern Orthodoxy did not look drastically different from the rest of American Judaism in its approach to women’s roles, and it had an advantage when it came to the culture’s new fascination with female sexuality: Modern Orthodoxy shared that interest and seemed to have more to say about female sexuality than did other religious groups.

### **The Jewish Ideal of Sex and Gender in Wouk’s Postwar America**

Recent scholarly interest in the retrieval of a nineteenth-century Jewish ideal of a gentle and timid male does not diminish the significance of an antithetical paradigm of virile masculinity, as expressed by Wouk, in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>76</sup> Rather, the red-blooded American Jewish male with a healthy sexual appetite, as portrayed by Wouk, may be read as a kind of protest against what Daniel Boyarin has recently described as “a widespread sensibility that being Jewish in our culture renders a boy effeminate.”<sup>77</sup> Wouk’s portrayals of Jewish

ideas about sex and masculinity likely sought to counter the marginalized, effeminate masculinity that Boyarin uncovers in mainstream American culture, which would have been perceived as a threat to the sexual and moral health of Cold War America.<sup>78</sup> Unlike Boyarin, who sees postfeminist Jews as capable of embracing the gentle image of the Jew, Wouk believed modern American Jews were fully incorporated into the postwar heteronormative ideal, although vestiges of the older, passive Jewish masculine ideal continued to exist, especially among wartime refugees. A central premise of *This Is My God* was the twinned postwar phenomena of modern and nonmodern Jews occupying the same American spaces (New York City offered a prime example) and presenting competing versions of masculinity. Wouk portrayed the tension created among American Jews in an opening section of the book, where he described what has become a common post–World War II experience for urban Jews: a modern, fully integrated American Jew sighting an Old World Orthodox Jew and the feelings of embarrassment and resentment that ensued. (The fantasy of such encounters likely provoked more anxiety than the reality, for survivors and ultra-Orthodox Jews were relatively few in number. That this encounter is envisioned both in *This Is My God* and in another important “Jewish book” of 1959—Philip Roth’s *Goodbye, Columbus*—suggests the degree of fear that the vision provoked among American Jews.) Wouk described a scene with competing Jewish masculinities:

Now we see him walking down Fifth Avenue after a hard day at his Rockefeller Center office, taking the pleasant evening air instead of hurrying in a taxi to Grand Central. Two men pass him on the street. They are obvious . . . survivors of some ghetto destroyed by Hitler. The older one wears a beard and a hat trimmed with fur, and gray earlocks curl down his cheeks; he is dressed in a long rusty black coat, though the day is warm. The young man is pallid and clean shaven, and he has ordinary American clothes, yet he looks hardly less alien than his companion. His hat is too big, and he wears it at a clumsy angle, far back on his head. His jacket is double-breasted, in a time when no alert man will be caught dead in a double-breasted suit (unless he is an Englishman wearing the really newest thing, cut in London, and subtly different from the old double-breasted, and this fellow is obviously not such a one). His trousers are not well pressed, and they do not taper as they should, so that they seem to flop about his ankles. He has an odd, abstracted look around the eyes. The two men are talking in Yiddish, with sweeping hand gestures. As they pass our man, these two unmistakable Jews, he is filled with resentment. He cries out in his heart—it will not do to shout it in the street—“I am not one of you! If you are Jews, I am not a Jew!”<sup>79</sup>

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This image of the modern American Jew encountering his Old World fellow Jew, and his feelings of recognition, anxiety, and resentment, encapsulates the struggle of Jewish Orthodoxy at mid-century, when the movement seemed poised either to embrace and take on the characteristics of European refugees and survivors or to win over the modern, suburban Jews shopping for a synagogue membership—paths with divergent implications for American Jewish gender norms. Wouk's scene also brings to mind an anecdote that Daniel Boyarin presents in *Unheroic Conduct*, in which Sigmund Freud's father's meek response to having his hat knocked off by a Christian elicited Freud's judgment:

This struck me as unheroic conduct on the part of the big, strong man who was holding the little boy by the hand. I contrasted this situation with another which fitted my feelings better: the scene in which Hannibal's father, Hamilcar Barca, made his boy swear before the household altar to take vengeance on the Romans.<sup>80</sup>

For Boyarin, the nineteenth-century anecdote reveals shifting gender norms as a result of the Westernization of Jews and new influences on a younger generation about the meaning of gender. Echoes of that period of change can also be found among the postwar Orthodox in America.

No doubt there existed within American Orthodox Jewry a desire to be both kinds of Orthodox: preservers of Old World Judaism and pioneers of a new middle-class Orthodox Judaism. Additionally, in the years after the Holocaust, shame at the sight of European Orthodox Jews became increasingly problematic for those American Jews who felt committed to memorializing the lost world of European Jewry. With the image of his favorite Yiddish-speaking Orthodox rabbi grandfather hanging over the pages of *This Is My God*, which also proudly displayed evidence of Wouk's modern and glamorous (and yet Orthodox) lifestyle, it is clear that Wouk felt the competing pressures of Orthodoxy's potential at mid-century.

The scene on Fifth Avenue excerpted above also calls forth questions of how American Jews should relate to their religion. Were Jews outsiders to religion in America, as the two black-hatted, foreign-looking men appeared to be, or were these very religious Jews the consummate insiders of the American Judeo-Christian tradition? For Jews to find a place within America's religious landscape, was it necessary to adjust religious practice to the Protestant majority, as Reform Jews had done, or was there another option, suggested by the Old World Orthodox men—of living in a tradition that had something

distinctive to offer Jews at a time when religion was seen as a necessary component of American identity? Religion was undergoing a revival in 1950s America, Wouk noted in *This Is My God*, and while he conceded that “[i]n the main the American Jewish revival of religion is so far a social change rather than a religious or intellectual one,” Wouk found value in it nonetheless.<sup>81</sup> “For those who want Judaism to live a revival on any basis ought to be welcome to begin with. Presumably in time the substance can take the central place.”<sup>82</sup> Wouk’s example raised the possibility of living as an Orthodox Jew without embarrassment, apology, or concern about content. Gender ideals thus proved compatible with Wouk’s model of Modern Orthodoxy.

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### Women, Religion, and Sex

Wouk’s treatment of masculinity in *This Is My God*, however, was not the only instance in which gender and Judaism were paramount to the writer during the postwar era. Four years earlier, Wouk’s best-selling novel *Marjorie Morningstar* had also treated postwar American gender norms, sex, and Judaism from a vastly different perspective: a young American Jewish girl coming of age in Manhattan. Wouk’s candid treatment of sex in *Marjorie Morningstar* coincided with the new openness toward the topic that had been initiated by Kinsey’s reports.

The earliest incarnation of Marjorie’s character appeared in Wouk’s play “Crisis over Marjorie,” written for the United Jewish Appeal in 1940.<sup>83</sup> The one-act play did not reveal the same preoccupation with sex as did Wouk’s 1955 novel. Rather, “Crisis over Marjorie” focused on the Lippman family’s concerns over the dating life of twenty-year-old Marjorie Lippman, a junior at Barnard College. “By hook or by crook, we’ve got to get her out of the hands of that no-good-for-nothing,” Mrs. Lippman tells her husband after Marjorie has started dating a writer named Noel Stern. Whether American parents had the right to meddle in their children’s dating life was the play’s central theme. Marjorie’s grandmother attempts to arrange a match between her granddaughter and a Jewish lawyer named Sam Schwartz, but Marjorie insists that it is the American custom for young women to select their own boyfriends. The progression of Wouk’s story from one based on a young American Jewish woman’s desire for independence in her dating life to one that pivoted around the decision to have sex reveals shifting concerns about the effects of American culture on a younger generation of American Jews.

While drafting *Marjorie Morningstar* in 1953, Wouk recorded his thoughts about contemporary dating in his journal:

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Each girl has to improvise her own code because necking is a new thing. The word itself is still only a colloquialism but the act is the most important, delicious, and formative experience of every youngster in the auto-age [*sic*]. Literature has nothing to say about it. The church simply bans it. Parents have never known it or have forgotten it. Modern novels skip over it and dwell on the depraved promiscuity of intellectuals, which is not realistic. It's part of the reader's life.<sup>84</sup>

"Part of the reader's life" was the desideratum that guided Wouk's attention to his heroine's deliberations about sleeping with her boyfriend. *Marjorie Morningstar*, Wouk believed, spoke to the dilemma facing all American women: whether to engage in premarital sex. The crux of the novel was this question of sex. "For 417 pages, Margie is a virgin on the verge," *Time* quipped of the lengthy treatment of Marjorie's indecision. Wouk responded that in focusing on Marjorie's dating juggernaut, he was actually examining an American dilemma with particular tensions for Jews:

Some people may get impatient and think, "She's going to sleep with this guy, what's all the fuss?" But it's still a great suspense thing to a girl. . . . The question may be more serious to Marjorie because of her Old Testament upbringing. But it is a key problem for any girl. It's a general American dilemma.<sup>85</sup>

Unlike other postwar Jewish novelists, Wouk focused in *Marjorie Morningstar* not on intermarriage but on the dating practices of young American Jews. Wouk took endogamy as a given—a situation that more accurately reflected the reality of Jewish courtship practices in the 1950s, when the majority of Jews dated and married other Jews.<sup>86</sup> (Intermarriage increased following World War II, but it had only reached 7 percent by 1957.<sup>87</sup>) Although Wouk believed that the question of sex was crucial in contemporary relationships, he also felt he was writing against literary fashion by highlighting women's concerns over virginity and "virtue." Shortly after *Marjorie Morningstar* was published, Wouk reflected in his journal on this literary risk:

In novels, virtue has been regarded as a dead topic since about 1900; and in fashionable writing on sex, a preoccupation with one's moral character and sexual purity has been treated as a neurotic symptom. I know all that. All the same, my own eyes and ears told me that all this

was the patter of an isolated coterie, not a fundamental change in society. If I had been wrong, *Marjorie Morningstar* would have been 500 pages of dated gibberish (as many critics duly dubbed it), and it would have sold a few thousand copies and died, for I would have been writing about a storyland in my own mind, not about everyday life.<sup>88</sup>

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Wouk interpreted the popularity of his novel as proof that the concerns it revealed were relevant to readers. The sexual negotiations internal to a relationship were not sufficiently discussed in literature, Wouk maintained, but they were deeply formative and influenced by religious, material, and social circumstances. They also confirm Wouk's engagement with Kinsey's reports.

Indeed, Wouk's observations about the importance of necking in the life of American teenagers echo those of Alfred Kinsey regarding petting, which the latter called "one of the most significant factors in the sexual lives of high school and college males and females."<sup>89</sup> As a sexual outlet and introduction to sex, petting was educational and contributed to marital happiness,<sup>90</sup> according to Kinsey, but was often limited by religious tradition. "Because religious tradition has so largely shaped public thinking on these matters," Kinsey wrote in his chapter on premarital petting, "its restraining influence is apparent not only among those who are devout, but, at least to some extent, among those who are not directly connected with any religious group."<sup>91</sup> The impact of religion on American sexuality was vast, Kinsey noted, with implications far beyond the devout. *Marjorie Morningstar* demonstrated this principle in the character of Marjorie; though not religious, her decisions about her sexual behavior were consistently linked to her Jewish upbringing.

## Conclusion

Kinsey's reports spurred Orthodox thinkers like Wouk to respond to the former's presentation of religion's repressive effect on sexuality and to his portrait of Orthodox sexuality in particular. Like Michel Foucault's "repressive hypothesis," which claims that moderns maintained a belief in the repressive sexuality of the past in order to more powerfully herald the coming of an uninhibited sexuality of the future,<sup>92</sup> Kinsey depicted a repressive Jewish approach to sex that would be upended by his findings about contemporary sexual practice. Wouk's (and Lamm's and Max's) intervention was to reveal a more enlightened Jewish approach to sex than outsiders like Kinsey assumed.

Wouk's goal, then—like those of Morris Max and Norman Lamm—was to explicate the Jewish view on a matter of considerable national import. Sexuality had always been linked with American ideas about religion, race, class, and morality, but during the Cold War these concerns seemed more prevalent and explicit—a fact that finds evidence in Wouk's discussion of Kinsey in his primer on Orthodox Judaism. Modern Orthodox thinkers who responded to Kinsey's reports testified to the scientist's far-reaching impact; they also revealed that sex and gender (and their relationship to religion) were no less on the minds of Orthodox Jews than other Americans.

Writing about sex in terms of pleasure within the bounds of marriage, and in contrast to what they perceived as a more inhibited, Christian view of sex, Modern Orthodox thinkers revealed their own Jewish assumptions about religion and sex. In fact, the postwar era marks years when Jewish denominational leaders began to feel comfortable asserting a kind of superiority, among mainstream religious groups, when it came to progressive attitudes toward sex. That confidence among Modern Orthodoxy was shaken by late-1960s cultural shifts. Yet the period of its reign illuminates both cracks in the Judeo-Christian tradition (as the Orthodox pulled away from Judeo-Christianity on the matter of sex) and surprising unions, as writers like Lamm and Wouk affirmed the importance of Kinsey's findings. A degree of ambivalence is apparent alongside the confidence: Modern Orthodox thinkers such as Wouk, Lamm, and Max seem not quite certain where to locate their religious movement in America's cultural division between "conservative" and "liberal" labels. Their desire to prove that traditional religion had something meaningful to offer on the topic of sex coincided with a belief that no other traditional religion was going about the matter of sexuality in as enlightened a manner. To be sure, Modern Orthodoxy had not yet accepted conservative Christian groups as good bedfellows on cultural issues, and an attachment to the science and reason that Kinsey represented accounted for Modern Orthodoxy's stance apart from other traditional religious groups. Kinsey's significance in American society waned over the next two decades, but it was his influence that had allowed Modern Orthodox writers to assert that as long as people were interested in sex and its relationship to the good and moral life, Judaism would have something to say on the topic.

## Notes

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- 1 Herman Wouk, *This Is My God* (New York, 1959), 143.
- 2 Miriam Reumann, *American Sexual Character* (Berkeley, 2005), 1.
- 3 Paul A. Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, Williams Masters, and Virginia Johnson* (New York, 1976), 43.
- 4 Historian R. Marie Griffith makes a substantial contribution in “The Religious Encounters of Alfred C. Kinsey,” *Journal of American History* 2 (2008): 349–77.
- 5 Norman Lamm, “Separate Pews in the Synagogue: A Social and Psychological Approach,” *Tradition* 1, no. 2 (1959): 157.
- 6 This inclusive view of the country would also help bring about new ideals of pluralism; Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York, 2011), 7–11.
- 7 See John D’Emilio and Estelle Freeman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago, 1988); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York, 1988); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America* (Philadelphia, 1994); Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (Cambridge, Engl., 2009); and Riv-Ellen Prell, *Fighting to Become Americans: Assimilation and the Trouble between Jewish Women and Jewish Men* (Boston, 1999).
- 8 Alan Petigny, “Illegitimacy, Postwar Psychology, and the Reperiodization of the Sexual Revolution,” *Journal of Social History* 38, no. 1 (2004): 63–79. For the role of Jewish thinkers in shaping expressive, less guilt-ridden individuals, see Andrew Heinze, *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 2004).
- 9 Daniel Boyarin argues in *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, 1997) that ideals of masculinity have been integral to the history of Jews and their modernization. Lila Corwin Berman’s *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (Berkeley, 2009) shows how changing postwar ideas about Jewish masculinity were reflected in Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe’s widely publicized marriage. Josh Lambert’s *Unclean Lips: Obscenity, Jews, and American Culture* (New York, 2014), reveals that stereotypes of Jews as a carnal people have an ancient tradition that was frequently revived during the first half of the twentieth century. Daniel Boyarin has also traced the influence of this stereotype on rabbinic Judaism in *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley, 1993).
- 10 Wouk, *This Is My God*, 144.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.*, 147.
- 13 Reumann, *American Sexual Character*, 2.



- 14 Griffith, "Religious Encounters," 349.
- 15 "Books: The Wouk Mutiny," *Time* 66 (Sept. 5, 1955): 48–52.
- 16 Arnold Beichman, *Herman Wouk: The Novelist as Social Historian* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1984), 9.
- 17 In his *A Study of History* (London, 1934), British historian Arnold J. Toynbee famously described Judaism as a "fossil" civilization.
- 18 The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported in January 1959 that "Herman Wouk's discerning work, 'This Is My God,' won such wide acceptance during the pre-holiday buying that it is safe to assume both Christians and Jews welcomed it. The sales are on the way to 200,000 copies and there is no reason to believe that they will not continue in 1960"; Harry Hansen, "Publishing House Finds Huge Sales of Its Books," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Jan. 3, 1960, p. G6.
- 19 Wouk, *This Is My God*, 7.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 250.
- 21 Rachel Gordan, "Post-World War II American Judaism: How Judaism Became an American Religion" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2011).
- 22 Lila Corwin Berman argues persuasively for the centrality of the social sciences in sculpting a mid-twentieth-century language about Judaism in *Speaking of Jews*, 2–3.
- 23 Will Herberg, *Protestant–Catholic–Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Chicago, Ill., 1955).
- 24 In the pages of this journal, Rabbi Israel Kazis observed, "Wouk's religious posture stands out in bold contrast to that of the alienated Jewish intellectuals of our day and lends strength to the contention that traditional Judaism is a viable religious system not only for the Hasidim in Williamsburg but also the sophisticated suburbanites"; Israel J. Kazis, Review of *This Is My God*, by Herman Wouk, *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 4 (1960): 246–47.
- 25 Conversation with the author, Feb. 10, 2011.
- 26 In a 1957 essay for the *Reporter*, George R. Clay noted the shift that had taken place in Jewish fiction and how that manifested in Wouk's fictional characters. "In the past, Jewish fiction has tended to concern itself with matters outside the general fabric of American life. Parochial novels—these were in the great majority—dealt with the Jew as Jew; propaganda novels, usually on antisemitism, dealt with the Jew as victim, and the tough school (Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run?* is an early example) with the Jew as monster. There was also a fourth kind, which presented the Jew as clown." Unlike this fiction of the past, Wouk's fit into a new paradigm, Clay observed, positing: "In fact, it is arguable that the Jew—not as victim or monster or clown, but quite simply, as representative American—has finally arrived"; George R. Clay, "The Jewish Hero in American Fiction," *Reporter*, Sept. 19, 1957, p. 43.
- 27 Ira Robinson, "Judaism, Orthodox: Modern Orthodox," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Judaism and Jewish Culture*, ed. Judith R. Baskin, (Cambridge, Engl., 2011), 343.

- 28 Jeffrey Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington, Ind., 2009), 207.
- 29 Ibid., 209.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven, Conn., 2004), 305.
- 33 Wouk, *This Is My God*, 38.
- 34 “Books: The Wouk Mutiny,” 48–52.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Bloomington, Ind., 1953), 366.
- 38 Ibid., 469.
- 39 Alfred Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Bloomington, Ind., 1948), 468.
- 40 Ibid., 469.
- 41 Ibid., 485.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 486.
- 44 “Prof. Kinsey Says U.S. Sex Laws Preserve ‘Talmudic Tradition,’” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 27, 1952, accessed Mar. 28, 2015, <http://www.jta.org/1952/05/27/archive/prof-kinsey-says-u-s-sex-laws-preserve-talmudic-tradition>.
- 45 Wouk, *This Is My God*, 137.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Ibid., 138.
- 48 Ibid., 137.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Irving Greenberg, “Jewish Values and the Changing American Ethic,” *Tradition* 10, no. 1 (1968): 43.
- 51 Historian David Singer writes, “Never before at Yeshiva had a modern Orthodox figure put forward so radical a critique of mainstream Orthodoxy. Greenberg pulled out all the stops, stating categorically that Orthodoxy ‘has lost all connection with modern life’”; David Singer, “Debating Modern Orthodoxy at Yeshiva College: The Greenberg–Lichtenstein Exchange of 1966,” *Tradition* 10, no. 1 (1968): 115.
- 52 Norman Lamm, *A Hedge of Roses: Jewish Insights into Marriage and Married Life* (New York, 1966), 20.
- 53 George Dugan, “A Rabbi Deplores the ‘New Morality,’” *New York Times*, Feb. 1, 1969, p. 32.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Written from an ultra-Orthodox perspective, Shmuley Boteach’s *Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy* (New York, 1999) is a contemporary version of this effort to show how age-old religious views on love and marriage align with contemporary ideals about sex and passion.
- 56 Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2010), 5.

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- 57 Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality*, 2.  
58 Wouk, *This Is My God*, 29.  
59 *Ibid.*, 93.  
60 Thus, in a 1959 article in *Tradition* about separate seating for men and women, Norman Lamm argued for a higher level of eroticism among Orthodox men (hence the necessity of separate seating during prayers) by using Kinsey's arguments. "Greater erotic responsiveness is experienced by higher class men," Lamm wrote, invoking Kinsey's logic, "both because of their greater restraint from full sexual outlet and because of their greater capacity for imagining erotic situations." These findings were especially relevant to Jewish men, because "it is well known that the great majority of American Jews fall into this category of 'upper-level males,'" Lamm wrote, adding, "certainly the more advanced education of so many American Jews needs no documentation here"; Lamm, "Separate Pews," 156.  
61 Morris Max, "A Jewish Reaction to the Kinsey Report," *Orthodox Jewish Life*, Mar.–Apr. 1954, p. 33.  
62 *Ibid.*, 34.  
63 *Ibid.*, 32.  
64 *Ibid.*  
65 "Young Israel Holds Kinsey Publicity Detrimental to Public Morals," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Sept. 1, 1953, accessed Mar. 28, 2015, <http://www.jta.org/1953/09/01/archive/young-israel-holds-kinsey-publicity-detrimental-to-public-morals>.  
66 Max, "Jewish Reaction," 32.  
67 *Ibid.*, 33.  
68 *Ibid.*, 32.  
69 *Ibid.*, 33.  
70 *Ibid.*, 32.  
71 *Ibid.*, 33.  
72 *Ibid.*, 35.  
73 *Ibid.*, 34.  
74 *Ibid.*, 35. 1 Corinthians 7:1–2 reads, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband."  
75 *Ibid.*, 36.  
76 Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*.  
77 *Ibid.*, 82.  
78 Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality*, 6.  
79 Wouk, *This Is My God*, 14.  
80 Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 33.  
81 Wouk, *This Is My God*, 119.  
82 *Ibid.*  
83 On May 27, 2009, the Library of Congress presented a performance of "Crisis over Marjorie" that is available for viewing on the Library of

Congress website, [http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature\\_wdesc.php?rec=4588](http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=4588).

Three years after the novel, the film *Marjorie Morningstar* provided the American viewing public with a visual impression of the character, played by Natalie Wood, with some adaptations to the original story. In 2012, an updated version of Marjorie, named Margo Solovei, appeared in Wouk's newest novel, *The Lawgiver*. Marjorie's various incarnations reflect not only transformations in the author's views of American Jewish social and religious concerns but also his evolving conception of the challenges facing modern American Jews.

- 84 "Notes copied from diary 9–28–49," Jan. 20, 1953, MS 1393, box 23, folder 2, series 11.1, Herman Wouk Papers, Columbia University Library, New York.
- 85 "Books: The Wouk Mutiny," 48–52.
- 86 Erich Rosenthal, "Studies of Jewish Inter-marriage in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book* 64 (1963): 53.
- 87 Rebecca Davis, *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), 112.
- 88 "The Morningstar Syndrome," MS 1393, box 22, folder 1, series 11.1, Herman Wouk Papers.
- 89 D'Emilio and Freeman, *Intimate Matters*.
- 90 Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior In the Human Female*, 328.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 247.
- 92 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* (London, 1976).

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