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How the Golem Came to Prague

EDAN DEKEL AND DAVID GANTT GURLEY

The legend of the Golem, the mute clay servant brought to life by Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague and who ran amok one Sabbath, is one of the most enduring and imaginative tales in modern Jewish folklore. Although its roots ultimately lie in late antique rabbinic literature, the story dilates somewhat dramatically in the nineteenth century.[1] While

1. On the Golem tradition in general, see Elaine L. Graham, "Body of Clay, Body of Glass," in *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture* (Manchester, 2002), 84–108; Lewis Glinert, "Golem: The Making of a Modern Myth," *Symposium* 55 (2001): 78–94; Peter Schäfer, "The Magic of the Golem: The Early Development of the Golem Legend," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 46 (1995): 249–61; Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, N.Y., 1990); Emily D. Bilski, *Golem! Danger, Deliverance, and Art* (New York, 1988); Byron L. Sherwin, *The Golem Legend: Origins and Implications* (Lanham, Md., 1985); Gershom Scholem, "The Idea of the Golem," in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), 158–204; Frederic Thieberger, *The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague: His Life and Work and the Legend of the Golem* (London, 1955); Hans L. Held, *Das Gespenst des Golem* (Munich, 1927); Chaim Bloch, *Der Prager Golem* (Berlin, 1920); Konrad Müller, "Die Golemsage und die Sage von der lebenden Statue," *Mitteilungen der Schlesischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* 20 (1919): 1–40; Nathan Grün, *Der hohe Rabbi Löw und sein Sagenkreis* (Prague, 1885); and passim the various essays in Alexander Putik, ed., *Path of Life: Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel* (Prague, 2009). On the literary reception of the Golem legend, see Cathy S. Gelbin, *The Golem Returns: From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808–2008* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 2011); Shnayer Z. Leiman, "The Adventure of the Maharal of Prague in London: R. Yudl Rosenberg and the Golem of Prague," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 36 (2002): 26–58; Eveline Goodman-Thau, "Golem, Adam oder Antichrist—Kabbalistische Hintergründe der Golemlegende in der jüdischen und deutschen Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts," in *Kabbala und die Literatur der Romantik: Zwischen Magie nnd Trope*, ed. E. Goodman-Thau et al. (Tübingen, 1999), 81–134; Hillel J. Kieval, "Pursuing the Golem of Prague: Jewish Culture and the Invention of a Tradition," *Modern Judaism* 17 (1997): 1–23 (reprinted as *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* [Berkeley, Calif., 2000], 95–113); Eli Yassif, *The Golem of Prague and Other Tales of Wonder* (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1991);

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most studies of the Golem tradition acknowledge that the association of the legend with R. Loew and Prague is an early nineteenth-century phenomenon, there has been little exploration of the first stages of that process of association, before the mid-1840s. There was, however, a surprising amount of literary activity surrounding the Prague version of the legend in the decade immediately preceding. In this essay, we would like to focus on the period between 1834 and 1847, and particularly on two sources near either end of that chronological range that have hitherto never been discussed in any printed scholarship on the Golem. Together they shed valuable light on the transformation of a shadowy oral legend into perhaps the most famous of all modern Jewish literary fantasies.

The popularity and plasticity of the Golem gain momentum from a short entry by Jakob Grimm in 1808 in the literary and folklore journal *Zeitung für Einsiedler* (Journal for Hermits), the principal organ of the Heidelberg Romantics edited by Grimm's mentors Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano:[2]

> The Polish Jews, after speaking certain prayers and observing fast days, made the figure of a man out of clay or loam, and when they speak the miracle-working *Schemhamphoras* over it, the figure comes

Jay Jacoby, "The Golem in Jewish Literature," *Judaica Librarianship* 1 (1984): 100–104; Arnold Goldsmith, *The Golem Remembered, 1909–1980: Variations of a Jewish Legend* (Detroit, 1981); Sigrid Mayer, *Golem: Die literarische Rezeption eines Stoffes* (Bern, 1975); Beate Rosenfeld, *Die Golemsage und ihre Verwertung in der deutschen Literatur* (Breslau, 1934). On the Golem of Prague specifically, see also John Neubauer, "How Did the Golem Get to Prague?" in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries,* vol. 4, *Types and Stereotypes*, ed. M. Cornis-Pope and J. Neubauer (Amsterdam, 2010), 296–307; Norbert Nübler, "Der Prager Golem," in *Jüdische Welten in Osteuropa*, ed. A. Engel-Braunschmidt and E. Hübner (Frankurt, 2005), 209–18; Vladimír Sadek, "Stories of the Golem and their Relation to the Work of Rabbi Löw of Prague," *Judaica Bohemiae* 23 (1987): 85–91; Egon E. Kisch, "The Golem," *Tales from Seven Ghettos* (London, 1948), 153–65; Vilém Klein, "Pražský Golem," *Věstník Židovské obce náboženské v Praze* 3 (1936): 27–28.

2. On the Heidelberg Romantics, see Friedrich Strack, ed., *200 Jahre Heidelberger Romantik* (Heidelberg, 2008); Jon Vanden Heuvel, *A German Life in the Age of Revolution: Joseph Görres, 1776–1848* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 121–49, and the literature discussed there. There has been no study of the *Zeitung für Einsiedler* since Reinhold Steig, "Zur Einsiedlerzeitung," *Euphorion* 19 (1912): 229–41, but see Jessen's brief *Nachwort* to the facsimile reprint of 1962 (Hans Jessen, ed., *Zeitung für Einsiedler mit Nachwort* [Darmstadt]). For a brief discussion of Grimm's piece in relation to the surrounding articles in the same issue of the journal, see Gelbin, *The Golem Returns*, 24.

alive. It is true that he cannot speak, but he understands reasonably well what anyone says to him and commands him to do. They call him *Golem* and use him as a servant to do all sorts of housework, but he may never leave the house alone. On his forehead is written *Aemaeth* (Truth; God). However, he increases in size daily and easily becomes larger and stronger than all his housemates, regardless of how small he was at first. Therefore, fearing him, they rub out the first letter, so that nothing remains but *Maeth* (he is dead), whereupon he collapses and is dissolved again into clay.

But once, out of carelessness, someone allowed his Golem to become so tall that he could no longer reach his forehead. Then, out of fear, the master ordered the servant to take off his boots, thinking that he would bend down and that then the master could reach his forehead. This is what happened, and the first letter was successfully erased, but the whole load of clay fell on the Jew and crushed him.[3]

Grimm's version is quite minimal compared to some of the fully developed narratives of the later nineteenth century, but it was enough to spark the imagination of several leading Romantics such as Arnim and E. T. A. Hoffmann. One of the earliest, and certainly most exaggerated, examples of the ludic nature of the legend's reception is Arnim's novel *Isabella von Aegypten* (1812), which features the Golem as an estranged bride filled with "Hochmut, Wollust, und Geiz" (pride, lewdness, and parsimony).[4] In fact, many critics have read Arnim's sexually charged Golem Bella as a critique of Romantic desire, a testimony to the legend's departure from rabbinic quarters.[5] Heinrich Heine's analysis of Arnim's novel in his influential *Die romantische Schule* (The Romantic School) undoubtedly also contributed to the Golem's increasing popularity.[6] By

3. Jakob Grimm, "Entstehung der Verlagspoesie," *Zeitung für Einsiedler* 1 (1808): 56 (= Jakob Grimm, *Kleinere Schriften* [Berlin, 1869], 4:22). All translations are our own unless otherwise specified. We have preserved Grimm's original spelling in his transcriptions of Hebrew words. The piece was only the fifth article published by the young Grimm in his varied and illustrious career as a philologist, folklorist, and jurist.

4. Achim von Arnim, *Isabella von Aegypten: Kaiser Karl des Fünften erste Jugendliebe* (Berlin, 1812), 76.

5. See Michael Andermatt, "Artificial Life and Romantic Brides," in *Romantic Prose Fiction*, ed. G. Gillespie (London, 2008), 209–11, and the earlier literature cited there. On Arnim's Golem as a symbol of "the corrupt nature of the Jew per se," see Gelbin, *The Golem Returns*, 30–35.

6. Heinrich Heine, *Die romantische Schule* (Hamburg, 1836), 240–52.

the middle of the century, the Golem had become folded into a larger set of Romantic motifs that included the doppelgänger, galvanization, Faustian sorcery, and various automata including, most famously, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein's monster.[7] Succumbing to the Romantic appetite for all things legendary, the ancient rabbinic story of man's mystical simulation of the divine creation becomes a trope of mutability. Like the piece of clay from which he is created, the literary Golem can be shaped and molded to resemble any form, from the spectral figures in Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's poetry to Leopold Kompert's nostalgic project and finally to Yudl Rosenberg's great protector of the Jewish people at the turn of the twentieth century.[8]

Since at least the middle of the seventeenth century the legend had been centered on the Polish city of Chelm and the famous R. Elijah Ba'al Shem.[9] As Jewish writers responded to Grimm, Arnim, and Brentano with their own literary versions, the legend began to migrate and crystallize around R. Judah Loew, known as the Maharal of Prague. The decisive move in establishing this new locus for the legend was the publication of Leopold Weisel's "Der Golem" in 1847 in an influential collection of Jewish tales of Prague issued by the Bohemian editor and publisher Wolf Pascheles.[10] This collection was an instant success and went through many editions over the next six decades, thus ensuring that Weisel's version became the standard for the rest of the century. Weisel fixes the legend to the Maharal, despite the fact that R. Loew was never in his

7. On the supernatural in Romanticism, see Meyer H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1973). On the possible influence of the Golem legend on Shelley's novel, see Jane Davidson, "Golem—Frankenstein—Golem of Your Own," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 7 (1996): 228–43; Graham, "Body of Clay," 85–86; Gelbin, *The Golem Returns*, 35–37.

8. Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, "Die Golems," *Kölnische Zeitung*, December 15, 1844; Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, "Halt Fest!" *Letzte Gaben* (Hannover, 1860), 2–4; Leopold Kompert, "Der Golem: November 1882," in *Sämtliche Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. S. Hock (Leipzig, 1906), 10:28; Yudl Rosenberg, *Sefer nifla'ot Maharal 'im ha-golem* (Piotrkow, Poland, 1909).

9. On the Golem of Chelm, see Idel, *Golem*, 207–12; Scholem, "Idea of the Golem," 200–203.

10. Wolf Pascheles, *Gallerie der Sipurim* [sic], *eine Sammlung jüdischer Sagen, Märchen und Geschichten, als ein Beitrag zur Völkerkunde* (Prague, 1847), 51–52. On Pascheles and his collection, see Chone Shmeruk, "Der Proger Pasheles-farlag un di shaykhesn fun zayne bikher tsu yidish," in *Jiddische Philologie: Festschrift für Erika Timm* (Tübingen, 1999), 21–25; Karel Krejčí, "Les legendes juives pragoises," *Judaica Bohemiae* 4 (1968): 3–19; Frédéric Garnier, "La vie juive à Prague à travers les *Sippurim*," *Tsafon* 52 (2006): 51–64.

lifetime associated with kabbalistic practices of the sort described in the *Sefer yetsirah* (Book of Creation), one of the earliest Jewish mystical texts, and a volume that actually enjoyed a revival in Loew's sixteenth-century Prague.[11] Because of the importance of Weisel's text as a baseline for the Prague version, we present a translation here:

> In the reign of Rudolph II among the Prague Jews lived a man named Bezalel Loew, known, because of his tall stature and great learning, as high Rabbi Loew. This rabbi was highly skilled in all the arts and sciences, especially in the Kabbalah. By means of this art he was able to bring to life figures, formed of clay or carved from wood, that, like real men, did what was assigned to them. Such self-made servants are worth much: they do not eat, they do not drink and do not need wages; they work tirelessly, you can scold them and they give no answer. The Rabbi Loew had formed such a servant out of clay, laid the *Shem* (magic formula) in its mouth, and brought him to life with it. This constructed servant performed all the menial duties in the house throughout the week: chopping wood, carrying water, sweeping the streets, etc. But on the Sabbath he had to rest, therefore, the master took the *Shem* from his mouth and made him dead before the rest day arrived. But once it happened that the rabbi forgot to do this and misfortune followed. The magic servant became enraged, tore down the houses, threw rocks around, uprooted trees, and thrashed about horribly in the streets. People rushed to let the rabbi know about this, but the difficulty was great; it was already the Sabbath, and any work, whether creating or destroying, is strictly prohibited, so how to undo the magic? To the rabbi, his Golem was like the broom to the sorcerer's apprentice in Goethe's poem. Fortunately no one had yet inaugurated the Sabbath in the Altneu-Synagogue, and since this is the oldest synagogue in Prague, everything depends on it, and there was still time to take the *Shem* from the wild fellow. The master ran, tore the magic formula from the mouth of the Golem—the clay lump fell and crumbled to pieces. Terrified by this scene, the rabbi no longer wanted to make such a dangerous servant. Even today, pieces of the Golem can be seen in the attic of the Altneu-Synagogue.

As the legend became increasingly associated with Prague and R. Loew, it became moored and unable to retain what folklorists describe as its

11. On the *Sefer yetsirah* and Golem-making, see Scholem, "Idea of the Golem," 180–95.

ecotypified nature.[12] An ecotypfied legend is one that is free to take on the locality of the place it arrives in because it is essentially and narratologically located in no one place. Place and name are not fundamental to the narration of the story; they are blanks to be filled in by the local storyteller. On this model, the Golem legend told in the streets of Prague differs from the one told in the streets of Vienna, Copenhagen, or Chelm only by the particular rabbis and towns it invokes. The point of adopting the tale is to lay claim that this all happened not very far from here. Once local variation is removed as a variable from the narration, then the material ceases to be legendary and undergoes a transformation into a full-fledged literary phenomenon, which somewhat counterintuitively allows for all sorts of expansions and revisions. In other words, once the rabbi and city are frozen in the European consciousness, the Golem is figuratively able to come alive and run amok. This helps explain the dramatic literary recastings by Jewish writers after the Weisel version appears, such as those by Ludwig Kalisch, Leopold Kompert, Moritz Bermann, and Ludwig Frankl.[13]

But, as we have already suggested, Weisel was not the first writer to associate the Golem with Prague. In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to an earlier version of the Prague tale reported in 1841 by the non-Jewish journalist and folklorist Franz Klutschak.[14] Likewise, several studies have acknowledged, without much discussion, earlier literary attestations going back as far as Berthold Auerbach's popular historical novel *Spinoza* in 1837.[15] Compared to the prismatic gleam of the

12. See, for example, Timothy Tangherlini, "'It Happened Not Too Far from Here . . . ': A Survey of Legend Theory and Characterization," *Western Folklore* 49 (1990): 385, "Legend, typically, is a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs."

13. Ludwig Kalisch, "Die Geschichte von dem Golem," *Deutsches Museum: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und öffentliches Leben* 14 (1864): 265–70 (= Ludwig Kalisch, *Bilder aus meiner Knabenzeit* [Leipzig, 1872], 108–16); Kompert, "Der Golem"; Moritz Bermann, "Die Legende vom Golem," in *Alt und Neu: Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in Sage und Geschichte* (Vienna, 1883), 404–7; Ludwig A. Frankl, *Gedicht in Sieben Gesängen* (Vienna, 1862).

14. Franz Klutschak, "Das Golam [*sic*] des Rabbi Löw," *Panorama des Universums* 8 (1841): 75–80. On this source, see Kieval, "Pursuing the Golem."

15. Berthold Auerbach, *Spinoza: Ein historischer Roman* (Stuttgart, 1837), 18–20. Other works from this period that regularly appear in surveys include Gustav Philippson, "Der Golem," *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 5 (1841): 629–31; Abraham Tendlau, "Der Golem des Hoch-Rabbi-Löb," in *Das Buch der Sagen und*

post-Weisel versions, the attestations in the decade before Weisel, when, it should be stressed, the details of the legend's rigidity are still being worked out, are quite sober. These earlier, perhaps even purer, literary renditions present a more granulated picture of Jewish storytelling in the early nineteenth century.

It is precisely the literary nature of these renditions, however, that has made scholars resist them. Whereas Weisel and Klutschak present their versions as folkloric records along the model that Grimm establishes, these other narrations are self-consciously artistic. Thus despite the fact that Auerbach's version has been almost universally acknowledged as the first, and that he quite intentionally reports the Golem tale through a story told by an old maid who heard it in her home village, his version has not been given much serious attention.[16]

There is, however, an early source that takes the form of a folkloric report. In 1836, a full year before Auerbach's novel was published, a brief item appeared in the November 16 issue of the *Oesterreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichts- und Staatskunde*. This leading Viennese literary magazine published a series of folk tales from around the German-speaking world under the title "Vaterländische Sagen und Legenden" (Tales and Legends of the Fatherland). Among these is the following brief untitled entry:[17]

> Under the roof of the oldest synagogue in Prague (the Altneuschul), because of the belief that misfortune would meet the workers, there is

Legenden Jüdischer Vorzeit (Stuttgart, 1842), 17–25; Therese von M. [Daniel Uffo Horn], "Der Rabbi von Prag," *Libussa*, ed. P. Aloys Klar (Prague, 1842), 1:184–218.

16. Kieval ("Pursuing the Golem") for example, does not even mention Auerbach and instead promotes the notion that Klutschak is the first reporter of the Prague version. On the folkloric aspect of Auerbach's version, see Jonathan Skolnik, "Writing Jewish History between Gutzkow and Goethe: Auerbach's *Spinoza* and the Birth of Modern Jewish Historical Fiction," *Prooftexts* 19 (1999): 114–15.

17. Ludwig A. Frankl, "Vaterländische Sagen und Legenden IV," *Oesterreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichts- und Staatskunde* 92 (1836): 368. Joseph Davis ("The Legend of Maharal before the Golem," *Judaica Bohemiae* 45 [2009]: 41, n. 2) notes the existence of this source and attributes its discovery to an anonymous online writer (http://onthemainline.blogspot.com/2009/11/earlier-written-source-for-golem-of.html), but neither Davis nor the blog describes the contents of the 1836 entry or identifies its author. Otherwise, the source has never been mentioned in any scholarly context. We offer the first translation and analysis of this early version of the Prague legend, preserving Frankl's original spelling of transliterated Hebrew words.

preserved, in its primeval form and color, a piece of trunk-like clay, which is known by the name "*Golem*."

A wise rabbi (still called High-Reb Leb by the Jews), who diligently occupied himself with the *Kabbalah* on every secret, silent night, formed a human-like figure and put a secret name ("*Schem*") of God under its tongue. Thus it was brought to life and performed the duties of a servant. But when the first three stars appeared in the sky on Friday evening, and the beadle (*Schames*, usually called *Mulassim* by the peoples of the Orient) announced the Sabbath, the rabbi, because even the damned spirits (only the Lord God creates a blessed one) are permitted to rest on the Sabbath, took the secret name of God from under his servant's tongue, so that he became again a lifeless piece of clay. Once, it is told, the rabbi suffered the pain of the loss of his beloved son and forgot to de-animate his servant, when the beadle again proclaimed the peace of the Sabbath. Then this one was seized as if by madness; his eyes rolled and burned like flaming wheels, his breath was visible and sparkled with wonderful colors, and he began a terrible destruction in the house. Everyone was very terrified and cried with anxious horror for the rabbi. However, he was not in any condition to restrain the creature in order to take the secret name from under his tongue. So he spoke a deep-cutting curse, and the servant became again what it was before, a piece of clay. The rabbi never dared again to practice the secret science.

The article is signed "L.A. Frankl," which, given the venue and the year, can only refer to Ludwig August Frankl, a young Jewish poet originally from Bohemia, who had made a name for himself on the Viennese literary scene with a series of popular poetic ballads on patriotic themes, and then later on various classical topics. In the 1840s he edited an influential literary journal, the *Sonntagsblätter*, that published the first so-called ghetto tales by Kompert and others.[18] He subsequently became secretary of the

18. See Jonathan M. Hess, *Middlebrow Literature and the Making of German-Jewish Identity* (Stanford, Calif., 2010), 82; Gabriele von Glasenapp, *Ghettoliteratur: Eine Dokumentation zur deutsch-jüdischen Literaturgeschichte des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 2005), 2:862–63; Kenneth Ober, *Die Ghettogeschichte: Entstehung und Entwicklung einer Gattung* (Göttingen, 2001), 38–39; Hildegard Kernmayer, *Judentum im Wiener Feuilleton (1848–1905): Exemplarische Untersuchungen zum literarästhetischen und politischen Diskurs der Moderne* (Tübingen, 1998), 268; Stefanie Dollar, "Die Sonntagsblätter von Ludwig August Frankl" (Ph.D. dissertation; Vienna, 1932).

Jewish community of Vienna and wrote a memoir of his trip to Palestine which became a crucial text in the burgeoning Zionist movement.[19]

Frankl's prominence makes the omission of this text from the bibliographies and literary histories quite surprising, but it is especially strange given the fact that, as we noted above, Frankl does figure in Golem studies as the author of one of the post-Weisel radical applications of the Prague tale, the *Gedicht in Sieben Gesängen* (Poem in Seven Cantos) written in 1862. Whatever the reason for its obscurity, this 1836 entry is one of the earliest known texts to associate the Golem with the Maharal and Prague.[20] Moreover, while it is clearly presented as a folkloric report, it displays a surprising degree of literary artistry, thereby bridging the gap between the obviously literary renditions of Auerbach, Tendlau et al., and the Klutschak/Weisel versions. We will return to that artistry in a moment, but we must first examine how a Jewish literary legend of the Golem came into being.

As we have already seen, Grimm ushers in the new age of the literary Golem in the nineteenth century. Before 1808 there is no coherent liter-

19. Despite his importance to both Austrian and Jewish literary history of the nineteenth century, there has been only one monograph on Frankl and his work: Eugen Wolbe, *Ludwig August Frankl, der Dichter und Menschenfreund* (Frankfurt a-M, 1910). His activities in the second half of the century feature in most histories of Jewish literature and politics of that era, but his early years have not been examined closely. For a general overview of that early career, see William O. McCagg, *A History of the Habsburg Jews, 1670–1918* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989), 89–90.

20. Currently, the earliest known source to make this association is Joseph Seligmann Kohn, *Das jüdische Gil Blas* (Leipzig, 1834), 20–22, reprinted as Joseph Seligmann Kohn, *Das jüdische Gil Blas: Neu herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Wilma Abeles Iggers* (Munich, 1993), 30–32. See Gabriele von Glasenapp, "Popularitätskonzepte jüdischer Folklore: Die Prager Märchen, Sagen und Legenden in der Sammlung Sippurim," in *Populäres Judentum: Medien, Debatten, Lesestoffe*, ed. C. Haug, F. Mayer, and M. Podewski (Berlin, 2009), 31, n. 31; Gabriele von Glasenapp, "'. . . wie eine schaurige Sage der Vorzeit'—Die Ritualmordbeschuldigung in der jüdischen Literatur des frühen 20 Jahrhunderts," in *Integration und Ausgrenzung: Studien zur deutsch-jüdischen Literatur und Kulturgeschichte von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. M. Gelber, J. Hessing, and R. Jutte (Berlin, 2009), 198, n. 16. Gelbin, (*The Golem Returns,* 45) erroneously identifies the earliest written source for the Prague Golem as Ludwig [*sic*] Philippson's "Der Golem und die Ehebrecherin" from 1834. In actuality, this ballad was published by Gustav Philippson in the journal *Sulamith* in 1843 (8:254–57). Kohn's Golem tale is embedded in a lengthy footnote to a description of the Altneuschul. An evaluation of the possible relationship between Kohn's version and other early versions of the Prague Golem will appear in a future article by the present authors.

ary narrative about the Golem, only fragmentary references by Christian Hebraists and various halakhic discussions (such as, for instance, whether a Golem can count in a *minyan*).[21] Somewhat paradoxically, Grimm himself does not offer a strictly literary tale but rather a minimal folkloric report that hardly resembles the fairy tale style of the famous *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Childrens' and Household Tales), which he and his brother Wilhelm were already collecting and which would appear only four years later. Grimm's intervention into the Golem tradition has two crucial features. First, by omitting any discussion of his sources, Grimm creates the strong, but false, impression that he is presenting a contemporary oral tale that he has collected and transcribed. In fact, his text is clearly based on a mid-seventeenth-century Latin account of the Chelm Golem by Christoph Arnold in a letter to the well-known Christian Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil.[22]

Second, although he translates the main narrative from Arnold, he universalizes it by stripping the name of R. Elijah and the city of Chelm and attributing it to the "Polish Jews" and an ambiguous "they." For his primarily Christian audience, this elision frees the legend from any historical specificity and subsequently makes it vulnerable to the esemplastic power of the Romantic worldview. When that audience hears the story for the first time, the legend is for a brief moment skeletal, unauthorized, and plastic. Whatever Arnim's Golem Bella is, she is certainly not the original Jewish Golem. The same can be said for all of the non-Jewish versions of the Golem before Klutschak's account in 1841. They are all extraordinary for the degree of playfulness with which they treat the motif of the Golem, but they are not particularly interested in the content of the original tale nor do they make an attempt to mimic any of the defining characteristics of a legend, such as being "short (mono-) episodic, traditional . . . [or] performed in a conversational mode."[23]

The Jewish response to Grimm's removal of the rabbinic name is to contradict the sensational pitfalls of demonic desire and the charnel house monstrosities that haunt the Gothic imaginations of the German Romantics.[24] For Jewish writers during this window before Weisel, the legend

21. On these earlier versions, see especially Idel, *Golem*; and Scholem, "Idea of the Golem."

22. Johann C. Wagenseil, *Sota. hoc est Liber Mischnicus de uxore adulterii suspecta* (Altdorf, 1674), 1198–99. Rosenfeld (*Golemsage* 39), seems to be the first positively to identify Grimm's source.

23. Tangherlini, "It Happened Not Too Far," 85.

24. Although one can rarely speak of a unified "Jewish response," we refer here to those sources written in the 1830s and early 1840s, which all reflect a deep engagement with German-language literature. No text written in any lan-

remains essentially a story about rabbinic mastery of the holy word, a practice highly regarded as the patrimony of the scholarly elite. Therefore, the natural response is to reattach the legend to a rabbi who is beyond all doubt, that is, a move toward the center of things. This may partially explain why it is attached to the Maharal; it is exactly because he was not a kabbalist that he makes such an attractive agent for the story. If the Christians saw the Kabbalah as some kind of radical Jewish thaumaturgy, then the way to lend it authority was to attach it to a rabbi whose spiritual profile was beyond reproach, a rabbi so serious that he even met with the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II in 1592.[25]

As we have seen, the move to the center (both religiously and geographically, since Prague is much closer to the heart of the Hapsburg Empire than the Polish city of Chelm) was a spectacular success. For nearly a quarter of a century after Grimm's report there is no written record of any specific ecotype of the Golem legend, and one could imagine countless variants circulating orally. But once the tale is fixed in Prague, it quickly becomes the standard reflex and ultimately the authoritative version through Weisel, dominating the next six decades until it is swallowed up by Rosenberg's more fully developed Prague narratives.[26]

That the attachment of Grimm's uprooted Golem to the Maharal is in large part an attempt to emphasize the power of the holy word is evident in one of the main differences between Jewish and Christian accounts of the Golem in this period. All Christian accounts follow Grimm in identifying the utterance of holy words as the key to the animation process. The Jewish versions, on the other hand, emphasize the act of writing the secret name and inserting it into a cavity of the head (usually the mouth), an act which by definition defies pronunciation. It is not a magical spell

guage other than German explicitly associates the Golem with Prague until later in the nineteenth century. In fact, the first Czech-language source to mention the Golem is Jaroslav Vrchlický, *Rabínská moudrost* (Prague, 1886). Cf. Neubauer, "How Did the Golem Get to Prague?" 301–2, but note that Neubauer misdates the work to 1884. For a brief discussion of Vrchlický's play, see Veronika Ambros, "How Did the Golems (and Robots) Enter the Stage and Screen and Leave Prague?" in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, vol. 4, *Types and Stereotypes*, ed. M. Cornis-Pope and J. Neubauer (Amsterdam, 2010), 310.

25. On the life and work of R. Judah Loew ben Bezalel, see the various essays in Putik, *Path of Life*; Theiberger, *Great Rabbi Loew*.

26. For the argument that the Golem tale became fixed in Prague as part of a larger Bohemian Jewish "process of identity formation," see Neubauer, "How Did the Golem Get to Prague?" 301. Neubauer, however, is not aware of any sources earlier than Auerbach, *Spinoza*.

that brings the Golem to life; it is an act of literacy, that is, an act of reading, studying, and writing, which are all meditations on the nature of God. This act strongly distances itself from the conjuring power of the words used by Grimm's anonymous "they," where "*Schemhamphoras*" is more like abracadabra.[27] Moreover this act of literacy is about rewriting or reclaiming the creation in Eden by transferring the divine voice into the written form of the divine name. It would seem, then, that only a rabbi with a specific name can control the Holy Name. Man might not be able to speak for God, but he can quote him on parchment.

If we turn back to Frankl now, we can see how he refines these elements with consummate artistry. One of the most striking features of his version is the fact that it does not conclude with an etiological or anthropological anecdote as does Weisel's and later Jewish versions, but rather it begins with such a notice:[28]

> Under the roof of the oldest synagogue in Prague (the Altneuschul), because of the belief that misfortune would meet the workers, there is preserved, in its primeval form and color, a piece of trunk-like clay, which is known by the name "Golem."

This creates a telescopic effect which moves us from the outside of the synagogue inside, as if exposing some hidden or forbidden space, where lying in the corner is an anatomical piece of trunk-like clay. No other version implies that after the Golem is deanimated for the final time he retains some resemblance or shape of his former self. Frankl also reports on the superstition that prevents the workers who have done repairs in the synagogue over the years from disturbing the Golem's remains. Whether or not this opening notice is authentic oral material, it certainly adds to the mysteriousness of the legend to follow while simultaneously adding a layer of authenticity that the other versions are not able to match: if one doubts the truth of the tale, let him ask the workers who have seen it. They will not touch it but they can testify to its existence. That is why it is still there today.

Further contributing to the authenticity of the tale is the parenthetical remark about the beadle, "usually called *Mulassim* by the peoples of the Orient." This aligns Jewish religious practice toward the east, thereby

27. Grimm, "Entstehung," 56. *Schemhamphoras* is the medieval kabbalistic term for one of the secret names of God derived through manipulation of letters in the Torah. The term is a corruption of the Hebrew *shem ha-meforash*, "the explicit name," which originally referred to the Tetragrammaton.

28. Frankl, "Vaterländische Sagen," 368.

gesturing toward the ancient genealogy of the legend. Frankl also offers an unusual explanation of why the rabbi must deanimate the Golem before the Sabbath is announced: "because even the damned spirits (only the Lord God creates a blessed one) are permitted to rest on the Sabbath." This further appeals to halakhic authority, but in a purposefully vague way.

Set against these markers of authentic transmission is perhaps the most spectacular literary feature of Frankl's account—the description of the Golem's frenzy as the Sabbath commences:

> Then this one was seized as if by madness; his eyes rolled and burned like flaming wheels, his breath was visible and sparkled with wonderful colors, and he began a terrible destruction in the house.

The pinwheels of flame for eyes and the prismatic breath spraying forth from the Golem are as beautiful as they are horrifying. Moreover, the description artfully resonates with the opening anecdote about the clay "preserved in its primeval form and color." Artistically then, this is a near-perfect literary legend. It contains all the hallmarks of an oral source yet shows literary finish and innovation. It stands out for its symmetric and well-formed reporting, but it also serves up a metaphor for the subsequent fortunes of the legend. The mute Golem spews out the kaleidoscopic history of his own literary reception, the colorful shower of stories that will follow him as he leaves the pages of folkloric collections and enters into a literary world that will constantly and inconsistently mold him into anything but his primeval form.

As we have already noted, once the legend is placed in Prague, it remains there quite consistently in the Jewish versions. The only Jewish author who does not abide by this topographic rule is the creator of the other important version that has escaped the notice of Golem scholars, the Danish Jewish writer Meïr Aaron Goldschmidt (d. 1887), who somewhat bizarrely locates the tale in the city of Lemberg, which is modern-day Lvov in Ukraine.[29] Goldschmidt was a radical journalist and writer who dominated the literary scene of mid- to late nineteenth-century Scandinavia. He is usually viewed as the quintessential Danish stylist and a seminal figure in the development of a language of realism.[30] Toward the

29. Meïr Aaron Goldschmidt [Adolph Meyer, pseud.], *En Jøde* (Copenhagen, 1845), 45.

30. On the life and work of Goldschmidt, see Hans P. Kyrre, *M. Goldschmidt* (Copenhagen, 1919); Mogens Brøndsted, *Meïr Goldschmidt* (Copenhagen, 1965); Kenneth Ober, *Meïr Goldschmidt* (New York, 1976).

end of his life, Goldschmidt became obsessed with the philosophical notion of nemesis and devoted much of his energy to a visionary brand of superfamily linguistics based on his study of Egyptian hieroglyphics, Jewish mystical texts, and comparative Semitics. This particular phase of Goldschmidt's authorship has generally been ignored in the scholarship, but it strongly informs our understanding of how he approaches the Golem material.

Given his broad Jewish reading habits and proclivity for Jewish tales, both literary and oral, it is not surprising that Goldschmidt gives us a version of the Golem legend.[31] He features the tale in his 1845 novel *En Jøde* (A Jew), which is marked by its extensive use of Jewish legends and folktales. The year 1845 was pivotal in the reshaping of the Golem legend, coming almost ten years after Frankl but still two years away from Weisel's standardizing version. In addition to locating the tale in Lemberg rather than Prague, Goldschmidt's tale exhibits certain innovations that are absent from all other Jewish versions in the nineteenth century. His is also the only Jewish source that reverts to the anonymous rabbi that Grimm offers. The combination of these two innovations gives the appearance that Goldschmidt is supplying a local variant of the tale before it becomes rigidly attached to the Maharal of Prague. This would be consistent with Goldschmidt's deep knowledge of Ashkenazi storytelling traditions and could support the notion that the tale was not yet fixed on the eve of Weisel's rendition. Moreover, Goldschmidt's Golem does something on the fateful Sabbath eve that no other nineteenth-century Golem does: he commits murder in the synagogue. This is in line with Goldschmidt's penchant for manipulating rabbinic legend and lore and writing against the grain of tradition. At the same time, Goldschmidt's Golem functions as a metonym for the main character of the novel, Jacob Bendixen, as he spins out of control from his creators' (that is, his parents') vision and ultimately fails at the act of artistic self-formation. Goldschmidt is the first author, Christian or Jewish, to use the Golem material as a metalegend for the narrative architecture of a larger work. In Arnim, Horn, and even Auerbach, the legend is only included as a miscellaneous anecdote or loosely constructed metaphor.

While these features alone make Goldschmidt's version an essential

31. On Goldschmidt's engagement with Jewish tales, see David Gantt Gurley, "Meïr Aaron Goldschmidt and the Poetics of Prose" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007).

part of the history of the legend, a closer reading of his text reveals an even more startling set of conclusions:[32]

> "There lived in Lemberg," began Philip, "a rabbi, who, as the *Kemech* ["the Christians"] say, knew more than his Our Father. Since he could not afford to hire a servant, he created a man out of clay, and by putting a piece of parchment with certain holy words under the man's tongue he animated it, and it would work for him six days a week. Every Friday evening he removed the parchment with the holy words on it and the clay lay there dead until he had said his *Avdolo* and again laid the parchment under his tongue. But one Friday evening the rabbi was out late in the town longer than usual, and when the Sabbath candles were lit, the clay man became uncontrollable. He rushed into the synagogue and killed people with one blow of his hard arms, and he would have surely killed everybody if the rabbi had not returned at that moment and taken the holy words out of his mouth. And so once more he was dead, and afterwards the people's urgent prayers convinced the rabbi never to animate him again. But even still to this day the Lemberger Jews say an extra prayer in thanks because they were saved from this calamity."

In many respects, this is the Prague tale as we know it from Frankl and Weisel, yet, as we have already noted, the detail that most stands out is the unusual choice of place. Although Lemberg is an important Jewish city historically, there is no other recorded version of the tale that situates the Golem there. Before the legend became attached to Prague and the Maharal, it did lie close to Lemberg, some one hundred miles to the north in the city of Chelm, but there it was quite specifically associated with R. Elijah Ba'al Shem.

It seems strange, then, that Goldschmidt knows the specific Prague version of the tale but chooses to situate the action in the vicinity of Chelm and assign it to an unnamed rabbi.[33] Should we read this as a local

32. Goldschmidt, *En Jøde*, 45. Our translation preserves Goldschmidt's original spelling for transliterated words. This version is not mentioned in any scholarship on the Golem and is only treated in the literature on Goldschmidt himself briefly by Kenneth Ober, "'Med saadanne Følelser skriver man en Roman': Origins of Meïr Goldschmidt's En Jøde," *Scandinavica* 30 (1991): 27–28; and Mogens Brønstedt, *Goldschmidts Fortaellekunst* (Copenhagen, 1967), 342, n. 5.

33. In his later memoirs Goldschmidt also mentions "den fromme Rabbi" (the pious rabbi) who made a clay man, but once again he refuses to name the rabbi, and this time he mentions no place at all. Meïr A. Goldschmidt, *Livs erindringer og resultater* (Copenhagen, 1877), 2:260

variant of the legend that Goldschmidt has learned from his father? It is, after all, Jacob's own father Philip who tells the tale in the novel. This is certainly a simple and elegant explanation for the unique attestation, but it does not fully take into account Goldschmidt's near-obsession with manipulation of language and source throughout the novel. As one critic has noted, by positioning the tale in Lemberg, Poland, Goldschmidt is already anticipating the Polish storyteller's arrival in chapter 7.[34] But even more striking is the fact that the story told by the Pole is actually an account of another, lesser-known, legendary figure of Jewish Prague, Simon Abeles.[35] How does Goldschmidt know a more obscure literary tale about Prague and not the Maharal legend, which by 1845 had been circulating widely in written form for almost a decade?[36] Moreover, he actually met Leopold Kompert and Ludwig Frankl in Vienna less than a year after completing the novel, which suggests a close engagement with the main currents of Golem literature in the period.[37]

The elegant chiasmus of the two stories—an itinerant Pole telling a Prague tale and Jacob's father relocating the Prague legend to Poland—suggests that Goldschmidt is quite consciously manipulating the Golem material. If we apply this sort of anagrammatic, or even kabbalistic, reading to the particular city in Poland he chooses, we can see the extent of Goldschmidt's artistry. Historically, Lemberg was known as Leopolis, literally the "City of the Lion." The proper German equivalent should be Löwenberg, but through various linguistic changes, the name was shortened to Lemberg. Thus, hidden beneath the name of the town Lemberg/Löwenberg is the family name of the Maharal himself, R. Judah Loew ("Lion"). Although Goldschmidt does not specify any particular rabbi, Rabbi "Lion" is still present in the etymological palimpsest of the toponym.[38]

At the same time, there is a genealogical tie between Lemberg and its

34. Ober, "Med saadanne Følelser," 28.

35. On the quasi-historical Simon Abeles, see Elisheva Carlebach, *The Death of Simon Abeles: Jewish-Christian Tension in Seventeenth-Century Prague* (New York, 2001).

36. Auerbach, *Spinoza*, was a European bestseller and was translated into several languages, but Goldschmidt read so widely on Jewish topics that he certainly would have seen Tendlau, "Der Golem des Hoch-Rabbi-Löb," as well.

37. On the meeting between Goldschmidt and Frankl, see Ober, *Meïr Goldschmidt*, 31.

38. The first element of the name Lemberg, *Lem-*, is also a homophone for the German word for clay, *Lehm*, which adds another layer of complexity to Goldschmidt's wordplay.

neighboring city Chelm. The major early source for the Chelm version of the Golem legend is a report by R. Jacob Emden, given in slightly different form in three of his works, who knows his legend from his father, R. Zvi Hirsch Ashkenazi, known as Ha-Ḥakham Zvi.[39] And the reason Ha-Ḥakham Zvi knew the story is that Elijah of Chelm was his grandfather,[40] but it also turns out that the grandson's last rabbinic post was in Lemberg, where he died and was buried. Thus Goldschmidt has also buried the Ba'al Shem into his cryptogram Lemberg by conflating the grandfather with the grandson and juxtaposing their respective cities.

Yet another odd feature of Goldschmidt's Lemberg legend is that he never specifically uses the word "Golem," but instead calls the creature *Lermanden*, or "Clay Man." Certainly this could not have been due to ignorance of the term, since it is well established in talmudic sources and carries enormous weight in kabbalistic texts, which Goldschmidt read thoroughly. For some reason, then, GOLEM is a word, like the Holy Name itself, that he dares not write overtly. But once again, he uses the town of Lemberg to conceal another name. By rearranging the letters of the town, one can arrive at GLEM + REB, that is "Golem" + "Reb" (the standard short honorific for rabbi), or the creature and his creator. One might even take the anagram a step further and read the actual Danish word *glem* (forget), yielding the command to "forget the rabbi." While such anagrammatic wordplay might seem to stretch the bounds of reason, in the context of Goldschmidt's obsessive interest in comparative linguistics and the Kabbalah, and alongside the etymological and genealogical clues he embeds in the name, it becomes much more plausible.

The juxtaposition of these two orphans of Golem history, Goldschmidt and Frankl, is no mere partnership of convenience. As we have already noted, Goldschmidt knew Frankl personally, and he had much in common with his Viennese Jewish literary circle. The Jewish milieu of his novel *En Jøde* was a major influence on the ghetto tales published by Frankl in the late 1840s.[41] Likewise, both Goldschmidt and Frankl began their literary careers with patriotic and nationalistic writings and later became increasingly associated with Jewish writing. Both were exiled from Jewish communities, Frankl from Palestine and Gold-

39. Jacob Emden, *Sefer she'ilat ya'vetz* (Altona, 1739), 2:28; Jacob Emden, *Mitpahat sefarim* (Altona, 1768), 12; Jacob Emden, *Megilat sefer* (Warsaw, 1896), 4.

40. Or possibly his great-grandfather. See Idel, *Golem*, 217; 229, n. 21.

41. On Goldschmidt's pervasive influence on the Ghetto tale, see Kenneth Ober, *Ghettogeschichte*, 29–38.

schmidt from London,[42] and both writers became interested in Egypt later in life.[43]

A brief but incredibly productive aesthetic window is opened when the Golem tale becomes attached to the Maharal of Prague in 1834 and then is closed with the publication of Weisel's version in 1847. In the hands of Frankl and Goldschmidt, the literary legend in its infancy proves to be much more sophisticated than the mature version of Weisel, while at the same time providing a vibrant representation of the earlier oral traditions surrounding the Golem. In this regard, Weisel does not define the legend; he ends it and thus allows the influence of the Christian Romantics to flood into the Jewish tradition. Weisel himself as much as acknowledges this when he says, "To the rabbi, his Golem was like the broom to the sorcerer's apprentice in Goethe's poem."[44] But the Jewish Golem of the early nineteenth century is not a monster or an erotic body; he is not a wind-up toy or an Anti-Christ. Everything that needs to be said about him can be said through his muted actions, not through any mutation of desire. Perhaps Goldschmidt is right, that in order to remember the Golem in his primeval form we must first forget the rabbi.

42. Ludwig A. Frankl, *Nach Jerusalem* (Leipzig, 1858), 2:511; Ober, *Meïr Goldschmidt*, 48–49.

43. Ludwig A. Frankl, *Nach Aegypten* (Leipzig, 1860); Goldschmidt, *Livs erindringer*, 2:180–245.

44. Pascheles, *Gallerie*, 52.