

5. The Idea of the Golem

I

SOME forty years ago Gustav Meyrink published his fantastic novel, *The Golem*.¹ By taking up a figure of Kabbalistic legend and transforming it in a very peculiar way, Meyrink tried to draw a kind of symbolic picture of the way to redemption. Such literary adaptations and transformations of the golem legend have been frequent, particularly in the Jewish and German literature of the nineteenth century, since Jakob Grimm, Achim von Arnim, and E. Th. Hoffmann. They bear witness to the special fascination exerted by this figure, in which so many authors found a symbol of the struggles and conflicts that were nearest their hearts.² Meyrink's work, however, far outdoes the rest. In it everything is fantastic to the point of the grotesque. Behind the façade of an exotic and futuristic Prague ghetto Indian rather than Jewish ideas of redemption are expounded. The alleged Kabbalah that pervades the book suffers from an overdose of Madame Blavatsky's turbid theosophy. Still, despite all this muddle and confusion, Meyrink's *Golem* has an inimitable atmosphere, compounded of unverifiable depth, a rare gift for mystical charlatanism, and an overpowering urge to *épater le bourgeois*. In Meyrink's interpretation, the golem is a kind of Wandering Jew, who every thirty-three years—it would seem to be no accident that this was the age of Jesus when he was crucified—appears at the window of an inaccessible room in the Prague ghetto. This golem

¹ Trans. Madge Pemberton, London, 1928.

² Cf. Beate Rosenfeld, who has investigated these interpretations in *Die Golemsage und ihre Verwertung in der deutschen Literatur*, Breslau, 1934.

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is in part the materialized, but still very spooky, collective soul of the ghetto, and in part the double of the hero, an artist, who in the course of his struggles to redeem himself purifies the golem, who is of course his own unredeemed self. This literary figure, which has achieved considerable fame, owes very little to the Jewish tradition even in its corrupt, legendary form. An analysis of the main Jewish traditions concerning the golem will show how little.

By way of defining the climate of this investigation, I should like first of all to present the legend in its late Jewish form, as vividly described in 1808 by Jakob Grimm in the romantic *Journal for Hermits*.¹

After saying certain prayers and observing certain fast days, the Polish Jews make the figure of a man from clay or mud, and when they pronounce the miraculous Shemhamphoras [the name of God] over him, he must come to life. He cannot speak, but he understands fairly well what is said or commanded. They call him golem and use him as a servant to do all sorts of housework. But he must never leave the house. On his forehead is written 'emeth [truth]; every day he gains weight and becomes somewhat larger and stronger than all the others in the house, regardless of how little he was to begin with. For fear of him, they therefore erase the first letter, so that nothing remains but meth [he is dead], whereupon he collapses and turns to clay again. But one man's golem once grew so tall, and he heedlessly let him keep on growing so long that he could no longer reach his forehead. In terror he ordered the servant to take off his boots, thinking that when he bent down he could reach his forehead. So it happened, and the first letter was successfully erased, but the whole heap of clay fell on the Jew and crushed him.

II

In investigating the golem as a man created by magical art, we must go back to certain Jewish conceptions concerning Adam, the first man. For obviously a man who creates a golem is in some sense competing with God's creation of Adam; in such an act the creative power of man enters into a relationship, whether of emulation or antagonism, with the creative power of God.

Strangely enough, the etymological connection between Adam,

¹ Taken from Rosenfeld, p. 41.

the man created by God, and the earth, Hebrew 'adamah, is not expressly mentioned in the story of the Creation in Genesis. Moreover, the linguistic connection has been contested by Semitic scholars. Nevertheless, this etymological connection is very much stressed in the Rabbinical and Talmudic commentaries on Genesis. Adam is a being who was taken from the earth and returns to it, on whom the breath of God conferred life and speech. He is a man of the earth but also—as the late Kabbalists put it in a daring etymology, derived from an ingenious pun on Isaiah 14 : 14—the 'likeness of the most high,' namely, when he fulfils his function by freely choosing the good.¹ This Adam was made from the matter of the earth, literally from clay, as one of the speakers in the Book of Job (33 : 6) expressly points out, but from the finest parts of it. Philo wrote: 'It is conceivable that God wished to create his man-like form with the greatest care and that for this reason he did not take dust from the first piece of earth that came to hand, but that from the whole earth he separated the best, from pure primal matter the purest and finest parts, best suited for his making.'² The Aggadah has a similar conception, which it expresses in any number of variants. 'From what is clearest in the earth He created him, from what is most excellent in the earth He created him, from what is finest in the earth He created him, from the [future] place of divine worship [in Zion] He created him, from the place of his atonement.'³ Just as according to the Torah a portion of dough is removed from the rest to serve as the priest's share, so is Adam the best share that is taken from the dough of the earth, that is, from the center of the world on Mount Zion, from the place where the altar would stand, of which it is said: 'An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me' (Ex. 20 : 24).⁴ This Adam was taken from the center and navel of the earth, but all the elements were combined in his creation. From everywhere God gathered the dust from which Adam was to be made, and etymologies interpreting the word Adam as an abbreviation of his

¹ Menahem Azariah of Fano, 'Asarah Ma'amaroth, Venice, 1597, in *Ma'amar 'Em Kol Hay*, II, 33. 'Eddameh in Isa. 14 : 14 has the same consonants as 'adamah.

² *De officio mundi*, 137.

³ From an unknown source in *Midrash ba-Gadol* on Genesis, ed. M. Margolioth, Jerusalem, 1947, p. 78.

⁴ *Genesis Rabbah*, XIV, 2, ed. Theodor, p. 126.

elements, or of the names of the four cardinal points from which he was taken, gained wide currency.¹

In the Talmudic Aggadah a further theme is added. At a certain stage in his creation Adam is designated as 'golem.' 'Golem' is a Hebrew word that occurs only once in the Bible, in Psalm 139 : 16, which Psalm the Jewish tradition put into the mouth of Adam himself. Here probably, and certainly in the later sources, 'golem' means the unformed, amorphous. There is no evidence to the effect that it meant 'embryo,' as has sometimes been claimed. In the philosophical literature of the Middle Ages it is used as a Hebrew term for matter, formless *hylé*, and this more suggestive significance will appear in the following discussion. In this sense, Adam was said to be 'golem' before the breath of God had touched him.

A famous Talmudic passage² describes the first twelve hours of Adam's first day:

Aha bar Hanina said: The day had twelve hours. In the first hour the earth was piled up; *in the second he became a golem*, a still unformed mass; in the third, his limbs were stretched out; *in the fourth the soul was cast into him*; in the fifth he stood on his feet; in the sixth he gave [all living things] names; in the seventh Eve was given him for a companion; in the eighth the two lay down in bed and when they left it, they were four; in the ninth the prohibition was communicated to him; in the tenth he transgressed it; in the eleventh he was judged; in the twelfth he was expelled and went out of Paradise, as it is written in Psalm 49 : 13: And Adam does not remain one night in glory.

Important for us in this remarkable passage is what it tells us about the second and fourth hours. Before the soul, *neshamah*, was cast into him and before he spoke to give things their names, Adam was an unformed mass. No less interesting is the further development of this motif in a midrash from the second and third centuries. Here Adam is described not only as a golem, but as a golem of cosmic size and strength, to whom, while he was still in this speechless and inanimate state, God showed all future generations to the end of time. The juxtaposition of these two motifs, between which there is an obvious relationship of tension

¹ Cf. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, V, p. 72; Max Förster, 'Adams Erschaffung und Namengebung,' *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, XI (1908), pp. 477-529.

² Sanhedrin 38b.

if not of contradiction, is exceedingly strange. Even before Adam has speech and reason, he beholds a vision of the history of Creation, which passes before him in images.

Rabbi Tanhuma said in the name of Rabbi Eleazar [Eleazar ben Azariah]: In the hour when God created the first Adam, He created him as a golem, and he was stretched out from one end of the world to the other, as it is written in Psalm [139 : 16]: 'Thine eyes did see my golem.' Rabbi Judah bar Simeon said: While Adam still lay as a golem before Him who spoke and the world came into being, He showed him all the generations and their wise men, all the generations and their judges, all the generations and their leaders.¹

It would seem as though, while Adam was in this state, some tellurian power had flowed into him out of the earth from which he was taken, and that it was this power which enabled him to receive such a vision. According to the Aggadah, it was only after the fall that Adam's enormous size, which filled the universe, was reduced to human, though still gigantic, proportions. In this image—an earthly being of cosmic dimensions—two conceptions are discernible. In the one, Adam is the vast primordial being of cosmogonic myth; in the other, his size would seem to signify, in spatial terms, that the power of the whole universe is concentrated in him.

And indeed, we find this latter conception in one of the fragments—so rich in archaic, mythical motifs—that have come down to us from the lost *Midrash Abkir*. Here we read:

Rabbi Berakhya said: When God wished to create the world, He began His creation with nothing other than man and made him as a golem. When He prepared to cast a soul into him, He said: If I set him down now, it will be said that he was my companion in the work of Creation; so I will leave him as a golem [in a crude, unfinished state], until I have created everything else. When He had created everything, the angels said to Him: Aren't you going to make the man you spoke of? He replied: I made him long ago, only the soul is missing. Then He cast the soul into him and set him down and concentrated the whole world in him. With him He began, with him He concluded, as it is written [Psalm 139 : 5]: thou hast formed me before and behind.²

¹ *Genesis Rabbah*, XXIV, 2, ed. Theodor, p. 230. *Ibid.*, XIV, 8, p. 132. In this latter passage on Gen. 2 : 7 we actually read: 'He put him [Adam] down as a golem extending from earth to heaven and cast a soul into him.'

² *Yalkut Shim'oni* to Gen. No. 34.

One is amazed at the audacity with which the Aggadic exegete departs from the Biblical version and begins Creation with the material making of man as a golem in whom the force of the whole universe is contained, but who receives his soul only at the end of Creation. Not the second and fourth hour of Adam's life, as in the account previously quoted, but the whole work of Creation lies between man in his amorphous state and man as an animated being. And whereas in the previous version earth for him was gathered from the whole world, here the whole world is concentrated in him.

Another mythical deviation from the Biblical story of Creation is also of importance for our purposes. Whereas in Genesis it is only when God breathes life into him that Adam becomes *nefesh hayah*, a living soul (Gen. 2 : 7), the old Jewish tradition contains several references to a tellurian earth-spirit, dwelling in Adam.

Here as so often the Aggadah goes back to ideas far removed from the Biblical text. A similar example is the story that a woman was created before Eve, which may, it is true, have originated as an attempt to resolve the contradiction between Genesis 1 : 27, where man and woman were created at the same time, and 2 : 21, where Eve was made from Adam's rib. According to a midrash¹ which, to be sure, is not quoted in this form before the ninth or tenth century, a woman was first made for Adam from the earth (and not from his flank or rib). This was Lilith, who irritated the Lord of Creation by demanding equal rights. She argued: We [Adam and I] are equal, because we both come from the earth. Whereupon they quarreled, and Lilith, bitterly disgruntled, uttered the name of God and fled to embark on her demonic career. In the third century this story seems to have been known in a somewhat different form, without the demonic Lilith. This version speaks of a 'first Eve,' created independently of Adam and hence no relation of Cain and Abel, who quarreled for possession of her, whereupon God turned her back into dust.²

But to get back to the soul, it is maintained, surprisingly enough, in traditions from the second century, that Genesis

¹ In the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, ed. M. Steinschneider, 1858, 23a.

² *Genesis Rabbah*, XXII, 8, ed. Theodor, p. 213. Apparently the idea that Eve was created 'in the same way' as Adam but independently of him was current in the Jewish sources of Ophite Gnosticism, as Hippolytus (V. 26) records.

1 : 24: 'Let the earth bring forth living soul,' refers to the spirit (*ruah*) of the first Adam, which accordingly is not a pneuma blown into him, but an earth-spirit, a vital potency dwelling in the earth. I feel certain that this conception is related to gnostic ideas, which, though taken over by heretics, were originally Jewish—a fact that has often, oddly enough, been denied or disregarded. In his *Philosophoumena* (V. 26) Hippolytus speaks of a Judeo-Christian system of Ophite gnosis, probably from the middle of the second century; his source is a *Book of Baruch* by an otherwise unknown Justinus. According to this Justinus there were three original principles: the good God; *Elohim*, as father of all created things (the function assigned to God in Genesis); and *Edem*, called also Israel and Earth, who was half virgin and half snake. The name *Edem* seems to spring from a confusion, by Jewish heretics who had forgotten their Hebrew, between the words 'adamah, Earth, and 'Eden (written *Edem* in the Septuagint). Justinus' *Edem* has features of both, though her principal characteristics are those of 'adamah. As Lipsius says, she is a mythological personification of the earth.¹ Here Adam is identified with *Edem*, just as he is with 'adamah in the midrash.² In this version Paradise, the Garden, which here in good Jewish style is distinguished from Eden, is the totality of the angels who are allegorically referred to as the 'trees' in Paradise. 'But after Paradise had been born from the mutual love of *Elohim* and *Edem*, the angels of *Elohim* took some of the best earth, that is, not of the animal part belonging to *Edem*, but of the human and noble parts of the earth,' and from it formed man. Here, just as in the contemporaneous tradition of the above-quoted midrash, Adam's soul, unlike the *neshamah*, or pneuma, of the Bible, which is breathed into Adam by God, comes from the virgin Earth or *Edem*³—and again as in the midrash Adam is made from the best parts of the earth.

Still in line with the basic meaning of *Edem* as Earth, this version goes on to speak of a mythical marriage (*gamos*) between

¹ Richard Lipsius, *Der Gnostizismus*, Leipzig, 1860, 76. The connection with the Hebrew 'adamah is also seen correctly in W. Scholz, *Dokumente der Gnosis*, 1909, p. 24, while Leisegang, for example, sees only the connection with the Biblical Eden.

² *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, XII.

³ The same occurs again in Hippolytus, X, 15: 'the psyche of Edem, whom the mad Justinus also calls Earth.'

Earth and *Elohim*. Adam is their 'eternal symbol,' 'the seal and monument of their love.' Thus tellurian and pneumatic elements were combined in Adam and his descendants, for, as Justinus says, *Edem*-Earth 'brought her whole power to *Elohim* as a dowry, when they were married.' It strikes me as probable that this tellurian soul of Adam stems from older Jewish speculation (quite possibly it forms the basis of the midrash about Adam's vision of future generations while he was still a golem) and subsequently, through heretical Jewish gnostics, came to the Naasenes and Ophites, who welcomed it because it fell in with their own notions of *psyche* and *pneuma*.

Such ideas about a marriage between God and Earth were to reappear at a later day, in the Spanish Kabbalah, for example. Still, they play no part in the late conceptions of the golem. But in the countries where the golem began his career in the Middle Ages, particularly in Germany, we come across the story that God and Earth concluded a formal contract concerning the creation of Adam (it occurs, for example, in a late recension of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*). God demands Adam for a thousand years as a loan from Earth, and gives her a formal receipt for 'four ells of earth,' which is witnessed by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and lies to this day in the archives of Metatron, the heavenly scribe.¹

III

The idea that such an act of creation might be repeated by magic or other arts that are not exactly defined had a different origin, namely, the legends recorded in the Talmud concerning certain famous rabbis of the third and fourth centuries.

¹ The text of the contract in N. Brüll, *Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, IX (1889), p. 16. Cf. also the passage from the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* in *Zohar Hadash*, 1885, 16b, according to which heaven, earth, and water were God's builders, but all of them were unable to give Adam soul, until 'God and earth joined to make him.' God's exclamation 'Let us make a man' was addressed not to the angels but to the earth, which brought forth Adam's golem (here simply 'body'). For the notion of the contract we have a parallel in a midrash of unknown origin, in *Yalkut Shim'oni* I, 41, where God makes a contract with Adam providing that David is to be granted seventy years of life (which Adam cedes from his own allotted 1,000 years). God and Metatron both sign the contract.

Rava said: If the righteous wished, they could create a world, for it is written [Isa. 59 : 2]: 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God.' The implication is that if a man is saintly without sins, his creative power is no longer 'separated' from that of God. And the text continues as though its author wished to demonstrate this creative power: 'For Rava created a man and sent him to Rabbi Zera. The rabbi spoke to him and he did not answer. Then he said: You must have been made by the companions [members of the Talmudic Academy]; return to your dust.' The Aramaic word here rendered by 'companions' is ambiguous. According to some scholars Rabbi Zera's sentence should be interpreted to mean: 'You must come from the magicians.' In the Talmud this passage is immediately followed by another story: 'Rav Hanina and Rav Oshaya busied themselves on the eve of every Sabbath with the *Book of Creation*—or in another reading: with the instructions [*halakboth*] concerning creation. They made a calf one-third the natural size and ate it.'¹

Thus the creative power of the righteous is limited. Rava is able to create a man who can go to Rabbi Zera, but he cannot endow him with speech, and by his silence Rabbi Zera recognizes his nature. This artificial or magical man is always lacking in some essential function. We are not told how he was created, unless we are to infer from another legend about the Sabbath-calf that the methods of Hanina and Oshaya were later known to Rava. The setting of the one legend is Palestine, of the other Babylonia.

It seems likely—and so it was always assumed in the Jewish tradition—that this creation involved magic, though in a perfectly permissible form. The letters of the alphabet—and how much more so those of the divine name or of the entire Torah, which was God's instrument of Creation—have secret, magical power. The initiate knows how to make use of them. Bezalel, who built the Tabernacle, 'knew the combinations of letters with which heaven and earth were made'—so we read in the name of a Babylonian scholar of the early third century, the most prominent representative of the esoteric tradition in his generation.² The letters in question were unquestionably those of the name of

¹ Sanhedrin 65b. The last section is repeated in 67b, where the procedure is termed 'permissible in any case' and distinguished from forbidden black magic, though no precise reason is given.

² Berakhoth 55a.

God,¹ for it was generally held by the esoteric Jewish thinkers of the time that heaven and earth had been created by the great name of God. In building the Tabernacles, Bezalel had been able to imitate the Creation on a small scale. For the Tabernacle is a complete microcosm, a miraculous copy of everything that is in heaven and on earth.

A similar tradition concerning the creative power of letters forms the basis of the following midrash on Job 28 : 13, in which what is said in Job of wisdom is applied to the Torah: 'No one knows its [right] order, for the sections of the Torah are not given in the right arrangement. If they were, everyone who reads in it might create a world, raise the dead, and perform miracles. Therefore the order of the Torah was hidden and is known to God alone.'²

This brings us to the text that played so important a part in the development of the golem concept: the *Book Yetsirah* or *Book of Creation*. It is uncertain which reading of the above-mentioned legend about the Sabbath-calf is correct, whether it should really be taken as a reference to the brief but baffling *Book Yetsirah*, which has come down to us, or whether the rabbis derived their thaumaturgic instructions from some other, otherwise unknown 'instructions for [magical] creation.' That the *Book Yetsirah* should be mentioned in this passage does not strike me as quite so impossible as numerous authors have assumed. We do not know the exact date of this enigmatic text, which sets forth the meaning or function of the 'thirty-two ways of wisdom,' that is, of the ten *sefiroth* or original numbers, and of the twenty-two consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. We can only be sure that it was written by a Jewish Neo-Pythagorean some time between the third and the sixth century.³

A few passages in this book are of crucial importance for our context. The idea of the golem is, to be sure, unrelated to the conception of the ten *sefiroth* as set forth in this book, nor does it owe

¹ Correctly understood by L. Blau in *Altjüdisches Zauberbwesen*, Budapest, 1898, p. 122. Blau, however, was unacquainted with the parallel passage in the *Greater Hekhaloth*, IX, where the significance of the letters is stated explicitly.

² *Midrash Tehillim* to Psalm 3, ed. S. Buber, 17a. Rabbi Eleazar, who transmitted this tradition, lived in the third century. Cf. above, Chapter 2, p. 37.

³ Cf. my article 'Jezirabuch' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, IX (1932), 104-11. As I shall explain elsewhere, I now (1960) incline toward the earlier dating.

anything to the later Kabbalistic symbolism of the *sefirot*. Significant for the creation of the golem were the names of God and the letters, which are the signatures of all creation. These letters are the structural elements, the stones from which the edifice of Creation was built. The Hebrew term employed by the author in speaking of the consonants as 'elementary letters' undoubtedly reflects the ambivalence of the Greek word *stoicheia*, which means both letters and elements.

Concerning these elements and their function in Creation, we read in the second chapter: 'Twenty-two letter-elements: He outlined them, hewed them out, weighed them, combined them, and exchanged them [transformed them in accordance with certain laws], and through them created the soul of all creation and everything else that was ever to be created.' And further:

How did He combine, weigh, and exchange them? A [which in Hebrew is a consonant] with all [other consonants] and all with A, B with all and all with B, G with all and all with G, and they all return in a circle to the beginning through two hundred thirty-one gates—the number of the pairs that can be formed from the twenty-two elements—and thus it results that everything created and everything spoken *issue from one name*.

Both the context and linguistic usage make it clear that what is meant by this name, from which all things issue, is the name of God and not 'any group of consonants combined into a name.'¹ Thus at every 'gate' in the circle formed by the letters of the alphabet there stands a combination of two consonants, which in line with the author's grammatical notions correspond to the two-letter roots of the Hebrew language, and through these gates the creative power goes out into the universe. This universe as a whole is sealed on all six sides with the six permutations of the name YHWH, but every thing or being in it exists through one of these combinations, which are the true 'signatures' of all being, as has been said in a formulation suggestive of Jacob Boehme.²

The *Book Yetsirah* describes in broad outlines, but with certain astronomico-astrological and anatomical details, how the cosmos was built—chiefly from the twenty-two letters, for after the first

¹ As L. Goldschmidt explains in *Das Buch der Schöpfung*, 1894, p. 84, and, following him, several recent translators.

² Johann Friedrich von Meyer, *Das Buch Jezira*, Leipzig, 1930, p. 24.

chapter no mention is made of the ten *sefirot*. Man is a microcosmos attuned to the great world. Each letter 'governs' a part of man or a realm of the great world. The summary, dogmatic exposition tells us nothing of how the things and processes not mentioned here came into being. Though the treatise is presented as a theoretical guide to the structure of creation, it may quite conceivably have been intended also as a manual of magical practices, or at least as a statement of general principles, to be supplemented by more detailed instructions—perhaps oral—concerning the application of these principles to other things. The affinity between the linguistic theory set forth in the book and the fundamental magical belief in the power of letters and words is obvious.

We know from the medieval commentaries on the book, some philosophical, some magico-mystical, that it was interpreted in both ways. Whether the tradition of the French and German Jews, who read the book as a manual of magic,¹ is in keeping with its original intention may indeed be questioned. But the end of the book seems to point strongly in this direction, and certainly does not argue to the contrary. In this conclusion insight into the creative power of the linguistic elements is attributed to Abraham as the first prophet of monotheism:

When our Father Abraham came, he contemplated, meditated, and beheld,² investigated and understood and outlined and dug and combined and formed [i.e. created],³ and he succeeded. Then the Lord of the World revealed Himself to him and took him to his bosom and

¹ This view was current not only among the Jewish esoterics of France and Germany, but is to be found in Rashi's commentary on the Talmudic tale about Rava's 'man.' In general Rashi (d. 1103 in Troyes) reflects a much older learned tradition.

² This strong emphasis on Abraham's meditations is lacking in certain old texts (Saadya's, for example) of the book.

³ This verb 'formed' (*ye-tsar*) is present in the text at the end of the commentary of Judah ben Barzilai, ed. Halberstamm, p. 266, but is lacking (mistakenly no doubt) at the bottom of p. 99. Saadya (ed. Lambert, p. 104) also read it, though in his version the order of the verbs is different. In the text of the book, this verb form is used throughout in connection with the creation of individual things and has the meaning of 'created.' Judah ben Barzilai (p. 266) artificially interprets away the clear meaning of the two verbs ('he combined the letters and created') which are used here both of God's and of Abraham's activity. According to him, the words have different meanings for Abraham and for God. But the text offers no basis for such an interpretation.

kissed him on the head and called him His friend [another variant adds: and made him His son] and made an eternal covenant with him and his seed.

Medieval or modern commentators wishing to disregard the magical tendencies of the book found all manner of edifying reflections with which to explain away this conclusion. But the strange 'he created and he succeeded' does not refer merely to Abraham's successful speculative efforts, but explicitly to his operation with letters, in which he repeats above all the words employed by God in His creative activity. It seems to me that the author of this sentence had in mind a method which enabled Abraham, on the strength of his insight into the system of things and the potencies of letters, to imitate and in a certain sense repeat God's act of creation.

This view is supported by the fact that the old manuscripts of the *Book of Creation* not only bore the title *Hilkboth Yetsirah* (suggested by the above-mentioned reading of the Talmud passage about the Sabbath-calf, unless it is the other way around and the Talmud refers to this title) but also bear at the beginning and end the additional title: 'Alphabet of Our Father Abraham,' 'Othioth de-' *Abraham Avinu*. Judah ben Barzilai, who at the beginning of the twelfth century, in southern France or Catalonia, wrote his compendious commentary, in which he cites many old variants tells us, moreover,¹ that the title bore the addition: 'Each man who looks at it [i.e., who contemplatively immerses himself in it],² his wisdom is beyond measure'—that is, comparable to the creative wisdom of God!

Thus it seems to me that the German Hasidim who commented on the book in the thirteenth century were not too far from the literal meaning of the text when they said that Abraham had created beings by a magical process described, or at least suggested, in the *Book Yetsirah*. In mystical circles and at least among the German Hasidim, the verse from Genesis (12 : 5) to the effect that Abraham and Sarah took 'the souls they had made in Haran' with them on their journey westward was always interpreted as a

¹ Commentary on the *Book Yetsirah*, ed. Halberstamm, pp. 100 and 268. Actually such a text is in the British Museum MS of the *Book Yetsirah*; cf. Margoliouth's catalogue, No. 600 (Vol. II, p. 197).

² In the Hebrew of the oldest esoteric texts from the Talmudic period, the verb *tsafab* always has this meaning of a profound contemplative vision.

reference to this magical creation.¹ Here of course we have a problem. Whether formulated as early as must at least be envisaged as possible, or only in the medieval development of the ideas about the golem, such an exegesis involves a distinct deviation from the traditional exegesis of Genesis 12 : 5. In the exoteric Aggadah the 'souls' made by Abraham and Sarah are interpreted as proselytes to the faith in the One God among the men and women of their generation. A commentary dating from the second century runs: 'Are we to believe that Abraham could make souls? Why, if all the creatures in the world gathered together to make a single gnat and put a soul into it, they would not succeed!'² No more than a man make a gnat, can demons, according to another tradition,³ make anything smaller than a grain of barley. But those who favored the thaumaturgic interpretation of the *Book Yetsirah*, and believed that a man or golem could be created with its help, interpreted Genesis 12 : 5 (in which *nefesh*, 'souls,' can also mean persons or, as in the *Book Yetsirah*, even 'human organisms') as the outcome of Abraham's study of the book. This was to adopt the interpretation so indignantly rejected in the older sources.

If this exegesis of Genesis 12 : 5 is an old one, the polemical question of the midrash—'Are we to believe that Abraham could make souls?'—may quite possibly have been directed against its currency in esoteric circles. But even if it was new to the Middle Ages, it certainly antedated the ritual of which we shall speak below. This interpretation still tells us nothing about the nature of the persons so created, except that Abraham took them along; so they must, like the man created by Rava, have been able to move. They are not symbolic condensations of magic ritual, for they physically accompany Abraham on his journey. This exegesis

¹ Thus in Eleazar of Worms, *Hokhmah ha-Nefesh*, 1876, 5d, who took the verse to mean that Abraham and Shem, son of Noah, (and not Sarah!) had busied themselves with the *Book Yetsirah*. We find a similar notion in the unprinted end of Pseudo-Saadya on the *Book Yetsirah*, MS Munich, 40, Fol. 77a, where it is also said: 'As someone demonstrates his power to the people, so did Abraham, and created persons, *nefashoth*, in order to demonstrate the power of God, who conferred [creative] force on the letters.'

² *Genesis Rabbah*, XXXIX, 14, ed. Theodor, pp. 378-9, and the parallels there noted. The passage on the impossibility of creating a gnat already occurs in the Tannaitic *Sifre* to Deut. 6 : 5, ed. Finkelstein, p. 54.

³ Sanhedrin 67b.

should then be taken rather as an imitation of the Talmudic story about Rava, inspired by the definitely thaumaturgic conclusion of the *Book Yetsirah*. I regard this latter explanation as more plausible than any other. Judah ben Barzilai, who had excellent old sources at his disposal, was not yet acquainted with this explanation, or he would surely have mentioned it at the end of his commentary along with the other Aggadoth there quoted. But regardless of the age of this exegesis of Genesis 12 : 5, I believe that the present interpretation of the last lines of the *Book Yetsirah* follows necessarily from the text itself.

If Jewish esoterics as early as the third century—in case the *Book Yetsirah* really comes from this period—believed Abraham to be capable of such miraculous creation on the strength of his insight into the *hilkboth yetsirah*, we shall be justified in drawing a parallel between these views and certain others held at roughly the same time. Such a comparison seems to throw new light on a number of important matters that have hitherto remained obscure. Graetz was the first to assume, on the basis of cosmogonic parallels, that the orthodox Jewish gnosis or esotericism of the *Book Yetsirah* was in some way connected with certain conceptions recorded in the *Pseudo-Clementines*.¹ These books, which contain a good deal of very interesting Jewish and semi-Jewish (Ebionite) material, are a strange Jewish-Christian-Hellenistic hodge-podge, composed in the fourth century—the period of Rava and his golem—from older sources.

In the semi-gnostic chapters of the 'homilies' on Simon Magus we find² a striking parallel to the above-mentioned conceptions of the Jewish thaumaturges and to the likewise semi-gnostic ideas of the *Book Yetsirah*. Simon Magus is quoted as boasting that he had created a man, not out of the earth, but out of the air by theurgic transformations (*theiai tropai*) and—exactly as later in the instructions concerning the making of the golem!—reduced him to his element by 'undoing' the said transformations.

First, he says, the human pneuma transformed itself into warm nature and sucked up the surrounding air like a cupping glass. Then,

¹ H. Graetz, *Gnosticismus und Judentum*, Krotoschin, 1846, pp. 110–15. H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, 1949, p. 207, seems to take an attitude of great reserve toward these relationships, but does not go into the matter in detail.

² *Homilia*, II, 26, Rehm, p. 46.

he transformed this air that had taken form within the pneuma into water, then into blood . . . , and from the blood he made flesh. When the flesh had become firm, he had produced a man, not from earth but from air, so convincing himself that he could make a new man. He also claimed that he had returned him to the air by undoing the transformations.

What here is accomplished by transformations of the air, the Jewish adept does by bringing about magical transformations of the earth through the influx of the 'alphabet' of the *Book Yetsirah*. In both cases such creation has no practical purpose but serves to demonstrate the adept's 'rank' as a creator. It has been supposed that this passage in the *Pseudo-Clementines* came, by ways unknown, to the alchemists, and finally led to Paracelsus' idea of the *homunculus*.¹ The parallel with the Jewish golem is certainly more striking. The 'divine transformations' in the operation of Simon Magus remind one very much of the creative 'transformations' (*temuroth*) of letters in the *Book Yetsirah*.

IV

The conceptions here set forth account for the medieval idea of the golem which made its appearance among the German and French Hasidim. Here we have a strange convergence of legend and ritual. The members of the strong esoteric movements that sprang up among the Jews in the age of the crusades were eager to perpetuate, if only in rites of initiation which gave the adept a mystical experience of the creative power inherent in pious men, the achievement attributed to Abraham and Rava and other pious men of old in apocryphal legends, some of which seem to have been current even before the eleventh century.

¹ Jacoby in *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, IV, 289. That such conceptions have remarkable parallels in early Christian apocrypha is demonstrated by the widespread legends about the childhood of Jesus, in which it is related that he made birds of clay, which flew off. Oskar Dähnhardt, in *Natursagen*, II (*Sagen zum Neuen Testament*), 1909, pp. 71–6, gathered the rich material concerning these conceptions, which go back to the second century. In medieval Arabic and Jewish treatments of this motif, the magical component makes its appearance just as in the stories of golem-making. According to the early medieval Hebrew (anti-Christian) *Toledoth Yeshu*, Jesus demonstrated his claim to be the son of God by making birds of clay and uttering the name of God over them, whereupon they lived, stood up, and flew off into the air.

I should like to make a few brief remarks that are important for an understanding of this development. The golem—beginning with the end of the twelfth century the name appears in a number of texts in the sense of a man-like creature, produced by the magical power of man¹—starts out as a legendary figure. Then it is transformed into the object of a mystical ritual of initiation, which seems actually to have been performed, designed to confirm the adept in his mastery over secret knowledge. Then in the whisperings of the profane it degenerates once more into a figure of legend, or one might even say, tellurian myth. The early Hasidim and later some of the Kabbalists were very much concerned with the nature of this golem. Man is an earthly being, but has a magical power. The problem might be formulated as follows: does he with this magical power create a purely magical being, or is it a being related to the tellurian origins of man? It seems to me that both of these conflicting possibilities were at work in the development of the medieval golem conceptions.

Still another preliminary remark is in order. The Hasidim seem to have regarded the magic effected by application of the instructions found in, or read into, the *Book Yetsirah* as a natural faculty with which man within certain limits is endowed. Creation itself, in this view, is magical through and through: all things in it live by virtue of the secret names that dwell in them. Thus magical knowledge is not a perversion, but a pure and sacred knowledge which belongs to man as God's image. This view, which predominates in the following records, instructions, and legends, must be rigorously distinguished from the specifically Kabbalistic

¹ First in the *Yetsirah* commentaries of Eleazar of Worms and Pseudo-Saadya, who belonged to the same circle; cf. *Lesbonens*, VI (Jerusalem, 1935), p. 40. In the same periodical, XII (1944), pp. 50-1, J. Tishby pointed to a passage in the paraphrased translation, probably done in the twelfth century, of Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, IV, 25, which, to his mind, may account for the shift to the new usage of the word 'golem.' Here it is stated, in a discussion of the *Book Yetsirah*, that if man had the same power as God (for whom the idea of a thing, its name, and the thing itself are one), 'he could by his word create bodies [*gelamim*] and achieve the power of God in creation, which is quite impossible.' The use of 'golem' in the sense of body is very common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Tishby believes, however, that the special context of this passage may have provoked the shift to the new usage of the Hasidim. But since the Hasidim read the *Kuzari* in the usual translation of Judah ibn Tibbon (1176), in which the word 'golem' is not used, this explanation does not strike me as very likely.

view of magic underlying, for example, the *Zohar*. For here¹ magic is represented as a faculty first manifested in the fall of Adam and originating in the corruption of man, in his bond with the earth from which he came. The *Zohar* describes this magical knowledge, which is obviously not identical with that of the *Book Yetsirah*, as a knowledge concerning the leaves of the Tree of Knowledge. The leaves of the Tree of Death, with which Adam veils his nakedness, are the central symbol of true magical knowledge. Magic makes its appearance as a knowledge serving to veil Adam's nakedness, which resulted when his garment of heavenly light was removed from him. It is a demonized magic, which came into being with the earthly corporeity resulting from the fall and is bound up with the existence of the body. As long as Adam had his garment of light, his *kothnoth 'or*—literally, garments of light—which an esoteric midrash from the middle of the second century attributed to him in place of the *kothnoth 'or*—garments of skin—of Genesis 3 : 21,² his spiritual essence excluded the magical relationship pertaining to the realms of the Tree of Knowledge and of Death to earth-bound nature. It strikes me as possible that the latest forms of the golem conception, with their accent on danger and destructiveness, on the tellurian aspect of the golem, were in part influenced by these conceptions of Kabbalistic magic, but in the present state of our knowledge we cannot be sure. In any event, this conception of magic plays no part in the early history of the golem.

The oldest medieval testimonies to the magical interpretation of the *Book Yetsirah* are to be found in Judah ben Barzilai at the end of his commentary on the book (p. 268). It can be demonstrated beyond a doubt that these pages were read at least by Eleazar of Worms, and they were probably known to the whole group of Rhenish Hasidim at the turn of the twelfth century. They include a fragment about Abraham and a highly remarkable apocryphal version of the Talmudic passage about Rava and Zera, which deviates extensively and in a very characteristic way from

¹ Cf. primarily *Zohar*, I, 36b, 56a.

² Rabbi Meir in *Genesis Rabbah*, XX, 12, ed. Theodor, p. 196. This thesis of the Jewish esoterics seems to be connected with Origen's famous spiritualist interpretation, later sharply attacked by Jerome, to the effect that the 'garments of skin' were the material body. This thesis occurs frequently in Kabbalistic literature.

the original Talmudic story. Since the author shows elsewhere (p. 103) that he also knows the authentic form of the story, it is clear that, as he says in the beginning of his commentary, he is actually copying out 'old recensions' of the *Book Yetsirah*, at the end of which he found these fragments. Little notice has been taken of them,¹ but in our context it will be worth while to quote them in their entirety:

When our Father Abraham was born, the angels said to God: Lord of the World, you have a friend in the world and you mean to keep something hidden from him? God replied forthwith [Gen. 18 : 17]: 'Am I indeed hiding something from Abraham?' and he took counsel with the Torah and said: My daughter, come, and we shall wed you to my friend Abraham. She said: Not until the Gentle One [i.e., Moses] comes and takes [the Hebrew word can also mean 'marries'] the Gentle One [the Torah]. Thereupon God took counsel with the *Book Yetsirah* and said the same thing to it and handed it down to Abraham. He sat alone and meditated (*me'ayyan*) on it, but could understand nothing until a heavenly voice went forth and said to him: 'Are you trying to set yourself up as my equal? I am One and have created the *Book Yetsirah* and studied it: but you by yourself cannot understand it. Therefore take a companion, and meditate on it together, and you will understand it.' Thereupon Abraham went to his teacher Shem, son of Noah, and sat with him for three years, and they meditated on it until they knew how to create a world. And to this day there is no one who can understand it alone, two scholars [are needed], and even they understand it only after three years, whereupon they can make everything their hearts desire. Rava, too, wished to understand the book alone. Then Rabbi Zera said to him: It is written [Jer. 50 : 36]: 'A sword is upon the single, and they shall dote,' that is to say: A sword is upon the scholars who sit singly, each by himself, and concern themselves with the Torah.² Let us then meet and busy ourselves with the *Book Yetsirah*. And so they sat and meditated on it for three years and came to understand it. As they did so, a calf was created to them and they slaughtered it in order to celebrate their conclusion of the treatise. As soon as they slaughtered it, they forgot it [i.e., their understanding of the *Book Yetsirah*]. Then they sat for another three years and produced it again.

¹ A brief reference to this passage may be found in L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, V, p. 210.

² These lines, taken over from another Talmud passage (Berakhoth 63b), are not at all inappropriate here. The word *baddim*, originally meaning 'liars,' is taken in the sense of *bodedim*, 'those who sit alone.'

I believe this passage to be the origin of the Hasidic view that the creation of the golem was a ritual. This is half implied in the passage itself, when on conclusion of their study the rabbis wish to celebrate, as it was the custom to celebrate on concluding a Talmudic treatise. In this form of the legend, the magical creation appears as confirmation and conclusion of the study of the *Book Yetsirah*. Moreover, we are told in what is unmistakably a reinterpretation of the original Talmudic story about Hanina and Oshaya (who are here confused with Rava and Zera) that this creation must serve no practical purpose. The moment they slaughter the calf to eat it at their celebration, they forget everything they have studied! Here then an entirely new motif is developed from the Talmudic form of the legend. This creation of a golem is an end in itself, a ritual of initiation into the secret of creation. Thus it is no longer surprising that the instructions about the making of a golem should originally have appeared as the conclusion of the study of the *Book of Creation*, exactly as Eleazar of Worms tells us at the end of his commentary on the book. Such a ritual at the conclusion of the study of the book was perhaps known to later circles, who were not deeply interested in the idea of a golem. The Moroccan philosopher Judah ben Nissim ibn Malka, a kind of freelance Kabbalist, reports in his Arabic commentary on the *Book Yetsirah* (c. 1365) that students of the book were given a magical manuscript named *Sefer Raxiel* and consisting of seals, magical figures, secret names, and incantations.¹

The apocryphal version of the story in Judah ben Barzilai is closely related to a version which we find in an obscure late midrash, probably from the twelfth century.² Here again the study confers world-creating power, but it is carried on not by two, but by three scholars:

When God created His world, He first created the *Book of Creation* and looked into it and from it created his world. When he had completed His work, he put it [the *Book Yetsirah*] into the Torah and

¹ George Vajda, *Juda ben Nissim ibn Malka, philosophe juif marocain*, Paris, 1954, p. 171. Vajda believes that the book was handed over at the beginning of the study, but this cannot be deduced with certainty from the text. Perhaps this step was taken in connection with an initiation at the conclusion of the study.

² 'Neue Pesikta,' in Jellinek's *Beth ha-Midrash*, VI, pp. 36-7.

showed it to Abraham, who however understood nothing. Then a heavenly voice went forth and said: Are you really trying to compare your knowledge with mine? Why, you cannot understand anything in it by yourself. Then he went to 'Eber and went to Shem, his teacher, and they meditated on it for three years, until they knew how to create a world. So likewise Rava and Rabbi Zera busied themselves with the *Book Yetsirah* and a calf was created to them, which they slaughtered, and Jeremiah¹ and Ben Sira also busied themselves with it for three years, and a man was created to them.

The author of this passage seems untroubled by the disproportion between the creation of a calf and the creation of a world. The knowledge of world creation is purely contemplative, while, as we shall see, the knowledge of the creation of a man, here attributed to Jeremiah and his son Ben Sira, suggests still other nuances of interpretation. The number of two or three adepts who study together and carry out the ritual of golem-making in common is not accidental. It seems to be based on a regulation in the Mishnah (Hagigah II, 1) to the effect that even if all other moral requirements for the study of a secret doctrine are met, a man must not concern himself with creation (that is, with the first chapter of the Bible and by extension with cosmogony in general) in the presence of more than two other persons. This prohibition seems to have been extended to the *Book of Creation*.

The end of the last quotation is the oldest reference so far known to us to the creation of a golem by Ben Sira and his father. We have at least three other accounts, which I shall quote here together, because of the light they throw on certain aspects of the golem conception.

a) In the preface to an anonymous commentary, known as Pseudo-Saadya, on the *Book Yetsirah*, we read a few lines about Abraham which are in agreement with those cited above.² The author then continues: 'It is said in the Midrash that Jeremiah and

¹ In Jellinek we read R. Hiya, which is no doubt a corruption, easily explained on graphical grounds, of Jeremiah.

² Edited by M. Steinschneider, *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*, 1892, p. 83. In connection with the 'tradition,' communicated at the beginning of Steinschneider's text, about Abraham's study of the *Yetsirah*, cf. the exactly corresponding passage from Eleazar of Worms, *Sefer Rokeach (Hilkoth Hasiduth)*, reproduced by Ginzberg in his *Legends*, V, p. 210.

Ben Sira¹ created a man by means of the *Book Yetsirah*, and on his forehead stood *emeth*, truth, the name which He had uttered concerning the creature as the culmination of His work. But this man erased the *aleph*, by which he meant to say that God alone is truth, and he had to die.' Here it is clear that the golem is a repetition of the creation of Adam, concerning which we learn here for the first time that then too the name 'truth' was uttered. According to a well-known Talmudic saying (Shabbath 55a) 'truth' is the seal of God. Here it is imprinted on His noblest creation.

b) The version written down by students of Rabbi Judah the Pious of Speyer (d. 1217) in Regensburg is more explicit.²

Ben Sira wished to study the *Book Yetsirah*. Then a heavenly voice went forth: You cannot make him [such a creature] alone. He went to his father Jeremiah. They busied themselves with it, and at the end of three years a man was created to them, on whose forehead stood *emeth*, as on Adam's forehead. Then the man they had made said to them: God alone created Adam, and when he wished to let Adam die, he erased the *aleph* from *emeth* and he remained *meth*, dead. That is what you should do with me and not create another man, lest the world succumb to idolatry as in the days of Enosh.³ The created man said to them: Reverse the combinations of letters [by which he was created] and erase the *aleph* of the word *emeth* from my forehead—and immediately he fell into dust.

As we see, Ben Sira's golem was very close to Adam; he was even endowed with speech, with which to warn his makers against the continuance of such practices. I shall have more to say below about this warning against idolatry and the example of Enosh. The golem is destroyed by the reversal of the magical combination of letters through which he was called into life and at the same time by the destruction, at once real and symbolic, of God's seal on his forehead. The seal seems to have appeared spontaneously on his forehead in the course of the magical process of creation, and not to have been inscribed by the adepts.

¹ According to a tradition which probably goes back to the early Middle Ages, Ben Sira is the son of the prophet; this was deduced from the fact that the names Sira and Yirmiyahu have the same numerical value, 271.

² MS of the *Sefer Gematrioth*, printed in Abraham Epstein, *Beiträge zur jüdischen Altertumskunde*, Vienna, 1887, pp. 122-3.

³ The Targum and Midrash interpreted Gen. 4:26 as relating to the beginning of idolatry in the days of Enosh; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, V, p. 151, with rich reference matter.

c) An interesting amplification of this passage is to be found in an early thirteenth-century text, originating with the early Kabbalists of Languedoc and clearly indicating the ties that must have existed between this group and the Hasidim of the Rhineland and northern France. In a pseudo-epigraphon attributed to the Tannaite Judah ben Bathyra, we read:¹

The prophet Jeremiah busied himself alone with the *Book Yetsirah*. Then a heavenly voice went forth and said: Take a companion. He went to his son Sira, and they studied the book for three years. Afterward they set about combining the alphabets in accordance with the Kabbalistic principles of combination, grouping, and word formation, and a man was created to them, on whose forehead stood the letters *YHWH Elohim Emeth*.² But this newly created man had a knife in his hand, with which he erased the *aleph* from *emeth*; there remained: *meth*. Then Jeremiah rent his garments [because of the blasphemy: God is dead, now implied in the inscription] and said: Why have you erased the *aleph* from *emeth*? He replied: I will tell you a parable. An architect built many houses, cities, and squares, but no one could copy his art and compete with him in knowledge and skill until two men persuaded him. Then he taught them the secret of his art, and they knew how to do everything in the right way. When they had learned his secret and his abilities, they began to anger him with words. Finally, they broke with him and became architects like him, except that what he charged a thaler for, they did for six groats. When people noticed this, they ceased to honor the artist and came to them and honored them and gave them commissions when they required to have something built. So God has made you in His image and in His shape and form. But now that you have created a man like Him, people will say: There is no God in the world beside these two! Then Jeremiah said: What solution is there? He said: Write the alphabets backward on the earth you have strewn with intense concentration. Only do not meditate in the sense of building up, but the other way around. So they did, and the man became dust and ashes before their eyes. Then Jeremiah said: Truly, one should study these things only in order to know the power

¹ MS Halberstam, 444 (in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York), Fol. 7b, and MS Florence, Laurentiana, Pl. II, Cod. 41, Fol. 200. The Halberstam MS, or a copy of it, is the source of the Latin translation in J. Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica*, ed. 1603, col. 759.

² 'God is truth.' In the revision of the Kabbalistic book *Peli'ab* (c. 1350), in which this whole passage is copied, this important change is crossed out, leaving the more inoffensive older text ('*emeth* by itself!'); cf. ed. Koretz, 1784, 36a.

and omnipotence of the Creator of this world, but not in order really to practice them.

In this Kabbalistic view of golem-making two contradictory motifs meet. Here the story is reinterpreted as a moralistic legend and the warning becomes more profound. To the Hasidim the creation of a golem confirmed man in his likeness to God; here, thanks to the daring amplification of the inscription on the golem's forehead, it becomes a warning; the real and not merely symbolic creation of a golem would bring with it the 'death of God'! The hybris of its creator would turn against God. This idea, barely hinted at in the second passage quoted, is clearly stressed by the anonymous Kabbalist.

The motif of warning against such creation, not so much because of the dangerous nature of the golem or of the enormous powers concealed in him as because of the possibility that it might lead to polytheistic confusion, connects these golem stories with the view of the origin of idolatry current in these same circles. For Enosh was said to have come to his father Seth and questioned him about his lineage. When Seth said to him that Adam had neither father nor mother but that God had created him out of the earth, Enosh went away and took a clod of earth and made a figure from it. Then he went to his father and said: But it cannot walk or speak. Then Seth said: God blew the breath of life into Adam's nose. When Enosh proceeded to do this, Satan came and slipped into the figure and so gave it an appearance of life. So the name of God was desecrated, and idolatry began when the generation of Enosh worshipped this figure.¹

Here the conception of the golem converges with the speculation—in which Judaism, with its rejection of all idols, has always taken a hostile interest—on the nature of images and statues. In certain Jewish traditions cult images are indeed looked upon as a species of animated golem. Not wholly without justification, attempts have been made to relate the notion of living statues, widespread among non-Jews, with the golem legend, though such

¹ In a manuscript text of *Sefer Nitsabon*, from a Roman library, a copy of which by Adolf Posnanski I have read in Jerusalem, this tale is designated as a 'tradition of Rabbi Judah, the Pious.' In *Legends* I, p. 122, and V, p. 150, Ginzberg cites a similar text from a later so-called *Chronicle of Yerahme'el*, in which Enosh takes six clods of earth, mixes them, and forms a human figure from dust and mud.

parallels can apply of course only to the purely magical and not to the tellurian aspect of the golem.¹ The Jewish traditions concerning idolatry disclose one motif in particular, which is unquestionably connected with certain forms of the golem legend, namely, magical animation by means of the names of God.

We first encounter such a tradition in the Talmud (Sota 47a), where we are told that Gehazi cut one of the names of God into the muzzle of Jeroboam's bull idol (I Kings 12 : 28), whereupon the idol recited the first words of the Decalogue: 'I am thy God' and 'Thou shalt have no other.' A similar story is told about the idol which King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3) had made. The king is said to have awakened it to life by putting on it the High Priest's diadem, stolen from the Temple in Jerusalem, on which was written the tetragrammaton YHWH. But Daniel, ostensibly wishing to kiss it, approached and removed the name of God, whereupon it fell lifeless to the ground.² In these tales the name of God, a sacred power, gives life to the cult images of polytheism. A conflicting view is that the devil, or—in anti-Catholic versions—Samael and Lilith had entered into such images. Both conceptions occur, for example, in the *Zohar*.³ The legends recorded by Ahima'ats of Oria in his eleventh-century family chronicle show that a conception very close to the later forms of the golem legend was alive among the Italian Jews of the early Middle Ages, from whom the German Hasidim assuredly took many of their traditions. Ahima'ats tells of the magical miracles performed by

¹ Cf. Konrad Müller, 'Die Golemsage und die Sage von der lebenden Statue,' in *Mitteilungen der Schlesischen Gesellschaft für Volkskunde*, XX (1919), pp. 1-40. Müller, to be sure, had no more knowledge of the authentic Jewish traditions concerning the golem than did Hans Ludwig Held in his book *Das Gespenst des Golem; eine Studie aus der hebräischen Mystik*, Munich, 1927, where, pp. 104-16, we find material about living statues. Held's book shows great enthusiasm for the subject, but in all crucial passages the author substitutes inappropriate mystical meditations for the knowledge of Hebrew literature that he does not possess. It is pointless to take a polemical attitude toward this and similar elucubrations; it suffices to analyze the actual source material.

² *Cant. Rabbah*, to 7 : 9. So also in *Zohar*, II, 175a.

³ In *Ra'ya Mehemma*, III, 277b, we are told that the generation that built the Tower of Babel fashioned idols. Samael and Lilith entered into these idols and spoke from them and so became gods. In *Tikkun* No. 66 of the *Tikkune Zohar* it is said, however (97b), that they had put the *shem meforash* into the mouths of these images, whereupon they began to speak.

Aharon of Bagdad, the *merkabab* mystic, and by Rabbi Hananel, who brought dead men back to life for a time by wedging a piece of parchment with the name of God under their tongue or sewing it into the flesh of their right arm. When the name is removed—in some stories on the pretext of a kiss, as in the legend of Daniel—the body falls back lifeless.¹

The above-mentioned conflict between pure and impure powers in the cult images occurs also in connection with what to the Jewish mind is the worst of all idols, namely the golden calf. In one story, we are told that Samael, the devil, spoke from it.² The other thesis occurred in a lost midrash, several times quoted in medieval sources.³ In a remarkable book which made its appearance after 1200 in the same circle as the conception of the golem, the magic of the *Book Yetsirah* is contrasted with that of the magicians. The anonymous author of the *Book of Life* contrasts Rava's method of creating a man with that of the magicians whose creation also, like that of the *Book Yetsirah*, employs earth as its basic element:⁴

The magicians of Egypt, who made creatures, were acquainted through demons or some other artifice with the order of the *merkabab* [the heavenly world and God's throne] and took dust under the feet of the order [suited to their undertaking] and created what they wished. But the scholars of whom it is said: 'N. N. made a man, etc.' knew the secret of the *merkabab* and took dust from under the feet of the [animal figures] of the *merkabab*, and spoke the name of God over it, and it was created. In this way Micah made the golden calf that could dance.⁵

¹ *Megillath 'Abima'ats*, ed. B. Klar, Jerusalem, 1944, pp. 17 and 27-8.

² *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, XLV.

³ Two recensions of the account from the Genizah in Cairo have been published by L. Ginzberg, one in *Ha-Goren*, IX (1923), pp. 65-6, and another in *Ginze Schechter*, I (1928), p. 243. They accord with the text used by the author of the *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, which is here translated. Saul Lieberman—*Yemenite Midraschim* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1940, pp. 17-18—was first to note that this midrash is the source of the strange, hitherto incomprehensible reference in the speech of the maker of the golden calf in the Koran, 20 : 95.

⁴ I have translated from the MSS Munich, 207, Fol. 10d-11a (written in 1268), and Cambridge, Add. 643¹, Fol. 9a. M. Gudemann—*Geschichte des Erziehungswesens und der Cultur der Juden*, I, Wien, 1880, p. 169—omits the whole passage about the golden calf.

⁵ A reference to the idolatrous Ephraimite mentioned in Judg. 17, whom the Midrash already credits with the making of the golden calf.

For like all Israel he had, in the exodus from Egypt, seen the *merkabab* in the Red Sea. But whereas the other Israelites had not concentrated on this vision, he did so, as is indicated in Song of Songs 6: 12. When the bull in the *merkabab* moved to leftward,¹ he quickly took some of the dust from under its feet and kept it until the appropriate moment. And in the same way the magicians in India and the Arab countries still make animals of men, by conjuring a demon to bring them dust from the corresponding place and give it to the magician. He mixes it with water and gives it to the man to drink, whereupon the man is immediately metamorphosed. And our teacher Saadya also knows of such practices, which are carried out by angels or by the Name.

V

In the twelfth century at the latest a set procedure for golem-making developed on the basis of the conceptions set forth above. This procedure, if I am not mistaken, was a ritual *representing* an act of creation by the adept and culminating in ecstasy. Here the legend was transformed into a mystical experience, and there is nothing in the instructions that have come down to us to suggest that it was ever anything more than a mystical experience. In none of the sources does a golem created in this way enter into real life and perform any actions whatsoever. The motif of the magical servant or famulus is unknown to any of these texts² and does not make its appearance until much later when, as we shall see, the golem becomes a figure in Kabbalistic legend.

We possess four main sources of instructions for golem-making. I should like to discuss their principal features. The most precise instructions are given by Eleazar of Worms at the end of his commentary on the *Book Yetsirah*.³ Revised and presented as a separate piece, they have come down to us in numerous manuscripts. The chapter is entitled *pe'ullath ha-yetsirah*, which probably means 'the practice, or practical application, of the *Book Yetsirah*.'

¹ This is read into Ezek. 1: 10, where the bull in the *merkabab* looks leftward.

² After careful examination of the sources, I must withdraw my statement in *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XIX, p. 151, Note 29, that this conception is first attested in Pseudo-Saadya.

³ Only in the complete Przemysl Edition, 1888, 152, with the following tables of combinations.

though the 'practice of golem-making' would also be possible.¹ Here as in the other texts Eleazar's complete tables of the combinations of the alphabet are lacking, but frequent reference is made to them. In the first half of the seventeenth century the Frankfurt Kabbalist Naphtali ben Jacob Bacharach had the courage to include this text in a printed edition of one of his Kabbalistic works, though in revised form and accompanied by the prudent explanation that the 'instructions' had been left incomplete, lest they be misused by unworthy persons.²

Eleazar's instructions specify that two or three adepts, joined in the golem ritual, should take some virginal mountain earth,³ knead it in running water, and form a golem from it. Over this figure they recite the combinations of the alphabet derived from the 'gates' of the *Book Yetsirah*, which, in Eleazar's recension, form not 231 but 221 combinations.⁴ The characteristic feature of this procedure is that not the 221 combinations themselves are recited, but combinations of each of their letters with each consonant of the tetragrammaton according to every possible vocalization (the Hasidim recognized the five vowels a, e, i, o,

¹ MS British Museum, Margoliouth 752, Fol. 66a; Cambridge Univ. Libr. Add. 647, Fol. 18a-b; Jerusalem Univ. Libr., 8°, 330, Fol. 248; cf. on this fragment my catalogue of Kabbalistic codices in *Jerusalem Kive Yad be-Kabbalah*, 1930, p. 75.

² *Emek ha-Melekh*, Amsterdam, 1648, 10c-d; this passage is completely translated into Latin from the excerpts from this work given in Knorr von Rosenroth, *Kabbala denudata*, II (actually the third volume of the whole work): *Liber Sobar restitutus*, Sulzbach, 1684, pp. 220-1.

³ In his *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS Munich, 81, Fol. 127b, Eleazar also demands virgin soil from the mountain for a magical cure effected with the 72-letter name of God. I have found something similar in the medieval magical text about the testing of a woman suspected of adultery, communicated in A. Marmorstein, *Jahrbuch für jüdische Volkskunde*, II (1925), p. 381. On p. 11 of *Die Golemsage*, B. Rosenfeld, whose medieval material on the subject is otherwise taken entirely (including the mistakes) from my article 'Golem' in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, VII (1931), expresses the belief that this prescription 'probably has something to do with the view of the earth as the virginal mother of Adam, which already occurs in the doctors of the Church and later in medieval, particularly Middle High German, literature' (Köhler, in *Germania*, VII, pp. 476 ff.). It may 'have reached the German Kabbalists and have been transferred to the golem.'

⁴ Saadya substituted '231 gates,' which is correct from the standpoint of the theory of combination. As the tables in Eleazar of Worms show, the German Hasidim arrived in a very complicated way at the 221 gates of their text.

and u). This seems to have been the first step. It is possible that the procedure was limited to the recitation of all the possible combinations of two (in every conceivable vocalization) between one of the consonants, each of which according to the *Book Yetsirah* 'governs' a part of the human organism, and one consonant of the tetragrammaton. Not the printed texts, but several of the manuscripts give exact instructions about the order of these vocalizations. The result is a strictly formal recitative, both magical and meditative in character. One prescribed order of the alphabet produces a male being, another a female; a reversal of these orders turns the golem back to dust.¹ None of these instructions leave room between the act of animation and the act of transformation back into dust, for a pause during which the golem might exist outside the sphere of meditation.

The ritual character of this golem creation is particularly clear in the explanations of the so-called Pseudo-Saadya. The words of the *Book Yetsirah* (II, 4): 'So the circle [*galgal*] closes before and behind' were taken by him as a prescription. These words do not only tell us how God went about his creation, but also teach us how the adept should proceed when he sets out to create a golem. Commenting on this sentence, Pseudo-Saadya writes:²

They make a circle around the creatures and walk around the circle and recite the 221 alphabets, as they are noted [the author seems to have in mind such tables as we actually find in Eleazar of Worms], and some say that the Creator put power into the letters, so that a man makes a creature from virgin earth and kneads it and buries it in the ground, draws a circle and a sphere around the creature, and each time he goes around it recites one of the alphabets. This he should do 442 [in another reading 462] times. If he walks forward, the creature rises up alive, by virtue of the power inherent in the recitation of the letters. But if he wishes to destroy what he has made, he goes round backward, reciting the same alphabets from end to beginning. Then the creature sinks into the ground of itself and dies. And so it happened to R. I. B. E. [probably Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha]³ with his students,

¹ So in the commentary to Chapter II, 5d.

² In addition to the text of the first edition of the *Book Yetsirah*, Mantua, 1562, with commentaries, I have used the MS of Pseudo-Saadya in the British Museum, No. 754 in Margoliouth's Catalogue of Hebrew Manuscripts, and the Munich MS Hebr. 40.

³ This is the legendary hero of *merkabab* gnosis. But in the British Museum MS there is another abbreviation: R. Z., which probably refers to a Rabbi Zadok. Who is meant I do not know.

who busied themselves with the *Book Yetsirah* and by mistake went around backward, until they themselves by the power of the letters sank into the earth up to their navels. They were unable to escape and cried out. Their teacher heard them and said: Recite the letters of the alphabets and walk forward, instead of going backward as you have been doing. They did so and were released.

It strikes me as important that the golem is here buried in the earth, from which it rises. This might suggest a symbolism of rebirth, which would be perfectly in keeping with the nature of the whole as a ritual of initiation. Before his palingenesis the golem is buried! Of course, such an interpretation is not necessary and as far as I know this detail appears only in this one passage. The prescription that the earth of which the golem is made should be virginal (i.e., untilled) also favors the parallel with Adam, for he too was created of virgin soil. In the Munich manuscript of Pseudo-Saadya this passage is immediately followed by a second very detailed prescription, which is lacking in the printed version.¹ Here we read the following instructions: 'Take dust from a mountain, virgin earth, strew some of it all over the house, and cleanse your body. From this pure dust make a golem, the creature you wish to make and bring to life, and over each member utter the consonant assigned it in the *Book Yetsirah*, and combine it with the consonants and vowels of the name of God.' Circle 'as in a round dance,' and when the round is reversed, the golem returns to his original lifeless state.

We can gather indirectly from such instructions that the ritual culminates in ecstasy. The recitation of these rhythmic sequences with their modulations of vowel sounds would quite naturally induce a modified state of consciousness, and seems to have been designed for this purpose. This is made perfectly clear in a text which we possess in several manuscripts. It dates from the fourteenth century at the latest, but may well be older.² Here again we find technical prescriptions about the passage through all 231 gates. Then we read:

He should take pure earth of the finest sort and begin with combinations, until he receives the influx of inspiration, *shafa' ha-hokhmab*, and he should recite these combinations rapidly and turn the 'wheel'

¹ MS 40, Fol. 55b.

² MS Munich, 341, Fol. 183b; Cambridge Add. 647, Fol. 18b. (In this MS three golem recipes are combined!)

[of the combinations] as fast as he can, and this practice brings the holy spirit [that is, inspiration]. Only then [in such a state of mind] should he undertake the [technical] part of golem-making.

These instructions show an unmistakable affinity to the yoga practices that had been disseminated among the Jews chiefly by Abraham Abulafia:

Then take a bowl full of pure water and a small spoon, fill it with earth—but he must know the exact weight of the earth before he stirs it and also the exact measurement of the spoon with which he is to measure [but this information is not imparted in writing.] When he has filled it, he should scatter it and slowly blow it over the water. While beginning to blow the first spoonful of earth, he should utter a consonant of the Name in a loud voice and pronounce it in a single breath, until he can blow no longer. While he is doing this, his face should be turned downward. And so, beginning with the combinations that constitute the parts of the head, he should form all the members in a definite order, until a figure emerges.

But it is forbidden to perform this operation too often. Its true purpose is: 'To enter into communion with His great Name.' The link between all this and Abulafia's Kabbalah (or its sources) is obvious.

It is in keeping with such a conception of the ecstatic nature of this vision of a golem when an important but anonymous Spanish author of the early fourteenth century explains that the process is not corporeal, but a 'creation of thought,' *yetsirah mahshavith*. Abraham, he writes, 'almost succeeded in producing valuable creations, that is, creations of thought, and that is why he called his valuable book the *Book of Creation*.'¹ And a disparaging remark of Abulafia himself, the leading representative of an ecstatic Kabbalah in the thirteenth century, seems to imply a similar view of golem-making as a purely mystical process. He ridicules the 'folly of those who study the *Book Yetsirah* in order to make a calf; for those who do so are themselves calves.'²

An awareness of the inadequacy of the written instructions is discernible in several records of the later tradition. Naphtali Bacharach, for example, does not say what he omitted to prevent

¹ So in 'Questions of the Old Man,' *Sbe'eloth ha-Zaken*, 97, Oxford MS. Neubauer, No. 2396, Fol. 53a.

² From Abulafia's *Ner 'Elobim*, quoted in my *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 384.

the misuse of his book. From parallels in the practical Kabbalah and in Abulafia's writings, one gathers that the omission may have concerned the intonation of the letter combinations, breathing technique, or certain movements of the head and hands that had accompanied the process. Hayim Joseph David Azulai, a famous Jerusalem Kabbalist of the eighteenth century, who was well acquainted with the traditions of the seventeenth-century school of Kabbalists in Jerusalem, said to Rabbi Jacob Baruch in Livorno (by word of mouth, it would seem) that in magic the 'corporeal combinations of letters as they first meet the eye are not sufficient.'¹

¹ In Jacob Baruch's additions to the edition of Johanan Allemanno's *Sba'ar ha-Heshek*, Livorno, 1790, 37a. The similar remark which occurs in the novelistic version of the legends about the golem of the 'Great Rabbi Loew' of Prague is probably connected with this. This version, in which the golem takes on the entirely new function of combatting lies about ritual murder, is a free invention, written about 1909, and published in Hebrew by Judah Rosenberg (the author?), supposedly after an apocryphal 'Manuscript in the Library of Metz,' under the title: *The Miraculous Deeds of Rabbi Loew with the Golem*. Language and content both show it to be the work of a Hasidic author with a Kabbalistic education and (something unusual in these circles) novelistic leanings, writing after the ritual murder trials of the eighteen-eighties and nineties. Chajim Bloch's book, *Der Prager Golem*, Berlin, 1920, is a German version of this text, whose wholly modern character escaped the deserving, but quite uncritical, author. Nor is Held's opinion, that these versions are 'the only authentic documents to have come down to us' (*Gespens der Golem*, p. 95), exactly indicative of critical understanding. He was surely fascinated by the following remark in Bloch's text (p. 59), which falls in very well with his own interpretation of the golem as man's double: 'Some regarded the golem as a "ghost" of Rabbi Loew.' In the Hebrew text of course there is no sign of this sentence, so welcome to such authors as Meyrink and Held. Toward the end of this Hebrew novel there are nineteen apocryphal 'utterances of Rabbi Loew on the nature of the golem,' which in reality, even if they were invented fifty years ago, do no less honor to the Kabbalistic frame of mind than to the imagination of the author. Here we read in § 17 (cf. *Nifla'oth Maharal 'im ha-Golem*, Pyotrkw, 1909, p. 73): 'One cannot study the letters of the *Book Yetsirah* as they are printed and make a man or living creature with them. Those who merely learn the combinations from the book can do nothing with them. First, because of the many corruptions and gaps in the text, and moreover, because everything depends on one's own spontaneous interpretations. For a man must first know to which 'lights' each letter points, then he will spontaneously know the material forces in each letter. All this can be studied; but when one has studied it all well, everything depends on one's intelligence and piety. If a man is worthy, he will achieve the influx [of inspiration] that enables him

From these testimonies on the practice of golem-making we learn chiefly two things:

1. As has been stressed above, it is without practical 'purpose.' Even where what is described seems to be on the border between a psychic experience (shared, it is true, by several adepts) and an objective manifestation of the golem, this 'demonstration' had no other purpose than to demonstrate the power of the holy Name. When rigorously interpreted, even the following statement in Pseudo-Saadya's commentary on *Yetsirab* (II, 5) remains within these limits: 'I have heard that Ibn Ezra made such a creature in the presence of Rabbenu Tam, and said: See what [power] God put into the holy letters, and he said [to Rabbenu Tam]: Go backward;¹ and it returned to its former state [as lifeless earth].' Even this report describes nothing more than a half-legendary initiation of the famous French Talmudist Rabbenu Tam (i.e., R. Jacob ben Me'ir, Rashi's grandson, who died in 1171) by the philosopher Abraham ibn Ezra, who travelled through Western Europe in the middle of the century, and whom the German and French Hasidim always revered as a great religious authority.² Here again the golem, no sooner created, is dissolved again into dust: with the initiation of the Talmudist it has served its purpose, which is purely psychic.

2. Golem-making is dangerous; like all major creation it endangers the life of the creator—the source of danger, however, is not the golem or the forces emanating from him, but the man

¹ It is clear from the context that this is an invocation, not to the golem but to Rabbenu Tam, who took part in the ritual. The whole story is told only in order to illustrate the act of going backward in destroying the golem.

² The mystical leanings of Abraham ibn Ezra were evidently clearer to them than to us, and in any case, they saw no contradiction between them and his other—grammatical, exegetic, and theological—interests. As late as 1270 Abraham Abulafia had before him a commentary of ibn Ezra on the *Yetsirab*, which he characterized as 'philosophical and in part mystical.'

to compose and combine the letters, in such a way as to produce a creature in the material world. But even were he to write down the combinations, his companion will be unable to do anything with them unless, through his own insight, he achieves the necessary concentration of thought. Otherwise the whole remains for him like a body without soul. Bezalel had the highest insight in these matters, and for him it would have been a little thing to create a man or living creature. For he even knew the right meditations concerning the letters with which heaven and earth are made.'

himself. The danger is not that the golem, become autonomous, will develop overwhelming powers; it lies in the tension which the creative process arouses in the creator himself. Mistakes in carrying out the directions do not impair the golem; they destroy its creator. The dangerous golem of later legends represents a profound transformation of the original conception, in which, as we have seen, a parallel with Adam was clearly present, but in which this tellurian element was not regarded as a source of danger.¹ And yet the danger incurred by the creator of a golem, at least as described by Pseudo-Saadya, is not entirely without such implications. For here the man himself returns to his element; if he makes a mistake in applying the instructions, he is sucked in by the earth.

There is another question to which we obtain no conclusive answer, namely: could golems speak? The Talmudist Rava was unable to confer speech on his artificial man. But even in the later ritual, muteness is not as essential as has often been supposed.² It was not always the rule, and apparently both conceptions were current among the German Hasidim. We do not know where the notion of a golem endowed with speech, as in the story about Ben Sira, first made its appearance.³ The legends

¹ It is a mistake to read a reference to such a destructive power of the golem in the passage of *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* in *Zohar Hadash*, 1885, 21c, saying in connection with Gen. 6:11: 'By this is meant the golem that destroys everything and brings about its ruin.' Here 'golem' is used in the sense of an irreligious, soulless man, as also, in another passage of the same *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, printed in *Zohar*, I, 121a: 'Rabbi Isaac said, No one sins, unless he is a golem and no man, which is to say: one who takes no account of his sacred soul and whose whole activity is like that of an animal.' The sacred soul is the divine part, in contrast to the mere vital soul. But is this usage connected with that of the Hasidim? Indeed, Joseph Gikatila wrote in the 'Garden of Nut Trees' (*Ginnath 'Egorz*, Hanau, 1615), 33c (which was written c. 1274, shortly before the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*): 'The body with the vital spirit that dwells in it, called *nefesh*, by virtue of which the body is able to move back and forth, is called golem.' Since otherwise 'golem' means only 'body' in philosophical usage, this more precise use of the term may have been influenced by the language of the German Hasidim. Cf. my further remarks in the text about the question of the 'soul' in the golem.

² I myself expressed such an opinion in my 'Golem' article in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, VII (1931).

³ Thanks to a strange typographical error, the golem of Ben Sira was associated with the Hay ibn Yaktan of Avicenna (Hebrew: Ben Sina), which, in the famous philosophical poem of Ibn Tofeil, is described as a kind of

about Ben Sira are far older than the twelfth century, although their association with golem-making is first attested for this period. Possibly this motif first made its appearance in Italy. In the speculative discussions of the Kabbalists, in any case, the golems of Rava and Ben Sira are taken as examples of the alternative possibilities.

It is Pseudo-Saadya who puts golems on the highest plane. He says that recitation of the alphabets of the *Book Yetsirah* has the God-given power to produce such a creature and to give it vitality, *hiyyuth*, and soul, *neshamah*.¹ No other Kabbalistic source goes so far. In distinguishing between the pneumatic element of the soul and the purely vital element, he implies at least that such a golem could do more than merely move, so placing him on a level with the golem who warned Ben Sira that his activities might bring about the death of God.

Clearly Eleazar of Worms is more cautious than our other sources from the same school of Judah the Pious. In commenting on the verse: 'Knowledge and speech in Him who lives forever' (in an old hymn of the merkabah gnostics) he declares expressly that man has true knowledge (*da'ath*, which also means gnosis) by which he can make a new creature with the help of the *Book Yetsirah*, but that even with the help of the Name of God, he cannot endow his creature with speech.² With a significant restriction, this opinion is shared by the *Book Babir* from the second half of the twelfth century. Here (§ 136) the Talmudic story about Rava is related, but with the following addition:

Rava sent a man to Rabbi Zera. He spoke to him and he did not answer. But if not for his sins, he would have answered. And what would have enabled him to answer? His soul. But has man a soul that he might transmit [to such a creature]? Yes, for it is written in Genesis 2 : 7: 'He blew into his nostrils the breath of life—thus man has a soul

¹ To *Yetsirah*, II, 5. Exactly as in the British Museum MS.

² From Munich MS, Hebr. 346, cited in my *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, Jerusalem-Tel-Aviv, 1948, p. 231.

philosophical golem, brought into being by *generatio aequivoca*. In Isaac ibn Latif's *Iggereth Teshubab* (*Kobetz 'al Yad*, I, p. 48), Ibn Sina's name is misprinted. Thus Ben Sira became the creator of Yehiel ben Uriel, that is, Hay ibn Yaktan. This misled A. Epstein, *Beiträge zur jüdischen Altertumskunde*, 1887, p. 124, into erroneous combinations concerning Ben Sira's golem.

of life' [with which he might confer language]¹ were it not for sins, through which the soul ceases to be pure; and this impurity is the dividing line between the righteous and God. And so also it is written [Ps. 8 : 6]: 'Thou madest him only a little lower than God'.²

According to this passage, sinless beings would be able to transmit the soul of life, which includes the power of speech, even to a golem. Thus the golem is not mute by nature, but only because the souls of the righteous are no longer pure. In contrast to this conception, which possibly opens up eschatological perspectives for a new and improved golem, Isaac the Blind (c. 1200) contents himself with observing that the golem was speechless because Rava could give him no *ruah*.³ What this author means by *ruah* is uncertain. Possibly it is taken in the sense of *pneuma*, the higher, spiritual soul.

Elaborating the statement of Eleazar of Worms, a Kabbalist at the turn of the fourteenth century goes so far as to say that although a golem has an animated form, he is still dead, because his creator can give him no knowledge of God or speech. 'Upon the real man God imprinted the seal *emeth*.'⁴ For several Kabbalists who accepted the *anima rationalis* of the philosophers, the power of speech was inseparable from reason. Thus Bahya ben Asher (1291) says of Rava: 'He was able to give his creature a motor soul, but not the rational soul which is the source of speech.'⁵ This is in keeping with the view prevailing among the Kabbalists that speech is the highest of human faculties, or, to quote J. G. Hamann, the 'mother of reason and revelation.'

But there were other Kabbalists who dissociated speech from reason. In one piece from the middle of the thirteenth century,

¹ My explanation of the passage in the complete translation of the *Book Babir*, Berlin, 1923, p. 150, should be amended accordingly.

² This interpretation of the passage in Ps. as a reference to man's inability to give the golem speech occurs also in a text of the German Hasidim, which I have published in *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*.

³ In his commentary on the *Yetsirah*, MS Leiden, Warner 24, Fol. 224b.

⁴ Simeon ben Samuel, *Hadrath Kodesh*, at the beginning (printed in 1560 in Thiengen under the title *Adam Sikkli*). The author employs the term 'golem', but his use of the word is colored by the philosophical meaning 'matter' in contrast to living form. In the final letters of Gen. 2 : 7 about the life breath, the author finds the word *botam*, seal.

⁵ In Bahya's commentary on the Torah, Gen. 2 : 7, Venice, 1544, 11d, and in his *Kad ha-Kemah*, ed. C. Breit, II, 103b.

entitled 'Epitome of the Things According to Which the Masters of the *Merkabah* Operated,' a Spanish Kabbalist writes:¹

When the rabbis say: a childless man is like a dead man, this means: like a golem [lifeless matter], without form. Consequently pictures that are painted on a wall are of this nature, for although they have the form of a man, they are called only *tselem*, image [here in the sense of reflection, derived from *tsele*, shadow] and form. When Rava created a man, he made a figure in the form of a man by virtue of the combinations of letters, but he could not give him *demuth*, the real likeness of a man. For it is possible for a man, with the help of mighty forces, to make a man who speaks, but not one who can procreate or has reason. For this is beyond the power of any created being and rests with God alone.²

Here then, contrary to the opinion put forward by Bahya and so many others, the golem has speech, but neither language nor sexual urge.²

Among later Kabbalists, two important authorities, each in a different way, expressed themselves about the specific kind of vitality conferred on the golem. About 1530 Me'ir ibn Gabbai expressed the opinion that a magically produced man has no spiritual soul, *ruah*, for he is—and he cites the Talmud passage in authority—speechless. But he has the lowest degree of soul, *nefesh*, for he can move and has vitality.³ Moses Cordovero takes a different view of the question in 1548. According to him,⁴ a 'new creature' of this kind—Cordovero, like all the Sefardic Kabbalists of the sixteenth century, avoids the term golem, which seems at that time to have been in use only among the

¹ MS 838 of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Fol. 35b.

² I have thus far found this conception in no other authentic Kabbalistic text. It is all the more interesting that it should recur in the utterances, mentioned in Note 1, p. 189, of a modern author inclining toward Kabbalism, which he puts into the mouth of the 'Great Rabbi Loew' of Prague. Here we read in § 9: 'The golem had to be made without generative power or sexual urge. For if he had had this urge, even after the manner of animals in which it is far weaker than in man, we would have had a great deal of trouble with him, because no woman would have been able to defend herself against him.' Small wonder that this motif should have played an important part in the literary treatment of the legend in modern fiction.

³ Ibn Gabbai, *Avodath ha-Kodesh*, II, 31.

⁴ In his *Pardes Rimmonim*, XXIV, 10. This is the source of Abraham Azulai's remarks on the subject in his *Hesed le-Abraham*, IV, 30, written c. 1630.

German and Polish Jews—has no soul of any degree, neither *nefesh* nor *ruah* nor *neshamah*; he has, however, a special kind of vitality, *Chiyuth*, which Cordovero puts higher than the animal soul. How, Cordovero asks, could men, even aided by the alphabets of the *Book Yetsirah*, have drawn any of these three degrees of soul down to such a creature? According to him it is impossible. What actually happens, in his view, is as follows: When the adepts put the earth together and, as a result of their occupation with the *Book Yetsirah*, a creature in the form of man comes into being, this creature's parts [like those of all created beings] strive upward, toward their source and their home in the upper world, whence all tellurian things come or in which they have their prototype. Upon these elements there shines a light appropriate to their specific rank in the scale of the elements; it is not *nefesh* nor *ruah* nor *neshamah*, but a pure naked vitality which, because of the nature of the elements here joined, is above the animal level and comes closer to the source of light than does an animal. On the other hand, a golem does not die in the strict sense, as an animal dies, but simply returns to its element, the earth. Consequently Rabbi Zera, in the Talmud, had no need to kill him, because his elements disintegrated of their own accord. So it is that one who 'kills' a golem is not liable to punishment and transgresses no commandment of the Torah.

Here then we have a truly tellurian creature, which, though animated by magic, remains within the realm of elemental forces. A tellurian soul, very similar to that which animated Adam in the midrash discussed at the beginning of this study, flows into him from the earth. Adam-golem, as we have seen, was endowed not with reason but with a certain elemental power of vision, and man has a similar power to endow his golem with elemental forces, or, as Cordovero says, 'lights that shine into the elements.' So also in the Kabbalistic development of the golem, the tellurian and magical elements converge in a way that is specifically defined. The purely theoretical speculation of the Kabbalists about the meaning and nature of golems may thus be said to prepare the way for, or run parallel to, the development in which, reverting from the purely mystical realm to that of Kabbalistic legend, the golem once again becomes the repository of enormous tellurian forces which can, on occasion, erupt.

VI

The Safed Kabbalists of the sixteenth century speak of golems as of a phenomenon situated in the remote past; their discussion of the matter is purely theoretical. Occasionally a set of instructions for golem-making made its appearance among them; the readers were explicitly forbidden to experiment along these lines, but nowhere do we find any direct reference to such activities among them.¹ One of the manuscripts of Cordovero's commentary on the *Book Yetsirah* concludes with a kind of appendix, quoting ancient passages about the creation of a man by means of the *Yetsirah*. But even here it is stressed at the outset: 'No one should imagine that anyone still has the power to achieve practical results with this book. For it is not the case; the magical sources are stopped up and the Kabbalah on the matter has vanished.'² Another characteristic statement is that of Joseph Ashkenazi, who came to Safed from Prague and Posen. In his treatise fulminating against the Jewish philosophers, he speaks of golem-making not as an actual practice, but as something known only from tradition. He uses the term 'golem' current among the German Jews: 'We find [in the old text] that man can make a golem, who receives the animal soul by the power of his [i.e., his master's] word, but to give him a real soul, *neshamah*, is not in the power of man, for it comes from the word of God.'³

Among the German and Polish Jews, however, the conception of the golem reverted to the realm of living legend. And whereas in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries such legends related primarily to persons of Jewish antiquity, prominent contemporaries became golem makers in the later development. When the common people took up the old stories and descriptions of the ritual, the nature of the golem underwent a metamorphosis. Once again he became an autonomous being, and for the first time

¹ So in Abraham Galante (c. 1570), who in his commentary, *Zobore Hammah to Zohar*, I, 67b, gives a prescription which in its technical details deviates sharply from the old recipes. Indeed the *Zohar* text itself in this passage mentions the principle, frequent in Kabbalistic literature, of the destructive power implicit in a reversal of the alphabets.

² So in the MS which Hirschensohn described in 1887 in No. 31 of the first volume of the Jerusalem periodical *Ha-Zvi*, on a separately printed page (No. 27 of his list of MSS).

³ Cf. *Tarbiz*, XXVIII (1958-9), p. 68.

acquired practical functions. He also took on new features, deriving from other conceptions.

The first report of this new development is of great interest. Transmitted by a famous Spanish rabbi of the first half of the fourteenth century, it is still quite in the esoteric tradition. In reference to the Talmudic passage about Rava, Nissim Girondi in Barcelona writes: 'The scholars in Germany who busy themselves almost daily with demonology take this passage as their foundation. They insist that this [i.e., the production of such a man] must take place in a vessel.'¹ But there is no mention of a vessel in any of the accounts of golem-making that have come down to us, unless this vessel should be identified with the bowl full of water and earth that we have encountered in one of our prescriptions. This, however, strikes me as unjustified. In my opinion the 'vessel' employed by the German golem makers should be taken as a retort. This would be extremely interesting, for it would mean that long before Paracelsus the Jews associated the retort, indispensable to the alchemist makers of homunculi, with their golem. Nissim Girondi was in contact with prominent scholars from Germany, and he is a cool-headed, reliable witness. His testimony proves that such stories were told about certain German Hasidim. Have we then here, among the Jews, an early form of the conception which found its classical expression in Paracelsus' instructions for making a homunculus?

According to Jacoby, Paracelsus' homunculus was an 'artificial embryo, for which urine, sperm, and blood, considered as vehicles of the soul-substance, provided the *materia prima*.'² At the end of forty days the homunculus began to develop from the putrefaction of this raw material. But such use of sperm was unknown to the Jews. Golems continued to be made of earth and water, and even in the later reports only clay or mud are mentioned. I have been unable to determine whether there is any reliable evidence of instructions for the making of a homunculus

¹ In his *Hiddushim* to Sanhedrin 65b.

² In *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, IV (1932), 286 ff. In *Das Gespenst des Golem*, pp. 118 and 123, Held describes two processes of Paracelsus, both from *De natura rerum*, one for the homunculus, and another for palingenesis, which indeed seem very closely related. Paracelsus' extravagant claims in regard to the gifts of his homunculi are not, to be sure, in line with the golem conception.

before Paracelsus.¹ It was only long after Paracelsus that the practice was attributed to earlier authorities, such as the physician, mystic, and reputed magician Arnaldus of Villanova; and such attributions appear to be legendary. I am far from certain that the interpretations of the homunculus as a symbol of rebirth after death or as an embryonic form of the philosopher's stone, as recently advanced by Ronald Gray, are correct.² But if they are, they suggest a profound connection with the symbolism of the golem, which, in one of the prescriptions recorded above, is buried in the earth as *materia prima* and rises up out of it.³

Paracelsus, it is true, also gave the name of homunculi to the golem-like figures of wax, clay, or pitch employed in black magic to inflict injury on enemies. By a combination of these two meanings, the homunculus became in legend the demonic servant, who seems to have made his first appearance in certain traditions of the seventeenth century. A similar metamorphosis took place among the Jews, but earlier. The golem as his maker's magical man of all work is known to none of the old traditions. This conception made its appearance only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when the famous scholars among the German Hasidim, who developed the theory and ritual of the golem, became objects of popular legend. The oldest record of it known to us occurs in a manuscript from the first half of the sixteenth century, relating (among other things) much older legends about the German Hasidim. It is here that Nehemiah Brüll found the story to the effect that Samuel the Pious (father of Judah the Pious, the central

¹ In *Handwörterbuch*, *loc. cit.*, Jacoby promises a monograph on the homunculus, to appear in *Archive de l'Institut Grandducal de Luxembourg, section des sciences naturelles, nouvelle série, tome XII*. Unfortunately this monograph never appeared, and in the place indicated there is only a résumé containing less than the article in the *Handwörterbuch*.

² Ronald Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, Cambridge, 1952, pp. 205-20, especially pp. 206-8. Cf. also C. G. Jung, *Paracelsica*, 1942, p. 94, on the personification of the Paracelsian 'Aquaster' in the homunculus.

³ This early contact of the golem with the homunculus motif would be still better attested if in Pseudo-Saadya to *Yetsirah*, II, 4, the word 'creature' (that is, one made by magic) were explained by the gloss 'homunculus.' But there is no such thing either in the MS that I was able to consult or in the first edition of 1562, 95b (although B. Rosenfeld, p. 18, quotes it from there). In the printed edition we find a meaningless *והמסת* corrupted from *וכריאות* in the MS. Only in the Warsaw edition of 1884(!) is this replaced by the word 'homunculus.'

figure among these Hasidim) 'had created a golem, who could not speak but who accompanied him on his long journeys through Germany and France and waited on him.'¹

In the sixteenth century legends of this kind became very popular among the German Jews. About 1625 Joseph Solomon Delmedigo quotes the above-mentioned story about Abraham ibn Ezra and goes on to say:

It is also related of Solomon ibn Gabirol [the famous poet and philosopher of the eleventh century] that he created a woman who waited on him. When he was denounced to the government [evidently for magic], he proved that she was not a real, whole creature, but consisted only of pieces of wood and hinges, and reduced her to her original components. And there are many such legends that are told by all, especially in Germany.²

Along the same lines, we read in a report published in 1614 by Samuel Friedrich Brenz that the Jews had a magical device 'which is called *Hamor Golim* (!); they make an image of mud resembling a man, and whisper or mumble certain spells in his ears, which make the image walk.'³

This is a far cry from the golem ritual discussed in the preceding section. 'Here we discern the influence of a different realm of ideas, those concerned with the making of an automaton. The breaking down of the golem into its separate components clearly suggests a mechanical golem, a notion that appears nowhere else in the tradition. The servant motif is also connected with the mechanical man and no doubt has its source in the automaton legends of the Middle Ages,' which in turn harked back to ancient tales, such as those related in Lucian's *Liar*.⁴

In the late forms of the legend, which arose in seventeenth-century Poland, a new element appears; the servant becomes dangerous. This new golem is mentioned by German students of

¹ *Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, IX (1889), p. 27. See also the text from a Hasidic MS of the same period, quoted by me in *Tarbiz*, XXXII (1963), p. 257.

² Delmedigo, *Matsref la-Hokhmah*, Odessa, 1865, 10a.

³ Cf. Rosenfeld, p. 39, where *Hamor Golim* is correctly explained as a Hebrew translation (by an ignoramus!) of the Yiddish 'leimener golem,' which then as now was a popular pejorative term for simpleton.

⁴ Rosenfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 17. On the 'sorcerer's apprentice,' see also Note 1, p. 203.

Jewish lore as early as the seventeenth century, but it does not figure in Hebrew literature until almost a hundred years later. In both cases the sources are legends about Rabbi Elijah Baal Shem,¹ rabbi of Chelm, who died in 1583. His descendants told their children almost the same stories that Christian Judaists had heard two generations earlier from German Jews. Johann Wülfer wrote in 1675 that there were in Poland 'excellent builders who can make mute *famuli* from clay inscribed with the name of God.'² He seems to have heard of the matter from several sources, but could find no eyewitnesses. A more explicit account of Rabbi Elijah's activities—the earliest thus far known to us—was written in 1674 by Christoph Arnold.³

After saying certain prayers and holding certain fast days, they make the figure of a man from clay, and when they have said the *shem hamephorash* over it, the image comes to life. And although the image itself cannot speak, it understands what is said to it and commanded; among the Polish Jews it does all kinds of housework, but is not

¹ The epithet in itself means that he was regarded as expert in the 'practical Kabbalah' (magic). 'Baal shem' means literally one who is master of the name of God, who knows how to employ it. In the *Sha'ar ha-Yibudim*, Lemberg, 1855, 32b, he is referred to as R. Eliyahu Baalshem Tov.

² Wülfer in his *Animadversiones* to Sol. Zevi Uffenhausen's *Theriaca Judaica*, Hanover, 1675, p. 69.

³ Letter to J. Christoph Wagenseil at the end of his *Sota hoc est Liber Mischnicus de uxore adulterii suspecta*, Altdorf, 1674, pp. 1198-9. In my translation I have in part made use of Schudt's German translation in his *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten*, Frankfurt a. M., 1714, Part II, Book VI, pp. 206 ff., which, according to B. Rosenfeld, p. 39, was taken from W. E. Tentzel's *Monatliche Unterredungen von allerhand Büchern*, I, 1689, p. 145. Schudt abridged slightly. The main passage runs in the original: 'Hunc [scil. golem] post certas preces ac jejunia aliquot dierum, secundum praecepta Cabbalistica (quae hic recensere nimis longum foret) ex . . . limo fingunt . . . Quamvis sermone careat, sermonicantes tamen, ac mandata eorundem, satis intellegit; pro famulo enim communi in aedibus suis Judaei Polonici utuntur ut quosvis labores peragat, sed e domo egredi haud licet. In fronte istius nomen scribitur nomen divinum Emeth . . . Hominem hujusque modi Judaeum quempiam in Polonia fuisse ferunt, cui nomen fuit Elias Baal Schem . . . Is, inquam, ancillatorem suum in tantam altitudinem excrevisse intelligens, ut frontem ejus non amplius liceret esse perfricanti; hanc excogitavit fraudem, ut servus dominum suum excalcearet . . . [et dominus] literam Aleph in fronte digito deleteret. Dictum, factum. Sed homo luteus, in rudem materiam cito resolutus, corruente mole sua quae insanum excreverat, dominum in scamno sedentem humi prostravit ut fatis ac luto pressum caput non erigeret.'

allowed to leave the house.¹ On the forehead of the image, they write: *emeth*, that is, truth. But an image of this kind grows each day; though very small at first, it ends by becoming larger than all those in the house. In order to take away his strength, which ultimately becomes a threat to all those in the house, they quickly erase the first letter *aleph* from the word *emeth* on his forehead, so that there remains only the word *meth*, that is, dead. When this is done, the golem collapses and dissolves into the clay or mud that he was . . . They say that a *baal shem* in Poland, by the name of Rabbi Elias, made a golem who became so large that the rabbi could no longer reach his forehead to erase the letter *e*. He thought up a trick, namely that the golem, being his servant, should remove his boots, supposing that when the golem bent over, he would erase the letters. And so it happened, but when the golem became mud again, his whole weight fell on the rabbi, who was sitting on the bench, and crushed him.

Zevi Ashkenazi, a descendant of this Rabbi Elijah, told a very similar story to his son Jacob Emden, who records it in his autobiography² and elsewhere in his works. 'When the rabbi'—after creating a mute man who waited on him as a servant—'saw that this creature of his hands kept growing larger and stronger by virtue of the Name which, written on parchment, was fastened to his forehead, he grew afraid that the golem might wreak havoc and destruction [in a similar account by the same author, we read: 'that he might destroy the world'].³ Rabbi Elijah summoned up courage and tore the piece of parchment with the name of God on it from his forehead. Then he collapsed like a clod of earth, but in falling damaged his master and scratched his face.' Thus the accounts are identical, except that in one version the golem maker comes off with cuts and abrasions, while in the other, he loses his life.

Still more detailed is the report of another contemporary, who wrote in 1682 that, 'apart from speaking,' these creatures 'perform all sorts of human activities for forty days and carry letters like messengers wherever they are sent, even a long way; but if

¹ This remark is lacking in Schudt. It has no parallel in other accounts. Here the golem seems to be confused with a household spirit. From here it was taken over into Jakob Grimm's account.

² Jacob Emden, *Megillath Sefer*, Warsaw, 1896, p. 4.

³ In Emden's *Responsa*, II, No. 82. In a different stylization the same tale occurs again in Emden's critique of the *Zohar*, *Mithpabath Sefarim*, Altona, 1769, 45a (mistakenly paginated as 35a).

after forty days the piece of parchment is not taken from their forehead, they inflict great damage upon the person or possessions of their master or his family.¹ Here we have two new elements: for one thing, the period of service is limited to forty days, a motif which I have found in no Jewish source, but which may very well be authentic. It is interesting to note that in Paracelsus it takes forty days for the sperm, once enclosed in the retort, to develop into a homunculus. The other new feature is the dangerous character of the golem, mentioned in all the variants. This golem has prodigious strength and grows beyond measure. He destroys the world, or in any case does a good deal of damage. It seems to be the name of God that enables him to do so. But it is also, and in at least equal degree, the power of the tellurian element, aroused and set in motion by the name of God. Unless this tellurian force is held in check by the divine name, it rises up in blind and destructive fury. This earth magic awakens chaotic forces. The story of Adam is reversed. Whereas Adam began as a gigantic cosmic golem and was reduced to the normal size of a man, this golem seems to strive, in response to the tellurian force that governs him, to regain the original stature of Adam.

This brings us to the form in which Jakob Grimm found the golem legend. It must have been shortly before Grimm's day, toward the middle of the eighteenth century, that the Polish legend about the rabbi of Chelm moved to Prague and attached itself to a far more famous figure, 'the Great Rabbi' Loew of Prague (c. 1520-1609). Of course the Prague legend may have grown up independently, but this strikes me as very unlikely. In the Prague tradition of the early nineteenth century, the legend was associated with certain special features of the Sabbath Eve liturgy. The story is that Rabbi Loew fashioned a golem who did all manner of work for his master during the week. But because all creatures rest on the Sabbath, Rabbi Loew turned his golem back into clay every Friday evening, by taking away the name of God. Once, however, the rabbi forgot to remove the *shem*. The congregation was assembled for services in the synagogue and had already recited the ninety-second Psalm, when the mighty golem ran amuck, shaking houses, and threatening to destroy

¹ Johann Schmidt, *Feuriger Drachen Giffit und wütiger Ottern Gall*, Koburg, 1682, quoted in Schudt, *loc. cit.* Schudt's whole passage also occurs in Held, pp. 67-9.

everything. Rabbi Loew was summoned; it was still dusk, and the Sabbath had not really begun. He rushed at the raging golem and tore away the *shem*, whereupon the golem crumbled into dust. The rabbi then ordered that the Sabbath Psalm should be sung a second time, a custom which has been maintained ever since in that synagogue, the Altneu Schul.¹ The rabbi never brought the golem back to life, but buried his remains in the attic of the ancient synagogue, where they lie to this day. Once, after much fasting, Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, one of Rabbi Loew's most prominent successors, is said to have gone up to look at the remains of the golem. On his return he gave an order, binding on all future generations, that no mortal must ever go up to that attic. So much for the Prague version of the legend, which has gained wide currency.

Many legends about the making of golems by famous or not so famous rabbis and mystics were widespread among the Jews of Eastern Europe throughout the nineteenth century and are heard occasionally even now. Often they border on literary dilettantism, and in any case they have no bearing on the present study.² Still, it is interesting to recall that Rabbi Elijah, the *Gaon* (i.e., the genius) of Vilna (d. 1797), the outstanding Rabbinical authority among the Lithuanian Jews, owned to his student Rabbi Hayim, founder of the famous Talmudic academy of Volozhin, that as a boy, not yet thirteen, he had actually undertaken to make a golem. 'But when I was in the middle of my preparations, a form passed

¹ Cf. the midrash passage quoted in Note 1, p. 162, which would fall in with such an interpretation. Much has been written about this legend of Rabbi Loew, which has attracted many writers. Our first literary record of it is in 1837, when it was used by Berthold Auerbach. We have already stressed (Note 1, p. 189) that Judah Rosenberg's *The Miraculous Deeds of Rabbi Loew with the Golem* are not popular legends but tendentious modern fiction. For the versions current in Prague, cf. Nathan Grün, *Der hohe Rabbi Löw und sein Sagenkreis*, Prague, 1885, pp. 33-8, and F. Thieberger, *The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague*, London, 1955, pp. 93-6. It was later related in Bohemia that Goethe's ballad, *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, was inspired by a visit of Goethe to the Altneu Schul in Prague; cf. M. H. Friedländer, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Juden in Mähren*, Brünn, 1876, p. 16. Friedländer speaks of this as a 'well-known' tradition. I have never been able to find out whether there is anything in it.

² Such material, in part from the collections of the YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute), formerly in Vilna (now in New York), in B. Rosenfeld, pp. 23-5.

over my head, and I stopped making it, for I said to myself: Probably heaven wants to prevent me because of my youth.¹ The nature of the apparition that warned Rabbi Elijah is not explained in the text. Held's suggestion that it was the rabbi's double, hence the golem himself, is profound but not very plausible.² Since we have limited our investigation to the Jewish traditions of the golem up to the nineteenth century there is no need to go into the modern interpretations put forward in novels and tales, essays and plays. The golem has been interpreted as a symbol of the soul or of the Jewish people, and both theories can give rise, no doubt, to meaningful reflections. But the historian's task ends where the psychologist's begins.

¹ In Rabbi Hayim's introduction to the commentary of the 'Vilna Gaon' on the *Sifra de-Tseni'utba*, a part of the *Zohar*, ed. Vilna, 1819.

² Held, *Das Gespenst des Golem*, pp. 155-61.

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