

Fiction's Archive: Authenticity, Ethnography, and Philosemitism in John Hersey's *The Wall*

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ABSTRACT

*In 1950, John Hersey, a Pulitzer prize-winning American author, published *The Wall*, an immediate best seller and one of the first English-language novels of the Holocaust. Quickly superseded by literature written by Jewish survivors, *The Wall* nonetheless deserves reconsideration as a major work of Jewish ethnography that introduced the English-reading public to Polish Jewish culture in the immediate postwar years. This article gauges the public's adoring and grateful reaction to *The Wall* through an analysis of the scores of letters penned to Hersey while also examining the American English- and Yiddish-language presses' criticism of Hersey's novel. The book's success was assured by Hersey's sensitive interlocution into a culture not his own, illustrating the significance of the author's gentile provenance and philosemitism in the postwar years.*

Key words: *The Wall, Holocaust representation, John Hersey, philosemitism, Warsaw Ghetto uprising*

In June 1947, John Hersey, the Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist, published a short story in the *New Yorker* entitled "A Short Wait" about a Holocaust survivor and refugee from Warsaw. In the story, Luba, newly arrived in the United States, is sitting in the foyer of an opulent Upper East Side apartment waiting impatiently for her relatives, who she believes have ignored a letter she sent

before the war, alerting them to her fate. Luba only relaxes when the gentle maid's words assure her that she was not consciously abandoned and that caring non-Jews do exist who understand and sympathize with her brutal war experiences:

"It must have been very hard where you were," the maid said.
"Oh, you know about me?"
"Of course. I've been with Mr. and Mrs. Lazrus for twelve years. Mrs. Lazrus tells me everything."
"She tells you everything?"
"Pretty near. I know all about the arrangements Mr. Lazrus had to make to get you over here."
"You are Jewish also?"
"Gracious no! But I've been here for twelve years. I'm almost one of the family, with Mr. and Mrs. Lazrus."¹

This short dialogue exposes Luba's misunderstanding and situates the unnamed maid as a sympathetic gentile, the very role that Hersey would play as author, as omniscient "editor," and through the character of Noach Levinson in his best-selling novel *The Wall*, the first major English-language novel of the Holocaust.

The Wall's plot narrates the steady decimation of the Jewish population in Warsaw and the revolt of a small group of fighters against the Nazis. It was a runaway best seller and had a profound effect on the American reading public's image of Jewish resistance as well as a distinct role in introducing that public to Judaism generally and to Polish-Jewish culture specifically. In this article, I will focus on the reception history of *The Wall*, adding to recent scholarly interest in the American public's response to the destruction of European Jewry in the immediate postwar period.² Although the novel's plot moves inexorably toward the Ghetto Uprising, I contend that the average American reader—Jews and non-Jews who wrote to Hersey after the book's publication—read and understood *The Wall* as an ethnographic handbook of Jewish ritual and religious behavior as much as a text about active Jewish resistance to the Nazis.³ Penned by a gentile for a general American audience, *The Wall's* reception illuminates how unfamiliar most Americans were with the culture of the Nazis' victims in the immediate postwar years, how desirous they were of information about the Jews and their culture, and how successful Hersey's efforts were to make that culture comprehensible to them.

Published under the prestigious Knopf-Borzoi imprint in January 1950, *The Wall* was an immediate literary sensation. It went through multiple printings that year and was on the best-seller lists of the *New*

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York Times and the *International Herald Tribune* for months.⁴ Moreover, it quickly garnered international success and was translated into German, French, Danish, Norwegian, Italian, Japanese, and Hebrew in the first decade after its publication in the United States.⁵ Shortly after the novel appeared, Pearl Kazin excerpted the book for serialization by *Harper's Bazaar*, which was then disseminated in the Soviet Union through the U.S. State Department's Russian-language journal, *Amerika*.⁶ The Book-of-the-Month Club selected *The Wall* as its March 1950 feature, ensuring an even more widespread circulation. Hersey gave the American Jewish Committee permission to read excerpts of it on the New York radio station WOR close to the holiday of Passover that year, evidence of the early tendency for ritualization of Holocaust fiction and testimonies.⁷ Hollywood's David Selznick purchased film rights as early as 1950, but the project was never completed, and Millard Lampell wrote the book for the stage version produced in 1960. A television version aired in 1982.

The Wall's success marks a particular moment in postwar American culture and the construction of Holocaust memory. It followed the appearance of important works of American Jewish popular ethnography, such as Maurice Samuel's *The World of Sholom Aleichem* (1943), Bella Chagall's *Burning Lights* (1946), and Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Earth Is the Lord's: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe* (1950),⁸ and the publication of early survivor literature or reportage by Jews who had visited Europe immediately after the war, such as Mary Berg's *Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary* (1945), Marek Edelman's *The Ghetto Fights* (1946), Marie Syrkin's *Blessed Is the Match: The Story of Jewish Resistance* (1947), S. L. Shneiderman's *Between Fear and Hope* (1947), Leo W. Schwarz's *The Root and the Bough* (1949), and Bernard Goldstein's *The Stars Bear Witness* (1949), but it appeared before the English translations of *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952) and Eli Wiesel's *Night* (1960).⁹

The overwhelmingly positive response to *The Wall* shows that the American public had not yet made the turn toward survivor narratives and testimonies as the most authentic representations of the destruction of European Jewry and was more than willing to accept a nonparticipating gentile's account of the brutal events.¹⁰ Hersey was regarded by Jews and non-Jews alike as an objective yet compassionate interpreter of the Jewish experience; his pedigree and earlier literary renown, the book's universalist message, and his non-Jewish status were assets to the book's favorable reception by the English-reading American public and critics in 1950. Most of these readers felt Hersey to be a credible informant on the struggle within the Warsaw Ghetto. His Jewish readers were grateful for his sensitive depictions of their culture, and his

gentile readers were indebted to his charitably didactic presentation of what they felt was a foreign culture and tradition. The Anglo-Jewish and Yiddish press's reception of the novel, which this article will also treat, was notably less enthusiastic about Hersey's treatment of Jewish ritual life. Nevertheless, both the mass of letters and the literary criticism about *The Wall* shared common tropes of amazement and gratitude for the gentile writer's philosemitic portrait of Polish Jewry.

Hersey constructed *The Wall* as a documentary novel, a fictional genre that hybridizes fact and fiction, relying heavily on historical documents and downplaying—at least in its narrative self-presentation—its debt to artistic imagination and license.¹¹ He based the novel on the heroic work of the Oyneg Shabes project, an effort by a group of Warsaw Jewish historians and activists guided by Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944) painstakingly to research, document, and preserve evidence of Warsaw Jewry's daily life during the years of ghettoization.¹² *The Wall* begins in the fall of 1939, a few months before the Nazis built the ghetto that would ultimately imprison almost 500,000 Jews from Poland and other European nations until its destruction in the aftermath of the Uprising, which raged between April 19 and May 16, 1943. The book centers on a group of individuals who come to consider themselves a family unit as ghetto conditions steadily destroy normal kinship ties. The novel's three main protagonists are Noach Levinson, a lonely bachelor who works as an archivist for the Judenrat, the Jewish council established by the Nazis to govern the ghetto; Dolek Berson, an acculturated bourgeois who gets caught up, at first unwittingly and then by choice, in the resistance; and Rachel Apt, the homely second daughter of the wealthy Apt family who becomes a major leader in the Uprising. Noach Levinson's "voice" dominates the book.

Hersey informed his readers through a carefully crafted "Editor's Prologue" that *The Wall* was a record of Levinson's diary that had been buried before the Uprising and recovered after the war in Warsaw's rubble.¹³ Hersey presented his fictive editor as responsible only for redacting the massive transcripts hidden by Levinson in order to narrate the story of life behind the ghetto walls. The reader encounters Levinson's careful record of the dates on which he had certain conversations, the names of the informants, and the dates on which he recorded those conversations. The "editor" also included a few interviews that occurred among the survivors of the Uprising on May 9–10, 1943, coded within the text by a six-pointed Jewish star.¹⁴ The "editor's" identity is unstated in the prologue. Implicitly, it seems that he must be a Jew, for who else would have been so deeply invested in the translation, organization, and presentation of Levinson's "archive"? Moreover, as the novel

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unfolds, the “editor” appears as an involved interlocutor, injecting explanations and commentary on the events in Warsaw, not merely recording them. Levinson, too, as the diary’s author, inserts commentary and observations on the book’s characters and narrative, allowing Hersey yet another fictional alias. The novel’s prologue, therefore, not only sets up the book as lived history, a conceit that was both celebrated and criticized by its readers, but also complicates their understanding of the mediation of Levinson’s materials: were they “edited” by an interested or implicated persona (that is, a Jew) or by a disinterested party? Who was telling the story—the author John Hersey, the “editor,” or the character Levinson? *The Wall* blurs all of these lines in order to assure the authenticity and accessibility of its narrative. The book’s narrator is not one person but a Hersey/“editor”/Levinson composite, a gentile and yet a Jew.

Written by an American writer for an American audience in English, the novel’s success must be understood within its American context. Literary scholar Naomi Seidman’s work has shown the central role that language played (and plays) in Holocaust representation, focusing on the transformations in meaning of Wiesel’s *Night* as it traveled into English from its Yiddish original via a French edition. The French and English versions excised original passages depicting the victims’ desire for violent revenge, making *Night* palatable and accessible to a general, non-Jewish readership.¹⁵ Although composed originally in English, *The Wall* nonetheless relied heavily on translated, testimonial materials from Yiddish and Polish, which Hersey’s “editor” acknowledged in the prologue. He thanked two translators, a Mrs. L. Danziger and a Mendel Norbermann, for their work on Yiddish and Polish materials that were inaccessible to an English-language audience. Both translators, the reader is told, were particularly attuned to the emotional and linguistic challenges of the materials, having lost relatives in the war and being native speakers: “They had to convey in English the life of Eastern European Jews without falling into the colloquialisms, word orders, and rhythms which, as taken over and modified by the American Jewish community, have become part of an entirely different culture: the connotations would have been misleading.”¹⁶ The names of the translators in the prologue were contrived, but Hersey’s desire for his book to be accessible to Americans was not.¹⁷ As he wrote to Mark Nowogrodzki, his actual Polish translator: “I left [Dolek] Berson’s ‘Aryan’ name as *Dolek* Jawardnik on the grounds that Polish and Jewish names will on the whole be very difficult for American readers, and I do not want to confuse them any more than absolutely necessary.”¹⁸ Clarity and accessibility for Hersey also meant aligning the book’s politics with Cold War

American liberal anticommunism, as he explained to Nowogrodzki: “I settled on [the Zionist] Hashomer [Ha-tsa’ir and not the socialist Bund] for the central characters partly because Hashomer would be unfamiliar to most Americans readers and so would not summon an immediate hostile response, as the mere words Socialist and Communist are apt to do.”¹⁹ Deliberately mediating the Holocaust experience for an American audience, Hersey’s Polish Jews spoke perfect, standard English, with some Yiddish expressions, such as *nu?*, added for color.²⁰

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Aware that his skillful documentary style could fool his readers, or anxious about his own “passing” as a Jew in war-riven Warsaw, Hersey placed a small and easily missed publisher’s or author’s disclaimer on the copyright page, directly informing readers of the book’s fictional character: “This is a work of fiction. Broadly it deals with history, but in detail it is invented. Its ‘archive’ is a hoax. Its characters, even those who use functions with actual precedent—such as the chairmanship of the Judenrat, for example—possess names, faces, traits, and lives altogether imaginary.”²¹

Because of the novel’s documentary form, much of Hersey’s popular audience resisted the author’s assertion that his book was a novel and absorbed *The Wall’s* ethnography with an almost seamless verisimilitude.²² Hersey’s book, they informed him in scores of letters, must be a work of history that told the “authentic” truth of what had happened in the ghetto and how the Jews lived in those dark times. Hersey’s personal archive therefore illuminates that in the immediate postwar period the public viewed Holocaust representation through a binary lens. They wanted *The Wall* to be either “authentic” history or “inauthentic” fiction even if Hersey’s book actually blurs these categories; the author employed a multitude of literary strategies, including documentation, translation, redactions, oral “testimony” derived from his own reportage, historical research, and conversations with survivors in the book’s construction.²³ Although the copyright note insisted on the book’s fictionality, its form and its faithful reliance on historical sources, as well as Hersey’s own journalistic bona fides, obscured the book’s genre. From *The Wall’s* very first pages, Hersey deliberately created a tension between history and fiction and between gentile interlocution and “authentic” Jewish experience of the Holocaust.

Authenticating and Fictionalizing History

Hersey achieved the astonishing feel of historicity in *The Wall*, an effort that assured his book’s being read as an “authentic” chronicle of the

Ghetto Uprising in the immediate postwar years, by applying the journalistic skills he had honed since his apprenticeship to Sinclair Lewis after graduating from Yale. In the fall of 1937, Hersey was hired by *Time* to report on the Sino-Japanese war. He published his first book, *Men on Bataan*, in 1942, based on reporting he had done from the Philippines, followed swiftly by *Into the Valley* (1943), which reflected his close contact with Marine combat, and then by *A Bell for Adano*, which earned Hersey the Pulitzer Prize for the Novel in 1944.²⁴ In 1944, he was sent to Russia by *Time-Life* to cover the war from Moscow. Assigned to the cultural beat in the Russian capital, Hersey published little about the European stage of the war in those years.²⁵ Moreover, his reportage in the winter of 1945–46 on the dropping of the atom bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, which appeared as a single issue of the *New Yorker* on August 31, 1946, and later as a book, eclipsed what had been published.²⁶ Yet Hersey's cables to both his wife and his editor at *Time-Life* illustrate that he had been deeply affected by trips with the victorious Red Army to war-ravaged Poland and Estonia. Already, he had begun to grapple with the difficulty of conveying what he had observed so it would be believed. Hersey expressed this concern to his wife in several letters after his shocking visit to the remains of Klooga, a notorious Estonian concentration camp, indicating that restraint and understatement were his guiding writerly principles:

I just hope I understated it enough to make it credible and true.²⁷

They are crazy as hell, those Germans. At Lodz they spent three days killing two or three thousand young Poles who they thought were anti-German; they did it systematically and brutally. . . . Three careful days to exterminate human beings—and hardly one military demolition. *I've tried to understate what I've written about it.*²⁸

An article describing the dislocating return of a Polish soldier to his native Warsaw was the only other writing that Hersey did in those years about the European stage of the war.²⁹ On receipt of the Howland Memorial Prize at Yale in 1952, Hersey reflected on his decision to return to the material for *The Wall* after publishing *Hiroshima*. He told how shaken he, “an American traveling naïve in the totalitarian jungle,” had been after briefly touring destroyed Warsaw and meeting survivors.³⁰ Hersey then revealed his existential—and cultural—impetus for writing *The Wall*: “The experience [of visiting war-ruined Poland] gave rise to certain optimism, too, for in each case there were survivors, and one had to conclude that mankind is indestructible.”³¹ Ghetto life, as

opposed to the world of the concentration camp, proved, Hersey argued, the indestructibility of humanity: "In the ghettos, there had been a semblance of civilization (theaters, concerts, readings of poetry), and the rituals of everyday human intercourse."³² He decided to focus on Warsaw and began to read, setting out to write a novel of redemption and hope grounded in history: "Music, writing and other artistic expressions are the hope of mankind. . . . In the craft of writing . . . lies the only hope man has of rising above his unmentionably horrible existence, his foul nest of murder, war, greed, madness, and cruelty."³³

Hersey's fidelity to historical detail resulted from three years of research, much of which was based on the translations done by Nowogrodzki and Lucy S. Dawidowicz. The two translators recorded their work orally on a wire recorder and then gave the author the spools that he later transcribed. Hersey related that their flawless translations gave him the impression that he was not just absorbing documentary material but hearing "felt experience. . . . It cost me very little in the way of fantasy to seem to experience the astounding story they passed on."³⁴ Hersey's archives also contain lists of the titles of the books he borrowed from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee library;³⁵ memos and letters from Dawidowicz and Nowogrodzki; commentary and letters from Nathan Ausubel, a Jewish folklorist, Nahum Glatzer, an eminent Jewish philosopher, and Milton Steinberg, a prominent American rabbi, whose writings provided him with key information on Jewish culture and tradition;³⁶ and notes on meetings—late in the process—with survivors, including Bernard Goldstein and Mary Berg, whose accounts of their lives in Warsaw had been published earlier, as noted above.

Hersey's exertions to make *The Wall* historically accurate included asking Nowogrodzki to check the value of the Polish zloty on the black market on the "Aryan" side of Warsaw in 1943; verify how long it would take to travel by train from Warsaw to Vilna; determine the date of the first night of Passover in 1941; confirm with Vladka Meed, a ghetto rebel, about the chemicals she had used to make bottle bombs;³⁷ find out how accessible chocolate bars were in 1935; and trace the publication history of the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz's poem "Campo di Fiori," which Noach Levinson recites at a literary evening in the ghetto.³⁸ James E. Young has noted that assiduous attention to historical accuracy is a feature of the documentary novels of the Holocaust, whose authors seem to need to compensate for the "essential rhetoricity of their literary medium."³⁹ This "anxiety" of Hersey's may have also stemmed from his gentile origins, but his journalistic *métier* likewise informed his acute attention to detail.

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Hersey found the amount and subject matter of the material staggering, remarking in his Howland Memorial Prize lecture that “there must have been between one-and-a-half and two million words of notes and translation assembled on wire.”⁴⁰ His fictional editor, whose job it was to winnow Levinson’s archive, was likewise overwhelmed, necessitating his limitation of materials to “one-twentieth their original scope.”⁴¹ In order to craft the novel as the fictional record of a historical diary, Hersey made lists of characters; drew up chronologies; commissioned maps; had Yiddish songs and Polish poems transcribed and translated; enumerated themes; and outlined events and created grids to keep track of his characters and where they were on a given day. Hersey did all this in beautiful, clear penmanship. Blurring the identity of the author and his characters, Hersey’s fictional editor described Levinson’s writing, which Hersey sacralized, in a similar manner: “Levinson wrote in Yiddish in a tiny, beautiful hand—a calligraphy worthy of a scribe of the law. His hand is crystal clear: it is doubtful whether there are a thousand illegible words in all his four million. . . . Writing was his grace and agility.”⁴²

The first version of *The Wall*, in longhand, weighed in at 1,084 pages. Hersey completed a second draft, which was typewritten, and then a third, in the summer of 1949. When published, the novel was over 600 pages and was no longer written from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. Both the gentile Hersey and his “editor” of ambiguous ethnic and religious origin agreed “to let Noach Levinson speak for himself.”⁴³ As Hersey later claimed, Levinson’s Jewish voice was necessary for it had “an authority my gifts could not evoke.”⁴⁴ Hersey, the gentile writer, employed the “editor” and Levinson, the Jewish historian, archivist, and Judenrat employee, as his fictional interlocutors into Jewish culture in Poland to assure the book’s reliability.⁴⁵

Many contemporary critics noted that Hersey’s decision to use the literary technique of a discovered archive was not particularly original, but the English-reading public nonetheless believed wholeheartedly in the authenticity of Levinson’s documents. The novel’s rich historical detail, the prologue’s carefully orchestrated conceit of finding the buried archive, and perhaps Hersey’s use of a first-person narrator made *The Wall* read like a memoir, not a documentary novel.⁴⁶ Levinson’s diary entries dominate the novel, “telling” the readers of his posthumous, restored journal of what had transpired in the ghetto. By crafting the novel from Levinson’s perspective, Hersey assured its reading as authentic testimony. Letter writer after letter writer in his actual archive beg Hersey to tell of the fate of Dolek Berson and Rachel Apt, to affirm that the Levinson archive was safe in Israel, and to determine

whether the book was fiction or nonfiction. They wanted Hersey to resolve the tension between the “Editor’s Prologue” and the copyright’s disclaimer. For example, Blaine Dunning of Omaha, Nebraska, asked Hersey on June 16, 1951: “Were you inferring on page 631 that Dolek Berson was captured in the sewer by the Germans or did he escape? If so, is he still living? How long did these survivors live in the Lomianki Forest before they were rescued? (I am presuming they were rescued there. If not, what was the outcome?) Are Halinka, Mordecai and Rutka still living? Has Rachel ever heard anything about her father or David?” She enclosed an envelope and awaited his reply.⁴⁷

Herman Schwab wrote to Hersey on June 11, 1950: “In the beginning you say: ‘This is a work of fiction. . . . Its ‘archive’ is a hoax’ But in ‘Editor’s Prologue’ you explain in detail the unearthing of the ‘archive’ and every paragraph starts with the real date of the century—Now what is *fiction* and what *truth*, as the whole story is one terrible *fact*. I should be thankful to you, giving me an explanation because every page is one question mark.”⁴⁸

Edward F. Brown told the author on June 18, 1950, that he had been taken in by Hersey’s “amiable ruse,” overlooking the copyright page’s disclaimer: “As a consequence I had called up the Israeli Consulate and the office of your publishers because I was eager to visit the Museum of Jewish History at 313 Madison Avenue, New York City, where you had stored the famous papers before they would be shipped to Israel.” On January 5, 1951, Russell Twiggs wrote to Hersey that he would like him to clarify whether the book belonged on the fiction or nonfiction shelves of the public library in Pittsburgh from which he had borrowed it. Hersey’s publishers also received readers’ queries: “Was there ever such a diary or diaries as he [Hersey] refers to in his foreword as being on exhibition at 313 Madison Avenue?” wrote Edward Weeks to Alfred Knopf, Jr. on January 17, 1950.⁴⁹

Unsettled by the ambiguity of Hersey’s literary construct yet swayed by the historicity of the novel’s presentation, these letter writers hoped that Hersey would resolve the tension that inheres in all historical representation between a “fixed” historical “reality” and its mediated cultural product but that had particular urgency in the case of the Holocaust in the early years after the war.

Jewish Ethnography for an American Public

Scores of letters in Hersey’s archive expressed disbelief that the book was a novel, even among those readers who read the copyright disclaimer.

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Moreover, no matter how they adjudged the book, person after person, Jews and non-Jews, professional critics and average readers, the Yiddish critics and their English-language counterparts were astounded by Hersey's ability to probe what they felt was the inner life and rhythms of Polish Jewry and noted this in their assessment of the novel's power. Hersey's credulous readers believed that his interpretations of Jewish culture and tradition were as true as the historical background and detail that shaped the novel. They trusted Hersey as their guide into the world of unfamiliar Jewish ritual behavior.

Although the members of Hersey's "family" hailed largely from more acculturated sectors of prewar Polish Jewish society, *The Wall* was nonetheless replete with references to Judaism. The novel described Jewish ritual in great detail, and Hersey had both Noah Levinson and the "editor" explain the meaning and significance of the rituals for the reader within the text itself, illustrating the novel's ethnographic or anthropological messaging. When Levinson explained a ritual or a Hebrew or Yiddish term, he included clarifications within his diary entries' narrative prose. When the "editor" elucidated a point of Jewish ritual practice, he did so in square brackets after the confusing or foreign term, often prefaced with an uppercase "NOTE." In both cases, Hersey's form of introducing and explaining Jewish ritual was explicit and assumed that his readers—like himself—found traditional Jewish practice foreign.

Hersey first introduced Jewish ritual through the Mazurs, an Orthodox family who had come to Warsaw from Lodz. Coding the character Reb⁵⁰ Yechiel Mazur's Jewishness through his beard and long coat, familiar metonyms for East European male Jewish religiosity, and employing a familiar westernized trope of the exotic, inscrutable *Ostjude*, Hersey described him as "a middle-sized man with the enigmatic, closed face so many bearded, religious Jews have; he wore a black kaffan."⁵¹ Their youngest son, Schlome, identified as a *yeshive bokher* (a student of advanced talmudic learning), carried the "objects dear to his father, the Sabbath menorah, the seder plate, the Hanukkah lamp, the ethrog box, the phylacteries and prayer shawls in their embroidered velvet bags, and in a little glass-topped box, the gold Kiddush goblet" when the family was located to the ghetto.⁵² His sister brought in the Passover set of dishes. These descriptions informed Hersey's readers of practically all the essential ritual objects necessary for an observant Jewish life. Soon thereafter, the Mazurs invited members of the "family," including Levinson, to their housewarming ceremony, at which Froi Mazur hung up a mizrach, whose significance was explained by the "editor's" bracketed note as "framed, illuminated verses in praise of

God.” Reb Mazur then attached the mezuzah, and Levinson described the object physically, narrated the ritual of affixing it to the doorpost, and translated the ritual’s Hebrew blessings:

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[His wife Froi Mazur] handed him [Reb Mazur] a tiny bit of parchment, from which, squinting closely, he read the words of the *Shema Yisroel* prayer—as if he had to read it! [He] rolled up the miniature scroll and put it into a small cloisonné capsule, which, with extreme care, he nailed to the doorpost, driving the nails through two brass ears for the purpose, at the ends of the capsule. He touched his fingers lightly then to the name of God, *Shaddai*, showing through a slot in the capsule, and kissed the ends of his fingers. [Then he recited the blessing:] “Blessed be Thou, our God, King of the universe, who hast made us holy with Thy law, and commanded us to affix the Mezuzah. Master of the Universe, look down from Thy holy habitation and accept in mercy and favor the prayer of Thy children who are gathered here to dedicate this dwelling and to offer their thanksgiving. . . . Grant them that they may live in their home in brotherhood and friendship.”⁵³

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Another description of Jewish ritual followed shortly after when a group of men attended services at the character Rabbi Goldflamm’s secret prayerhouse. Levinson’s diary tells Hersey’s readers that about 10 men were wearing prayer shawls and phylacteries and that the “Baal Tefilla, or leader of prayers . . . stood at the center of us, reciting petitions, blessings, and Psalms.” The “editor” then added his commentary in brackets:

NOTE. EDITOR. Among Eastern European Jews, prayers are not necessarily conducted by a rabbi. Any *minyan*, or quorum of ten, may hold services, and any Jew may recite the ritual. A rabbi need not even be present. Indeed, it is basic in Judaism that any believer may speak directly to God at any time, and never needs the intercession or good offices of God’s mortal bureaucracy. The Rabbinate in Eastern Europe regulates the religious life of the community and devotes itself to the study of sacred literature.⁵⁴

Levinson later explained the contents of the phylacteries and translated the Hebrew Shema prayer when he commented on the Nazis’ disruption of the service. But then Hersey goes further by having Levinson move from simple ritual explanation to interpreting modern antisemitism and its relationship to Jewish identity. When the Nazis forced the clownish character Schpunt to dance so hard that his head phylacteries jiggled, Levinson commented: “This our religion, which sets us apart, which keeps us erect in the face of no matter what affronts, which even



maintains the spirits of those who profess to be faithless, our very Jewishness, the whole incredible nightmare we are experiencing now—all this bounced up and down before Schpunt’s eyes and ours.”⁵⁵ “Explaining” the meaning of the phylacteries to their readers, Hersey/Levinson projected an undeniable membership of Jewishness to all Jews regardless of their involvement with ritual practice, an essentializing trope that appeared more explicitly when Hersey later introduced the rite of circumcision to his readers.

Other ritual asides, explanations, and descriptions in *The Wall* included details surrounding the celebration of Passover; a description of a makeshift shofar blowing on the New Year in which a concertina produced the “mournful triads, the *Tekiah*, the *Teruah*, and the *Shebarim*, the Shofar’s shouts and wails and sighs and the joyous going-up of God on the day of remembrance”; a Jewish marriage ritual; the recitation of the traveler’s blessing when a courier leaves the ghetto; the “editor’s” explanation of the holiday of Lag Ba-‘omer as “a festive holiday, observed mostly by children and young people, celebrating the Jewish heroes, Bar Kokhba and Akiba. In Eastern Europe, Jewish schools used to be closed for the day, and the pupils would go on picnics”; and the description of Jewish death and mourning rituals, including rending clothing and burying the dead in a shroud.⁵⁶

The most explicit depiction of a practice that would have been unfamiliar to many American readers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, was an evocative description of kosher slaughter. Five pages long, the slaughter narrative was extraordinary not only for its detail but also because the animal in question, a horse, was unacceptable for kosher consumption.⁵⁷ Hersey therefore used the scene to discuss the rabbinic permissibility of eating a nonkosher animal in a time of starvation. The character Rabbi Goldflamm, asked whether or not the members of the “family” could eat the horse if one could be obtained, answered affirmatively with a lengthy description of the Jewish laws of ritual slaughter. His interpretation of the reasons for the Jewish dietary laws emphasized their modern, rational, and scientific foundations, rationales that would have been understandable and acceptable to the postwar American public:

By the strict application of our dietary laws, the horse is unclean. As you know, we are permitted the flesh of animals that have cleft hooves and chew their cud. Neither applies to our horse. *But the basis of these laws is health and common sense.* First, we can say that health and common sense urge that if we have been meat-eaters in the past, any meat (if it is itself healthy) should be good for us, since we have been so long without

meat. Second, we can say that the animals who have cleft hooves and chew cud are the herbivorous and peace-loving animals: our horse is certainly that. Third, the only exceptions to the rule that cud-chewing and cleft feet go together in animals are the pig, which only has the cleft hoof, and the camel, which only chews. The pig was presumably ruled out from our diet because he is actually and demonstrably unclean in his choice of victuals, in his habits, and especially in his susceptibility to trichinae; none of these things would apply to our horse. The camel was probably eliminated because in the desert, where these rules had their origin, he was too useful to be spared; we are assured by the Kohn-Heller organization [who maintained horse-drawn rickshaws in the ghetto], I gather, that our horse is beyond usefulness. It is my opinion (the rabbi pulled at his beard) that our horse should be eaten. However (he held up his hand), it must be killed by ritual slaughter. Because the animal is itself normally “unclean” does not mean that we should, having made an exception for the best of reasons, deliberately eat double-*terefah*. *The purpose of kosher slaughter is to take health precautions.*⁵⁸

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Hersey's narrative, which included ethnographic stage directions to underscore the rabbi's Jewish seriousness (such as pulling at his beard in contemplation), also informed the reader that there had been a ban on kosher slaughter in Poland through his “editor's” interjection: “NOTE. EDITOR. Kosher slaughter, which requires draining of blood from the meat and the examination of organs and entrails for signs of disease, had been banned by decree on October 26, 1939—for humanitarian reasons!”⁵⁹ Rabbi Goldflamm tells the “family” that he knows of a man who can slaughter the horse with legendary skill, including the ability to “take the sinew from the hind leg.” Levinson described the horse's slaughter with artisanal detail: the whetting of the knife; the sagging of the animal as “its esophagus, windpipe, and great veins [were] all severed in one astounding, old-fashioned, up-curving stroke-and-pull”; the investigation of its lungs, windpipe, esophagus, heart, brains, stomach, and intestines; the pronouncement of the horse's health; the salting of the animal's flesh; and, finally, the removal of the sciatic nerve. Hersey and his characters (and readers?) reveled in the inclusion of the esoteric requirement to remove the ischiadic nerve: “When the Shohet came to the removal of the hamstring from the hindquarter, the most difficult excision of all, Rabbi Goldflamm nudged [Dolek] Berson and nodded his bearded head. Goldflamm, ecstatically: ‘What did I tell you? He's a genius!’”⁶⁰ Hersey's penetration of Jewish ritual here is particularly complex because neither the “editor” nor Levinson had explained the prohibition against eating the sciatic nerve. An American reader not deeply familiar with Jewish dietary laws



might well have been perplexed, although no letter to Hersey addressed this detail directly. The scene concluded with Froi Mazur's Sabbath meal, redolent with *cholent*, a traditional long-cooked meat stew, this time made from the horse that the "family" heartily consumed. Reb Mazur had the last words, which, true to the ethnographic purpose of these sections of *The Wall*, informed readers of Jewish ritual by showing them the rabbinic practice of reciting daily benedictions for both ordinary and extraordinary events:⁶¹

I know hundreds of benedictions for all sorts of occasions—for the sniffing of fragrant barks, for hearing thunder, for seeing a rainbow, for listening to a wise man lecture on the Law, for seeing kings and their courts, for encountering strangely-formed men, giants, dwarfs, and crooked persons—outlandish things—but I've never heard of a benediction for smelling the fragrance of horsemeat stew on an extremely empty stomach, and I've never been so eager to pronounce one!⁶²

Finally, in Chapter Eight, Hersey furtively explored one of the most fundamental and persistent signs of Jewishness: male circumcision.⁶³ Pan Apt, a well-to-do jeweler intent on leaving the ghetto, believes that his gentile looks and perfect Polish will allow him to pass on the "Aryan" side of the wall, but he does not want to take any chances. When asking a ghetto doctor for some serum to prevent typhus, Pan Apt has a private conversation with the physician. The doctor visits again, and Pan Apt comes down with some ill-defined "stomach trouble," which passes. When the patient is feeling better, the doctor tells Rachel Apt that she should congratulate her father for recovering "not (and here came the terrible bitterness) from this disease transmitted by lice, but from that other one which is transmitted by parents." At this enigmatic comment, Levinson made a bracketed aside: "Note. N.L. Jewishness? How 'recovered'?" To which Hersey's "editor" added: "NOTE. EDITOR. Levinson was not to learn what this was until [a starred] conversation, May 9–10, 1943."⁶⁴ The impatient reader, turning to the novel's last pages, finds Levinson's interview with Rachel Apt in the aftermath of the Uprising in which she told the archivist: "He (Pan Apt) had his circumcision corrected."⁶⁵

Hersey used this convoluted narrative of Pan Apt's desire to rid himself of his Jewish marking in order to expatiate on the relationship of circumcision to Jewish identity, allowing his readers knowledge of Pan Apt's circumcision reversal before he informed the character's daughter and Levinson. Shortly after the section above, but before the starred conversation recorded at the book's end, Pan Apt tells

Rabbi Goldflamm about his intention to undo his circumcision. The latter tries futilely to dissuade him from the surgery, making a case for an inexplicable yet immutable quality of Jewishness independent of Jewish practice.⁶⁶ Rabbi Goldflamm articulates this identity as a kind of subconscious internalized religion that Pan Apt could not elude:

"I'm not talking about the mechanics of escape. . . . What sets us apart from the rest of the world, as you well know, is not this wall around us, but our religion—and you cannot shake that. . . . No, Pan Apt, you still misunderstand me. Who should know better than I that you are not "religious," in the outward sense? But it is not necessary to be Reb Yechiel Mazur. The Jewish faith is in you, it shows. . . . The Jewish faith is ancient. Through centuries and generations it has come down to you. You are a product of its traditions: traditions of humility, of the Torah, of family bonds, of hard work, of love of music and art, of poverty and frugality—traditions, above all, of being persecuted. Especially here in Poland. You may not realize it, but the way you hold your head when you walk in the streets has our past in it. Your face is accidentally not easy to distinguish from a Polish face, but every time you speak or laugh or nod or lift an eyebrow or express an emotion, our heritage is in that movement of the muscles of your face, our way of doing things. The sign of the Covenant is on your body. . . ." [To which Apt responds:] "Very few things are irrevocable in this world." [Goldflamm persists:] "It is in your heart. It's an inheritance in your fingertips and in the nerve behind your eyeball and in the drumstick of your ear and in the membranes of your nostrils—even if the Germans do not see anything Semitic about the outside of your nose. The heritage is in your heart, it is a glorious heritage, you should be proud of it."⁶⁷

This monologue offered Hersey's readers both a sympathetic response to antisemitic physical tropes of Jewishness (such as the physiognomy of a "Jewish" nose) and a nonritual definition of a Jew in contrast to the many scenes in the novel that described and explained Jewish ritual, beliefs, and customs. Here, Hersey's purpose was to describe "Jewish" feelings or sensibilities independent of ritual practice as well as to affirm Jewish pride in a nonreligious identity, an emotion that certainly found an echo among acculturating sectors of the post-war American Jewish community.⁶⁸

Hersey's ethnographic exercise, albeit appreciated by the majority of his nonprofessional readers, was not always successful. One writer complained that the book would have been more useful and enjoyable with a glossary; though she was "an American born Reform Jewess . . . many of these terms were unknown to me and many more must be incomprehensible to non-Jews."⁶⁹

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Simultaneous with readers' admiration for the novel's attention to ethnographic detail was their astonishment that a gentile could write such a sympathetic portrait of Jews and understand the inner workings of a "foreign" culture. Hersey's audience, both the public and the critics, marveled at his outsider status, articulated gratitude for his sympathetic portrait of Polish Jewry, and expressed their hope that *The Wall's* success would encourage religious and ethnic tolerance in the future. On June 27, 1950, Gertrude Sheffield Gring wrote: "I feel that any thing which makes us understand the Jew and his religion better gives us that much firmer grip on our striving for tolerance. The fact that you are not a Jew yourself gives us that much more hope for the human race." Mrs. Joseph F. Cannon, the aunt of Hersey's wife, penned a note to him on February 10, 1950: "I can't yet say that I shall enjoy this book but already I can see the value of it and that its influence will be tremendous in relation to attitudes toward the Jewish problem." Another aunt expressed similar thoughts: "I hope it will be the means of making people conscious of the need for tolerance for those races which do not have our traditions and a greater sympathy and understanding for those who are persecuted. Incidentally, I am learning some things I did not know about the Jews." Sylvia B. Davidson commented on April 24, 1950, that she was in "particular awe of a non-Jew who caught and understands the feelings that Jewishness and Jewish history engenders" and thanked him for "the service it [*The Wall*] may render to humanity." Pauline Nidus, an East European Jew who felt "the tragedy first hand," told Hersey on March 29, 1951, "I admire the book more yet that you, dear Mr. Hersey, are a gentile. If a non-Jew can react and feel so strongly there is still a hope that justice and love will prevail and the future will be brighter for future generations. . . . I hope you'll write for many years to come and wake the conscience of humanity against injustice and barbarism."⁷⁰

Noting that Hersey's plot depicted the struggle of Warsaw's Jews as a universalist clash between the forces of Humanity and anti-Humanity—and not as a specific battle of antisemites against Jews—Esther E. Shapiro gushed to the author, "If only Parent-Teachers' Associations, Political Organizations, Church and Civic Fraternities which mold *World Public Opinion*, the cementing agent of universal brotherhood, could absorb the purposeful teaching of 'The Wall,' namely *the Struggle of the Friends of Humanity against the Foes of Humanity*, then the 'Unknown Soldier' of the world of democracies will not have died in vain."⁷¹ Even a decade after *The Wall's* publication, readers still commented to Hersey about his non-Jewish origins.⁷²

The Wall was reviewed in every major American newspaper as well as in the British press, and the public was not alone in its admiration of Hersey's role as gentile interlocutor. Many professional English-language critics found fault with the construct of the fictional archive, but in the end they felt that the plot, the characters, and the author's sympathy for Poland's doomed Jews made the novel triumph, and they all remarked on Hersey's ability to take on a culture not his own.⁷³ A colleague who reviewed the book's galleys wrote to Hersey on October 25, 1949: "How a non-Jew could have achieved this blazing miracle of sympathy I do not know either."⁷⁴ Richard M. Clurman, the editorial assistant of *Commentary* magazine, wrote to Hersey on February 3, 1950, about his initial misgivings that the author had chosen fiction as his medium: "But my misgivings were rather quickly dispelled. I think you have written an extraordinary book. For one thing, I am simply flabbergasted at your knowledge of Jews and Jewish life."⁷⁵ Granville Hicks of *The New Leader* concurred in his review of books published in 1950: "John Hersey's *The Wall* . . . was also, I feel, a kind of moral triumph. That an American journalist, who is not a Jew and was far from Poland in the years of the German occupation, should try to reconstruct the miseries and grandeurs of the Warsaw ghetto seems to me something to be proud of."⁷⁶ Even the left-leaning Alfred Kazin, who felt that the book lacked the political depth of a Koestler or an Orwell novel, nonetheless commended Hersey's metamorphosis into the character of Noach Levinson, which gave the non-Jewish writer entrée into the Jewish psyche: "But surely the great thing to note about this astonishing and very moving book is the quick and affectionate understanding, the superlative human sympathy, the wealth of love itself, with which Mr. Hersey has interested himself in a tradition so different from his own."⁷⁷

Many Jewish professionals, too, echoed these sentiments. Richard Strouse told Hersey on June 23, 1952, that he had discussed *The Wall* with a friend who was a prominent pillar of the Chicago Reform rabbinic: "I was indeed pleased when he eulogized it unrestrainedly. He said he had thought it impossible until reading *The Wall* for even the most sensitive and best-intentioned non-Jew to understand the psychology resulting from centuries of persecution."⁷⁸ Milton Steinberg, whose *Basic Judaism* was one of the books Hersey used to research Jewish ritual life, wrote to the author on March 1, 1950, that he had finished reading the book in a "single round-the-clock session" and could not "refrain from expressing my admiration and gratitude."⁷⁹ He, too, praised the book's "almost always authentic" spirit and presentation of Jewish life:

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As a rabbi, I have read any number of documents in Hebrew, Yiddish and English which have come out of Nazi held Europe. I have spoken to survivors. Nothing I have seen in print or heard surpasses your imaginative account in verisimilitude, which is an achievement indeed of the highest order. . . . But, even more consequential, you have had the insight and compassion to see into your characters not only as human beings but as Jews. This, it seems to me, is your climactic accomplishment *qua* author, that *you, who are not of their fellowship*, should have be[en] able to conceive their distinction and differential reactions, values and aspirations.⁸⁰

The American-Jewish English and Yiddish Presses Weigh In

English-language critics in general American publications extolled Hersey's interlocution into Jewish life and culture in Poland. However, critics writing in organs of the Anglo-Jewish press, such as *Menorah Journal*, *The Jewish Frontier*, and *Congress Weekly*, "insider" publications that assumed a Jewish audience, and in the Yiddish press that was directed to an even more internal Jewish audience connected to the vernacular of East European Jewry, confronted Hersey far more directly on issues of historicity, Jewish ritual authenticity, and the particularism of the Nazi assault against the Jews.

Carefully comparing Hersey's fictionalized history to the extant historical sources, Abraham J. Karp, a rabbi and trained historian of Polish Jewish origin, concluded that the book was technically and journalistically masterful. But he disparaged the author for his unwillingness to particularize the Jewish tragedy and to condemn German barbarism: "The motive of revenge, or even of hatred for the oppressor, is lacking in *The Wall*, though it is found in the documents and memoirs of the Warsaw Ghetto. The novel is all the less authentic for it."⁸¹ For Karp, the novel ultimately failed to do justice to the historical events and to the memory of the Uprising. Maurice Samuel, a Romanian-Jewish intellectual, Yiddish translator, and critic, also praised Hersey's efforts but censured him on some signal issues of representation and authenticity, focusing particularly on the novel's universalism and Hersey's inability to grasp, despite his ethnographic footwork, the majesty of Polish-Jewish civilization. Calling *The Wall* an "intellectual *tour de force*," Samuel nonetheless argued that Hersey's attention to Jewish ritual did not successfully convey the totality of the Jewish world destroyed by the Nazis. Hersey's mediation of Jewish ceremonies was akin to "a sympathetic anthropologist's report" but missed the essential inner quality of Jewish life.⁸²

The novel's ending, in which Rachel Apt optimistically asks two other underground leaders what the plans are for the next day,⁸³ particularly bothered Nathan Ausubel, one of the book's galley readers. In an unrestrained eight-page handwritten letter, Ausubel reproached Hersey for obscuring the specific antisemitic thrust of Nazism by structuring the book's plot as a struggle between the forces of Humanity and Anti-Humanity. Rachel's comments in her post-Uprising conversation with Levinson that "the whole of the Torah is in one sentence in Leviticus: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" and that, even if her neighbor were a Nazi, she would not necessarily kill him, provoked Ausubel to conclude that Rachel's turn-the-other-cheek universalism must be the author's own misguided opinion about the rebels' motivation: "Suppose Rachel had not fought at all, at the very outset but *loved* the Nazis? What would have happened? She would have gone to the umschlagsplatz like the other sheep, only beatified like a saint with a gold nimbus floating over her head!"⁸⁴ Hatred "of their murderers and tormenters," not love, had motivated the ghetto fighters, despite the differences among the Zionists, bundists, religious Jews, socialists, and communists: "Where in your book is this mentioned?" demanded Ausubel.⁸⁵ For these critics, Hersey's construction of the Uprising as a universal struggle between good and evil and not as a specific battle between Jews and their mortal enemies fell irredeemably short of representing the historical "truth."

The sharpest critiques of *The Wall* appeared in the Yiddish press, although they too expressed gratitude to Hersey.⁸⁶ Largely ignored in the critical study of Hersey's work, the response of the Yiddish press to *The Wall* affirms Anita Norich's observation that there was no monolithic "American Jewish" reaction to the destruction of European Jewry. When Anglo-Jewish and Yiddish writers responded to news of European antisemitism, the threat of war, the invasion of Poland by the Nazis and the Soviets, and then to the images and news of the Final Solution, they did so by drawing on distinct and different cultural reservoirs.⁸⁷

All of the major American Yiddish newspapers—*Forverts*, *Der tog*, *Morgn-frayhayt*, and *Morgn-zhurnal*—reviewed *The Wall*, often allocating space for serialized columns by one prominent critic or a series of reviews by different critics.⁸⁸ The overriding themes of the Yiddish press's reviews echoed those of the English-language press: surprise that a non-Jew had taken on such a "foreign" theme; respect that Hersey had paid such careful attention to historical and cultural detail; and a poignant gratefulness for Hersey's efforts. Leon Crystal of *Forverts* noted: "If a Jewish writer had written the book, this would not have surprised anyone," but Yiddish readers would have been skeptical about

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the writer's ability to succeed "because it is accepted that we are too close to the tragedy to create a good belletristic work." Crystal sensed that a good part of *The Wall's* success was its author's non-Jewish provenance: "[T]he case is different because the work was written by John Hersey, who already has a wide, deserved reputation as a writer and as a human being."⁸⁹ Hillel Rogoff, also writing in *Forverts*, began his review with "John Hersey is a Christian, the son of a priest, and only thirty-six years old," and then continued to tell his Jewish readers that they should be thankful because Hersey's book would compel thousands of readers as well as the people they told about the book to remember the Jewish tragedy in Europe.⁹⁰ S. Dingol, writing in *Der tog*, commented that Hersey's book was a wonder. Unlike Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which emerged from the pen of someone who knew something about Russian army life, *The Wall* came from the mind of a non-Jew, a stranger: "[Hersey] never lived in a Hitler ghetto."⁹¹ S. L. Shnayderman, editor of Mary Berg's *Warsaw Diary* (1945), writing in the *Morgn-zhurnal*, extended the observation that Hersey's outsider status secured the novel's success and suggested that *The Wall* would be read and understood differently by its non-Jewish and Jewish readers. The former would believe Hersey's world; the latter, familiar with the real historical actors, Emanuel Ringelblum and Majer Balaban (1877–1942), and their real archive, Oyneg Shabes, would find their composite fictional representative, Levinson, and his diary sorely wanting.⁹²

Although the Yiddish critics were indebted to Hersey for catapulting the war experiences of Warsaw's Jews onto best-seller lists, their gratitude was laced with some bitterness. Either recent immigrants themselves or with relatives who may have suffered or perished in Europe, the Yiddish journalists concluded that the gentile writer, as well intentioned and hardworking as he clearly had been, still missed something essential about the experience of Europe's Jews during the war. They charged that Hersey's interest in human psychology and in the potential of individual inner transformation, and what they considered to be his very American belief in the redemptive power of individual stories of survival, obscured the most obvious facts of the Nazi war against the Jews of Europe: the unrelenting terror that engulfed Warsaw's Jews as they were destined for annihilation, their sense of abandonment by Poland's gentiles, particularly the socialist and workers movements, and their resentment at the world's seeming indifference to their fate. Hersey, the Yiddish reviews articulated, had been unable or unwilling to convey the depths of horror, fear, and dread that had overwhelmed Europe's Jews during the war.

Likewise, many Yiddish reviewers posited that *The Wall* betrayed Hersey's liberal political orientation, misrepresenting the defiant radical politics of pre-war Warsaw. Products of the socialist-oriented immigrant Jewish community in New York, their reviews noted that the members of Hersey's "family" were all proper bourgeois Jews, hardly representative of the working masses of interwar Polish Jewry.⁹³ Because Hersey emphasized the survival of individuals from an economically more secure group, his book miscast the centrality of politics, particularly the activities of the socialist Jewish Labor Bund, among the ghetto rebels who orchestrated the Uprising.⁹⁴

The most extensive and inarguably most "authentic" critique of Hersey's work in the Yiddish world was Rokhl Oyerbakh's long review published in *Di goldene keyt* in 1951, a text that is still unfamiliar to most critics and would have been missed by most American readers at the time.⁹⁵ Oyerbakh (commonly known as Rachel Auerbach, 1903–76) was educated at the University of Lwów and moved to Warsaw in 1933, where she began to write about theater, literature, and psychology in the Yiddish and Polish press. In the ghetto, Ringelblum recruited her to work with Oyneg Shabes. In 1943, Oyerbakh escaped to the "Aryan" side, becoming a courier for the underground. After the war's end, she, with the three remaining survivors of Oyneg Shabes, worked to find the buried archive.⁹⁶ Her review of *The Wall* started with the obligatory trope of gratitude that a non-Jew had taken the struggle of Warsaw's doomed Jews as his theme. She also praised Hersey's ability to penetrate some of the psychological problems of ghetto life. Yet Oyerbakh's review sought to expose her view of Hersey's inadequate understanding of the social, historical, and cultural background of Warsaw Jewry under Nazi occupation. She criticized Hersey for his sanitized depiction of ghetto life that elided the overwhelming sense of daily terror, particularly after the mass liquidations that began in 1942. Germans, she noted—as had a few other critics—were surprisingly absent in *The Wall*, as were their heinous crimes against the Jews, which included cremation of living human beings, burying people alive, and the gassing and drowning of thousands. The author's knowledge of Jewish custom was superficial, glaringly revealed in his narration of the horse's slaughter. Did Hersey's informants—he must have had them, Oyerbakh commented—not know of the dedication of Warsaw's observant Jews to avoid unkosher meat at all costs, despite their starvation? Hersey's matter-of-fact description in the "Editor's Prologue" of the discovery and retrieval of the buried archive bore no relationship to the history of the partial recovery of Ringelblum's archive. What was located was waterlogged

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and mildewed, hardly anything like the fictional archive's pristine condition. Moreover, the brave historian who had organized this extraordinary effort had been murdered with his wife and small son in 1944, a far cry from the character Noach Levinson's miraculous survival and natural death a few years later.

In her summation, Oyerbakh zeroed in on Hersey's own contingent cultural experience as an explanation as to why he had deviated from the historical truth. He was, after all, an American gentile writing for an uninformed American audience. Any reader who knew the ghetto and Jewish life could not accept Hersey's portrait at all. Long before it had become a commonplace of literary and historiographic criticism to stress how culture shapes historical memory, Oyerbakh pointed out that Hersey's novel suited its American audience's view of the war, which underscored the triumph of universal good over universal evil and minimized specific Jewish suffering. She also noted that, by 1950, Germany had been readmitted into the sphere of the Western nations, defusing Hersey's ability to represent the Nazis' full evil for an American readership.⁹⁷

For the Yiddish-reading world, Hersey's novel of a universalist, triumphant human spirit betrayed the catastrophe that had befallen Warsaw's Jews and the particularism of the Nazi campaign against European Jewry. Downplaying the rage, bitterness, and feelings of revenge that many survivors felt, *The Wall* had turned a tragedy—the word most often used in the Yiddish press to describe the terrible events in Warsaw in 1943—into a triumph. Hersey's fiction had buried, not uncovered, history.

Conclusion

Given the success of *The Wall* in its time, it is clear that the novel's universalism made it a literary phenomenon among postwar Americans who shared Hersey's cultural heritage of optimism. Hersey's non-Jewish status, which cast him as a disinterested observer, allowed him to introduce postwar Americans to East European Jewish culture generally and to Jewish ritual practice in particular. Americans wanted to know about the people who had been victimized by the Nazis, and Hersey's ethnographically accessible text, woven into the novel's diary entries through Levinson's and the "editor's" didactically interpolated notes and explanations, allowed Hersey's readers to encounter Polish-Jewish ritual behavior through a book whose explicit plot line was about resistance, not about Judaism and Jewish identity.

Because Hersey's sympathy for Warsaw's Jews and their practices did not originate from an ethnic or religious affiliation, his work reached a far wider audience at the time than works written in English by Jews for Jewish publications or by Jews in Jewish languages.⁹⁸ By reading *The Wall*, Americans absorbed Hersey's own sense of the foreignness and distinctiveness of Jewishness, yet their encounter—through his mediation—with Jewish ritual objects and behaviors that defined Jewish religious culture was overwhelmingly positive.

The letters to Hersey and the published English-language reviews in general American journals and newspapers illustrate the persuasiveness of Hersey's fictionalized history and cultural ethnography for so many readers, both Jews and gentiles. The novel's reception by these readerships was paradoxical. Many individuals in the general American reading public believed that *The Wall* was actually a work of history, indicating their desire that the events of World War II not be fictionalized. Yet those who read the book as a novel were likewise amazed that a gentile could be an interlocutor into Jewish culture, revealing their need for "authentic"—meaning Jewish—interpreters of the Holocaust. Together, these reactions illustrate that, in the immediate years after the war, American readers wanted reassurance that the texts they were encountering about the destruction of European Jewry were "true," and, by true, they meant authored by a Jew. However, the letters and reviews also illustrate that most American readers trusted John Hersey as their explicator of Polish Jewish culture. Gratitude was the overpowering sentiment in all the letters to Hersey and reviews of *The Wall*, even informing the more censorious Anglo-Jewish and Yiddish press. A significant work of postwar American Holocaust literature and a literary phenomenon in its time, *The Wall* was perhaps the earliest, if not the first, embodiment of a philosemitic genre that one might call "the literary righteous gentile,"⁹⁹ abetting a new, more positive image of the Jew that would characterize American literary culture in the 1950s and early 1960s.

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Notes

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- 1 John Hersey, "A Short Wait," *New Yorker* (June 1947): 29.
- 2 Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York, 1999); Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999); Anita Norich, *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and Jewish American Culture During the Holocaust* (Stanford, 2007); Lawrence Baron, "The Holocaust and American Public Memory, 1945–1960," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 62–88; Gulie Ne'eman Arad, *America, Its Jews, and the Rise of Nazism* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000); Alan Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle, 2001); Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York, 2009); "AHR Forum: Representing the Holocaust," *American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (Feb. 2010): 26–122.
- 3 The sources for this study are the rich stashes of archival letters to Hersey, his responses, and public comments on the writing of the book, both published and in manuscript, as well as the contemporaneous published English and Yiddish criticism on *The Wall*. See the John Hersey Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter cited as Hersey Papers), which comprise several call numbers, including Za Hersey and Uncat ZA MS Hersey, Uncat ZA MS 235, and Uncat ZA MS 343. For recent critical studies of Hersey and of *The Wall*, see David Sanders, *John Hersey* (New York, 1967); idem, *John Hersey Revisited* (Boston, 1990); Alvin Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980); Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago, 1980); Barbara Foley, "Fact, Fiction, Fascism: Testimony and Mimesis in Holocaust Narrative," *Comparative Literature* 34, no. 4 (Autumn 1982): 330–60; Nancy L. Huse, *The Survival Tales of John Hersey* (Troy, N.Y., 1983); Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York, 1999); Alan Rosen, *Sounds of Defiance: The Holocaust, Multilingualism, and the Problem of English* (Lincoln, Neb., 2005); and Efraim Sicher, *The Holocaust Novel* (New York, 2005). None of these works utilizes the archival material.
- 4 *The Wall* was the fourth best-selling book of 1950. Rosen, *Sounds of Defiance*, 200 n.2.
- 5 Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 8.
- 6 Pearl Kazin to John Hersey, June 29, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 8, and Mrs. Marion K. Sanders, Chief, Magazine Branch, INP, to John Hersey, May 25, 1950, Hersey Papers, ZA MS 235, Box 2, folder "Correspondence D," 1937–1951.

- 7 Morton Wishengrad wrote “The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto” for the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Theological Seminary’s Eternal Light program in 1943 and adapted the script for the radio, which aired on Mar. 30, 1950. Nadya Margulies, Supervisor, The Eternal Light Program, to Miss Friedman, secretary to Mr. William Koshland of Knopf, Sept. 29, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 8. Jeffrey Shandler and Elihu Katz, “Broadcasting American Judaism: The Radio and Television Department of JTS,” in *Tradition Renewed: A History of JTS*, ed. Jack Werthemier, vol. 2 (New York, 1997), 363–401.
- 8 See Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Imagining Europe: The Popular Arts of American Jewish Ethnography,” in *Divergent Centers: Shaping Jewish Cultures in Israel and America*, ed. Deborah Dash Moore and Ilan Troen (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 155–91.
- 9 Mary Berg, *Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary* (New York, 1945); Marek Edelman, *The Ghetto Fights* (New York, 1946); Marie Syrkin, *Blessed Is the Match: The Story of Jewish Resistance* (Philadelphia, 1947); S.[amuel] L.[oeb] Shneiderman [spelled Shnayderman in his Yiddish writing], *Between Fear and Hope* (New York, 1947); Leo W. Schwarz, ed., *The Root and the Bough: The Epic of an Enduring People* (New York, 1949); Bernard Goldstein, *Finfyor in varshever geto* (New York, 1947), later published as *The Stars Bear Witness*, trans. and ed. Leonard Shatzkin (New York, 1949); *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, trans. B. M. Mooyaart-Doubleday (Garden City, N.Y., 1952); Eli Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Stella Rodway (New York, 1960).
- 10 Shandler, *While America Watches*, esp. chap. 7.
- 11 Ezrahi, *By Words Alone*, 24–25.
- 12 *The Wall* preempted the first English translations from the Oyneg Shabes archive by eight years. See *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, ed. and trans. Jacob Sloan (New York, 1958), and Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington, Ind., 2007).
- 13 John Hersey, *The Wall* (New York, 1950), 3–11.
- 14 Robert Franciosi, “Designing John Hersey’s *The Wall*: W. A. Dwiggins, George Salter, and the Challenges of American Holocaust Memory,” *Book History* 11 (2008): 245–74, esp. 255.
- 15 Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago, 2006), 199–242.
- 16 Hersey, *The Wall*, 11.
- 17 Their names veiled in the prologue, Hersey’s actual translators were Lucy S. Dawidowicz, later the author of *The War Against the Jews, 1933–1945* (New York, 1975), and Mark Nowogrodzki, the Warsaw-born son of the secretary of the International Jewish Labor Bund, who had fled Poland via its Soviet-occupied territories shortly after the Nazi invasion. Hersey met Dawidowicz and Nowogrodzki through his friendship with Edward M. M. Warburg, chair of the American Jewish Joint Distribution

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Committee, which also paid Nowogrodzki's and Dawidowicz's salaries. Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.

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- 18 John Hersey to Mark Nowogrodzki, Oct. 13, 1949, letter in the personal collection of Mark Nowogrodzki, pp. 1–2.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 20 Hersey rendered parts of Luba's English dialogue in an accented form in "A Short Wait," a strategy he consciously avoided in *The Wall* to make the work more accessible. Rosen, *Sounds of Defiance*, 37.
- 21 Hersey, *The Wall*, copyright page.
- 22 An equally complex dissembling occurred with Zvi Kolitz's 1946 Yiddish short story, "Yossel Rakover Speaks to God," which was later mistaken as historical testimony, despite the author's assertion of its fictional genre. Sandor Goodhart, "Conscience, Conscience, Consciousness: Emmanuel Levinas, the Holocaust and the Logic of Witness," in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, ed. John K. Roth, Elizabeth Maxwell, and Margot Levy (London, 2001), 98–113.
- 23 My thanks to Jeffrey Shandler for this observation.
- 24 Sanders, *John Hersey*.
- 25 Hersey complained to his wife that, while "the most important battles of the Eastern Front, and perhaps of the whole war, are being fought in Poland . . . here I sit writing about music, literature and the drayma [*sic*] in the Metropole." John Hersey to Frances Ann Hersey, Jan. 18, 1945, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 7.
- 26 John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York, 1946); Michael J. Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience: The Reception of 'Hiroshima,'" *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (1974): 24–49.
- 27 John Hersey to Frances Ann Hersey, Oct. 6, 1944, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 7.
- 28 John Hersey to Frances Ann Hersey, Feb. 9, 1945, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 7 (emphasis is mine). Writing to his editor, David Hulburd, about his article "Prisoner 339, Klooga," which would appear in *Life Magazine* on Oct. 30, 1944, Hersey commented, "I assure you I have not fictionalized." John Hersey to David Hulburd, Oct. 5, 1944, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 39. Understatement also characterized the prose in *Hiroshima*. Sanders, *John Hersey*, 41; Huse, *Survival Tales of John Hersey*, 38–39; Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience," 37–38.
- 29 John Hersey, "Life's Reports, Home to Warsaw," *Life Magazine*, Apr. 9, 1945, pp. 16–20.
- 30 Hersey's Howland Memorial Prize lecture was later transcribed and published as "The Mechanics of a Novel" in *Yale University Library Gazette* 27, no. 1 (July 1952): 1–11, esp. 4.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 4. A decade later, Hersey published an anthology of his work about individual survival, *Here to Stay: Studies in Human Tenacity* (London, 1962).
- 32 Hersey, "Mechanics of a Novel," 5.

- 33 Ibid., 11.
- 34 Ibid., 5–6. On the mediated nature of all Holocaust testimonies, even oral histories, see James E. Young, “Holocaust Documentary Fiction: The Novelist as Eyewitness,” in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York, 1988), 200–215.
- 35 Edward M. M. Warburg to John Hersey, Sept. 3, 1947, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 36 Nathan Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore: Stories, Legends, Humor, Wisdom and Folk Songs of the Jewish People* (New York, 1948); Nahum N. Glatzer, *The Language of Jewish Faith: Selected Jewish Prayers*, trans. Jacob Sloan and Olga Marx (New York, 1947); Milton Steinberg, *Basic Judaism* (New York, 1947).
- 37 Vladka Meed (née Fegele Peltel Miedzyrzecki) had also written her own account in Yiddish, *Fun beyde tsaytn geto-moyer*, which the Educational Committee of the Workmen’s Circle published in 1948.
- 38 John Hersey to Mark Nowogrodzki, Sept. 15, 1949, personal collection of Mark Nowogrodzki. Mark Nowogrodzki to John Hersey, Oct. 21 and Dec. 7, 1949, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 8; Oct. 4, 1948, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20; Sept. 21, Sept. 22, Oct. 2, and Oct. 10, 1949, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 26. Hersey wrote to Milosz to clarify the poem’s publication history; the latter responded, “The poem was written on Easter 1943 in Warsaw. That was the only thing I could do to [*sic*] my dying Jewish friends.” Czeslaw Milosz to John Hersey, Oct. 10, 1949, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 8.
- 39 Young, “Holocaust Documentary Fiction,” 200.
- 40 Hersey, “Mechanics of a Novel,” 10.
- 41 Hersey, *The Wall*, 6.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Ibid., 11.
- 44 Hersey, “Mechanics of a Novel,” 8; idem, “The Novel of Contemporary History,” *Atlantic Monthly* 184 (Nov. 1949): 80, 82, 84.
- 45 Hersey himself retroactively dismissed the authority of his gentile authorial voice 30 years later, positing that only a survivor, a Jew, a person “who was there” could serve as the novel’s chief storyteller. Sanders, *John Hersey Revisited*, 26, citing John Hersey, *To Invent a Memory: John Hersey’s The Wall* (Baltimore, Md., 1990), 15.
- 46 Ezrahi, *By Words Alone*, 24.
- 47 Blaine Dunning to John Hersey, June 16, 1951, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 48 Herman Schwab to John Hersey, June 11, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 49 Edward F. Brown to John Hersey, June 18, 1950; Russell Twigg to John Hersey, Jan. 5, 1951; Edward Weeks to Alfred Knopf, Jr., Jan. 17, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20. The publication of Leon Uris’s *Mila 18* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), which also employed fictionalized historical documents buried in Warsaw, only confused readers

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- who continued to write to Hersey. Carolyn Wright to John Hersey, Nov. 29, 1967, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 15.
- 50 Nowogrodzki and discriminating readers familiar with Polish Jewish life questioned Hersey's seemingly arbitrary decision to use various titles, such as "Reb," "Pan," and "Froi," for his characters. Conversation with Mark Nowogrodzki, Dec. 6, 2009. See also Mendel Kochanim to John Hersey, Feb. 21, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 51 Hersey, *The Wall*, 61. See also Elliot Horowitz, "The Early Eighteenth Century Confronts the Beard: Kabbalah and Jewish Self-Fashioning," *Jewish History* 8 (1994): 95–115.
- 52 Hersey, *The Wall*, 66.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 66–67.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 72. See Mark Nowogrodzki's galley edits on this comment, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 26.
- 55 Hersey, *The Wall*, 75.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 120, 189, 196, 197, 203, 177–80.
- 57 Mark Nowogrodzki told me that he came from several generations of nonreligious Jews, so Hersey's error regarding the horsemeat did not strike him as incorrect. But several Orthodox readers noted Hersey's ritual mistakes and focused on the impermissibility of ritually slaughtering a horse. Rabbi Philip R. Alstat, *The Jewish Examiner*, Apr. 28, 1950, and Rabbi Simcho Levy to John Hersey, Mar. 29, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 58 Hersey, *The Wall*, 223–24 (emphases are mine). In postwar America, Hersey's rationalist explanation of kosher slaughter found willing readers eager to see Judaism and its kitchen as less "foreign." Jenna W. Joselit, *The Wonders of America: Reinventing Jewish Culture, 1880–1950* (New York, 1994), 177–83.
- 59 Szymon Rudnicki, "Ritual Slaughter as a Political Issue," *Polin* 7 (1992): 147–60.
- 60 Hersey, *The Wall*, 226.
- 61 On the rabbinic tradition of reciting 100 blessings daily, see *BT Menachot* 43b.
- 62 Hersey, *The Wall*, 227.
- 63 On circumcision's persistent observance, even among disaffiliated modern Jews, see Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (Chicago, 1996).
- 64 Hersey, *The Wall*, 186.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 626–27.
- 66 Hersey also had his alias Levinson give a long exposition on modern Jewish identity in the character's bunker lecture on the Yiddish writer I. L. Peretz's story *Three Gifts*. Hersey, *The Wall*, 546–50. For a discussion of Peretz's significance during the Holocaust, see Norich, *Discovering Exile*, 118–20. The possibility that Hersey knew of the Vilna Yiddishist Zelig Kalmanovitch's ghetto essay on Peretz is tantalizing given the personal closeness between Lucy S. Dawidowicz and Kalmanovitch, yet

- Hersey does not mention Kalmanovitch in his copious research notes for *The Wall*.
- 67 Hersey, *The Wall*, 187–88.
- 68 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi described this inchoate if deeply felt modern Jewish identity as belonging to “psychological Jews,” who, having no “special need to define themselves as Jews” nonetheless feel “irreducibly Jewish” and are acutely aware of antisemitism. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud’s Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, Conn., 1991), 10.
- 69 Mrs. Herbert L. Steiner to John Hersey, Apr. 11, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 70 Gertrude Sheffield Gring to John Hersey, June 27, 1950; Mrs. Joseph F. Cannon to John Hersey, Feb. 10, 1950; Edith Hersey to John Hersey, Mar. 20, 1950; Sylvia B. Davidson to John Hersey, Apr. 24, 1950; Pauline Nidus to John Hersey, Mar. 29, 1951, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 71 Esther E. Shapiro to John Hersey, Aug. 5, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20. Levinson articulated the desire in his diary entry of Nov. 4, 1942, that by joining the underground he would contribute his share, “no matter how trifling, to the defeat of Anti-Humanity.” Hersey, *The Wall*, 425.
- 72 Louis Goldman to John Hersey, Apr. 2, 1961, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 73 See, e.g., Orville Prescott, *New York Times*, July 7, 1950; William Shirer, *New York Herald Tribune*, Feb. 26, 1950, sec. 7, 1, 14; Richard Sullivan, *Chicago Sunday Tribune*, Feb. 26, 1950, part 4, 3; James Graffman, *Daily Compass*, Feb. 28, 1950; Maxwell Geismar, *Saturday Review of Literature*, Mar. 4, 1950, pp. 14, 16; Richard Rovere, *Harper’s Magazine* 200, no. 1198 (Mar. 1950): 102–7.
- 74 Kip [no surname] to John Hersey, Oct. 25, no year on the letter but in a file dated 1949, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 8.
- 75 Richard M. Clurman to John Hersey, Feb. 3, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 76 Granville Hicks, “Review of 1950 in Literature,” *New Leader*, Jan. 29, 1951, p. 11.
- 77 Alfred Kazin, “Books: John Hersey and Noach Levinson,” *New Yorker*, Mar. 4, 1950, p. 96.
- 78 Richard Strouse to John Hersey, June 23, 1952, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 79 Milton Steinberg to John Hersey, Mar. 1, 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 80 *Ibid.* (emphasis is mine).
- 81 Abraham J. Karp, “History Into Fiction,” *Menorah Journal* 38, no. 2 (Autumn 1950): 217. In his review, Karp distinguishes between “authentic” source material—the diaries and documents written by participants—and Hersey’s fictional work.

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- 82 Maurice Samuel, "The Story Must Build Itself," *Jewish Frontier*, Nov. 26, 1950, pp. 228–49.
- 83 Hersey, *The Wall*, 632.
- 84 Nathan Ausubel to John Hersey, Nov. 19, 1949, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Hersey and the leadership of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, both of whom were very interested in the novel's reception in the American Yiddish press, received Yiddish press synopses from Harry Sackler in Mar. and Apr. 1950, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 23.
- 87 Norich, *Discovering Exile*.
- 88 Leon Crystal, *Forverts*, Mar. 4, 1950, p. 4; Mar. 6, 1950, p. 4; Mar. 7, 1950, p. 2; Hillel Rogoff, *Forverts*, Mar. 12, 1950, p. 5; *Der tog*, Mar. 5, 1950, "Bookshelf Brief" (in English), end of sec. 1, unpaginated; S. Dingol, *Der tog*, Mar. 5, 1950, sec. 2, p. 1; D[avid] Lehrer, *Der tog*, Mar. 8, 1950, p. 7; Mar. 12, 1950, p. 5; Mar. 19, 1950, p. 2; Mar. 26, 1950, p. 7; A[ron] Glantz, *Der tog*, Apr. 9, 1950; J. B. Bailin, *Morgn-frayhayt*, Mar. 11, 1950, p. 3; Mar. 18, 1950, p. 3; Mar. 25, 1950, p. 3; Apr. 1, 1950, p. 5; S. L. Shnayderman, *Morgn-zhurnal*, Mar. 8, 1950, p. 9; Mar. 13, 1950, p. 7; Mar. 15, 1950, p. 9; Mar. 20, 1950, p. 9; Mar. 22, 1950, p. 9.
- 89 Leon Crystal, "The Wall: John Hersey's Novel about the Warsaw Ghetto," *Forverts*, Mar. 4, 1950, p. 4.
- 90 Hillel Rogoff, "The Wall: The Novel About the Warsaw Ghetto, by the Young American Writer John Hersey," *Forverts*, Mar. 12, 1950, sec. 2, p. 5.
- 91 Dingol, *Der tog*, Mar. 5, 1950, sec. 2, p. 1.
- 92 S. L. Shnayderman, "Noah Levinson, the Main Protagonist of 'The Wall,' the Novel about the Jewish Ghetto in Warsaw," *Morgn-zhurnal*, Mar. 8, 1950, p. 9.
- 93 English-language communist and communist-Jewish journalists also found fault with Hersey's politics. See, e.g., John Stuart, "Story of Resistance," *Jewish Life* (Apr. 1950): 13–15; Louis Harap, *Masses & Mainstream* (Apr. 1950): 83–88; and Robert Friedman, *Daily Worker*, Feb. 28, 1950, p. 11.
- 94 Bernard Goldstein, a bundist, was initially upset with the book's depiction of its role. Leonard Shatzkin to John Hersey, Oct. 25, 1949, Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 20. Yet in a letter to Hersey on Dec. 7, 1949, Shatzkin assured the author that, though Goldstein still disagreed with certain elements in the book related to the Bund, he wanted "to express his deepest gratitude to you for writing the book." Hersey Papers, Uncat ZA MS 235, Box 8.
- 95 Rokhl Oyerbakh, "Vegn bukh, 'Di vant' fun John Hersey," *Di goldene keyt: Fertl-yorshrift far literatur un gezelschaftlekhe problemen* 8 (1951): 162–80.
- 96 For a more extensive biography of Oyerbakh, go to http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Oyerbakh_Rokhl.

97 Oyerbakh, "Vegn bukh," 172–74.

98 Norich, *Discovering Exile*; David G. Roskies, *The Jewish Search for a Usable Past* (Bloomington, Ind., 1999), esp. chap. 3.

99 Hersey continued to play this role with his journalistic writing about the young state of Israel. John Hersey, "A Reporter at Large: The In-gathering of the Exiles," *New Yorker*, Nov. 19, 1951; idem, "Our Far Flung Correspondents: The Kibbutz," *New Yorker*, Apr. 19, 1952. On the postwar fascination of gentile American writers with the Jewish "New York intellectuals," see Julian Levinson, "Connoisseurs of Angst: The Jewish Mystique and Postwar American Literary Culture," in *Philosemitism in History*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (Cambridge, Engl., 2011): 235–56.

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