

2016-05-16

"Two Beings Unite and Enrich the World": Creation, Control, and the Body in Contemporary Golem Fiction

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

“TWO BEINGS UNITE AND ENRICH THE WORLD”: CREATION, CONTROL,
AND THE BODY IN CONTEMPORARY GOLEM FICTION

By

Adam Jamie Berzak

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

August 2016

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"Two Beings Unite and Enrich the World":

Creation, Control, and the Body in Contemporary Golem Fiction

(August 2016)

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor Joseph Alkana.

No. of pages in text. (181)

This dissertation explores the use of the golem, the Jewish mythical creature, by authors to challenge monolithic conceptions of Jewish masculinity. I argue that by acknowledging the mutual interdependencies between the creator and the created, writers can gesture to the radical potential of the golem. In chapter one, I show how the treatments of the golem in Elie Wiesel's and Isaac Bashevis Singer's respective golem novels, *The Golem: The Story of a Legend*, and *The Golem*, precipitate its use in later stories. I also demonstrate how Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Klay* interrogates masculinity by taking some of the questions concerning the creator's relation to their art raised by Wiesel and Singer to their logical ends. In chapter two, I examine the representations of Jewish and black masculinities and the golem in James Sturm's graphic novel, *The Golem's Mighty Swing*. Chapter three demonstrates how Ruth Pattermessenger of Cynthia Ozick's *The Pattermessenger Papers* can perform masculinity by creating a golem. Finally, in chapter four I explore how Thane Rosenbaum with his novel *The Golems of Gotham*, and Pete Hamill with *Snow in August*, negotiate cultural rupture and loss via their golems. I posit that all of these stories attest to the strong ties between creator and created in order to reimagine creation and power inside and outside Judaism.

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Chapter One:

The Golem Legend, or Rabbis and their Sidekicks

In the past several decades, American Jewish writers have turned to the figure of the golem, a creature derived from Jewish lore, to explore Jewish identity. Isaac Bashevis Singer published his novel, *The Golem*, in the Yiddish language *Jewish Daily Forward* in 1969, and issued an English language version in 1981. Two years later Elie Wiesel published his own novelization of the myth, *The Golem: The Story of a Legend*. Attracted by the creature's power and mystique, comic book since the 1970s writers have incorporated the golem into their tales.¹ Writers of novels, too, have increasingly turned to the myth. Cynthia Ozick initially published her golem story "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" in the literary magazine *Salmagundi* in 1982, and later included it in *The Puttermesser Papers*, a novel consisting of five stories. Perhaps the most well-known golem novel of late is Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*. Published in 2000, Chabon's novel links the golem of literature and comics with a story of two artists who create a superhero modeled on the golem.² Following Chabon's novel, numerous writers—Jewish and non-Jewish—have produced works featuring the legend, and golems continue to be involved in stories across various mediums.³ In the past few

¹ For a thorough description of the golem in Marvel comics, see Weiner. There is also the famed children's series of comic books, *Mendy and The Golem*, published in 1981 and then again in 2013.

² In "Golem! Making of a Modern Myth," Lewis Glinert labels Superman "among the true sons of the Golem" (86). There are myriad connections between the comic book hero and the Jewish myth; Arie Kaplan cites cartoonist Al Jafee as saying that the "terrible daily life experienced by a tribe of Nomads only made it natural for the Jews to fantasize that a Golem—be he from Prague or Krypton—would deliver them from evil" (17). Kaplan also quotes Will Eisner on the Superman-golem connection: "[Jews needed] a hero who could protect us against an invincible force. So [Siegel and Shuster] created an invincible hero" (17).

³ In the past few decades, the golem has appeared in television episodes of *The Simpsons*, *X-Files*,

decades, the myth has grown more prevalent as writers have increasingly tapped into its opportunity for exploring Jewish identity, which, as the legend attests, demands the complex negotiation of tradition, history, and modernity.

Prior to its proliferation in literature and other media, the creature garnered attention from myriad texts exploring and explaining its roots. Only recently, in fact, has the scholarship sharpened its focus to explore the golem as a trope used by writers to confront issues of memory, creation, representation, power, and more. This project, in turn, makes the case that the incorporations of golems into U.S. fiction, as part of the cultural and literary traditions from which they derive, offer accounts of subjectivity that defy stereotypes and essentialized constructions of identity. I argue that with their increasing presence in the last several years, golems point to the growing persistence and availability of more flexible and unstable notions of identity. Contrary to the conventional dumb, mute, and oafish golem of yore, with their diversity more recent golem iterations expose the socially contingent nature upon which various hierarches are

and *Sleepy Hollow*. Compared to their early history in Hollywood cinema, which saw several feature films with golems front and center—most notably Paul Wegener’s *Der Golem*—the monster has been less prevalent in recent film, although Steve Niles, Matt Santoro, and artist Dave Wachter’s graphic novel, mini-series *Breath of Bones: A Tale of the Golem*, published in 2012, has recently been slated for adaptation into a major motion picture. 1991 saw the publication of Marge Piercy’s science fiction sensation, *He, She, and It*, one of the few golem stories to acknowledge overtly the connections between the Jewish monster and the robot. More recently, Helene Wecker’s *The Golem and The Jinni* (2013), and Jesse and Jonathan Kellerman’s *The Golem of Hollywood* (2014), along with the soon to be published sequel, *The Golem of Paris*, all feature golems as major focal points. Additionally, lesser-known novels such as Marc Estrin’s *Golem Song* (2006) Ben Schrank’s *Consent*, and Nomi Eve’s *The Family Orchard* employ the golem thematically, but do not include actual golems.

Certainly, offering a comprehensive list of golems in modern times is impractical if not impossible; even as I write this my wife Alissa alerts me to a golem in *Halloweentown II: Kalabar’s Revenge* (2001), a made for TV movie on the Disney channel. Testifying to the diversity of golems, this particular one is a villain made from frogs and evades the deep insights of even the most astute golem scholars.

predicated. Even though most golems are inevitably unmade, I suspect that as people of modern societies continue to find new ways of fashioning and defining themselves, writers will continue to reimagine the myth by bringing their creatively reimagined golems back to life. More to the point, this project describes the transformation of golem fiction in order to demonstrate implications for identity—ethnic, racial, religious, and sexual—in the dialectical relationship of the golem and its maker.

The reason this relationship is central is twofold: the inability to control the golem is always the crisis point of the plot; in fact, without the threat of unruliness, there really is not much of a story. This internal unruliness mirrors the external unruliness of the threat of the gentile world that elicits the creation of the golem in the most well-known version of the story. I refer, of course, to that of Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague.⁴ Particularly, in response to changes both inside and outside Judaism, the male Jew—and what is included in this definition—is continually redefining himself and being redefined, and in the creature’s transformation from obedient to unruly the golem tale echoes these changes. To show this relationship, I explore recent recastings of the golem story by American Jewish writers in light of scholarship by feminist theorists and other scholars who have discussed the Jewish, male body. I show the conceptual relationships between the varying fictional works, the primary one being the use of the golem figure to highlight and render problematic what might otherwise seem simple or unified conceptions of masculinity. The golem is an embodied creature, but instead of this body

⁴ “Maharal” is acronymic for *Morenu Harav Rabbi Laib* (“Our Teacher Rabbi Leow”). Arnold Goldsmith explains how the spelling varies between “Loew, Leib, Liva and other ways in other versions” (“Prague” 15). I typically use “Loew” but I use the appropriate permutation when necessary.

being the ground of existence in these stories the body emblemizes the unsettled condition of being.

In this introduction, I begin by detailing the version of the golem myth that involves the creature's creation by Rabbi Loew, the real life figure most often connected to the golem, along with a consideration of writing on the golem by two of the most influential twentieth-century scholars on the myth, Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel. Following this discussion, I refer to supplemental texts that further help to understand the golem myth and its relation to modern times; however, to explain the demand for the alternate approach for examining the golem myth conceptualized here, I also highlight some of the assumptions and omissions of these readings, particularly the overwhelming tendency to acknowledge but ultimately repudiate the proximity between golems and humans. The stability of masculinity and subjectivity, I contend, relies on such disavowals. I then discuss Singer's and Wiesel's golem novels, which appear to be straightforward tales but which, I posit, foreshadow the interests and themes of later permutations like Chabon's. To establish these themes, in this chapter I read the writers' myriad and diverse applications of the golem myth in light of views of the body and subjectivity espoused by feminist and queer scholars such as Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz.

In his seminal work, "The Idea of the Golem," a chapter in his book-length study, *The Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, Gershom Scholem weaves through the relevant texts to discern the biblical and Talmudic sources for later references to the monster by medieval and modern scholars. Scholem begins his discussion of the golem demonstrating its connection to the biblical Adam, who "is designated as 'golem,'" 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,” who says, “Thine eyes did see my golem” (162).⁵

According to Scholem, “Here probably, and certainly in later sources, ‘golem’ means the unformed, amorphous,” and he relates that “Adam is a being who was taken from the earth and returns to it, on whom the breath of God conferred life and speech” (160-61).⁶ Like God’s creation of Adam and the universe, making the golem requires the creator to utter the precise formula, which Scholem speculates is found in *Book of Creation*, or the *Sefer Yetzirah*, one of the earliest known treatises on cosmology, 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 consonants of the Hebrew alphabet” (167).⁷

To illustrate these connections further, Scholem cites a “famous Talmudic passage [that] describes the first twelve hours of Adam’s first day,” and which calls attention to the “second and fourth hours,” and how “Before the soul, *neshamah*, was cast into him and before he spoke to give things their names, Adam was an unformed mass” (161). Scholem then refers to a “midrash from the second and third centuries” in which 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” (161). Scholem also explains the different permutations taken by the golem, which

⁵ References from Scholem derive from *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* unless specified.

⁶ Scholem also notes the etymological connection between the name Adam, “the man created by God, and the earth, in Hebrew ‘*adamah*’” (161).

⁷ Scholem explains, “after the first chapter no mention is made of the ten *sefiroth*,” meaning creation involves only letters (169).

Beginning in a number of texts in the sense of a man-like creature, produced by the magical power of man—starts out as a legendary figure. Then is transformed into the object of a mystical ritual of initiation, which seems to actually have been performed, designed to conform 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 say, tellurian myth. (174)

According to this description, the golem's creation takes two forms: the "Symbolic condensations of magic ritual" in which the Rabbi strives for transcendence through "mastery of the secret knowledge," and creation that results in a "man-like creature" of body and "tellurian" soul derived from the earth (174). For Scholem, between these contradictory readings there "is an obvious relationship of tension if not of contradiction" that is "exceedingly strange," as "even before Adam has speech and reason, he beholds a vision of the history of Creation, which passes before him in images" (162). How can Adam, prior to being given a soul, behold a vision of such enormity? Scholem responds, "It would seem as though, while Adam was in this state, some tellurian power had flowed into him from out of earth from which he was taken, and that it was this power which enabled him to receive such a vision" (162). This possibility implies that Adam's "tellurian" soul or spirit was different from the privileged and esteemed one later endowed him by God. Infused with "tellurian" matter, Adam at this point was inferior, and Scholem suggests the golem is of the same type:

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 [...] flows into him from 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. (195)

The connection to Adam thus articulates that the golem can have soul, spirit, or intellect, but also that this spirit is "tellurian" and derives from the earth rather than God. As a

result, the creature's reason, vision, and wisdom are different from humans', and this "repository of enormous tellurian forces which can, on occasion, erupt" is linked to the golem's threshold for control and desire, which for Scholem explains why it is subject to the irrational forces of nature (195). This link with irrational nature further connects the golem to women, who are stereotypically viewed as closer to nature and less rational than men. The golem is essentially different from Adam because it is not blessed with the divine spirit, which indelibly anchors it in the inferior plane of matter, or the "elemental," as opposed to the superior realm of the divine God shares with humans. Such tensions underpinning the golem myth help illustrate many of the tensions evident in later novelistic permutations, as the golem often strives for and is able to attain a measure of humanity but is ultimately denied full humanity on the basis of its essential difference, which often manifests in its denial of a soul and the esteemed intellect associated with religious devotion. As I will show, these roots also clarify the golem's connection to marginalized identities and therefore its potency for authors attempting to contest rigid definitions of masculinity, as the protean nature of the golem reflects the fluidity of the human.

This golem's link to marginalized identities is explained in Moshe Idel's *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions of the Artificial Anthropoid*, where he expands on Scholem's essay, which he calls a "Procrustean bed" for its conceptions of the golem because it was written to introduce the kabbalah to a general audience (xvii). Instead of one idea of the golem as indicated by Scholem's chapter title, Idel posits there are many ideas deriving from varied sources and traditions. These sources suggest that the human's relationship to the golem is a metaphor for the distinction between men and women: the

latter, like golems, have been denied full entry into the category of human. In the chapter “Golem and Sex,” Idel explains the lexical connection between golem and women: while the “Aramaic term” is “*gavra*, literally, and more specifically, a male person,” in Hebrew “an unmarried woman was considered to be, like an unmarried man, an imperfect being, and she was referred to in classical texts as a Golem” (232). Just as Adam was an empty vessel before God infused him with spirit and made him whole, a woman requires a husband to “attain her essential perfection as a woman” (232). Idel’s explanation thus articulates the link between women and golems, and also how the human is synonymous with man. Specifically, this connection attests to the view that both women and golems are incomplete and inferior to men. Such links are inevitably vital to understand how writers broach issues of gender by complicating and extending the definition of the human.

According to Idel, gender was a topic among scholars writing of the golem beginning only in the seventeenth-century, probably in response to an earlier, unknown text. An example is R. Joseph Shelomo del Medigo’s writing on Ibn Gabirol and his golem, which from the evidence, Idel offers, was likely a “mechanical creature rather than a creation out of dust and water” (223). Therefore, “We witness here the first clear example of a female famulus that bears evidence, according to the legend, to the mechanical achievement of Ibn Gabirol, and not to indulgence in magic” (234). By contrast, the other text by R. Isaiah Horwitz “exploited” the female golem’s “sexual implications” and examined “a serious quandary concerning the denunciation of the sons of Jacob by their brother Jacob” (234). Too dense to fully reiterate here, the text deals with a verse from Genesis 37:3 in which “Joseph brought an evil report,” and in which

the female golem is employed to “solv[e] a quandary which seems to be completely unsolvable; how to preserve the honor of Joseph while mitigating the grave accusations against the brothers” (236). The brothers were accused of violating injunctions, but are exonerated on the basis that their transgressions revolved around female golems, which for Idel means, “the female Golem was denied any human quality from the halakhic point of view” (236).⁸ This description also reiterates how golems are made to serve as scapegoats for qualities in themselves humans wish to disavow, which further reinforces my claim that by reimagining the golem myth writers can challenge assumptions about identity and gender, and can reveal what is negated or denied in the construction of identity.

As in Judaic scholarship, the golem tends to be treated as a scapegoat in subsequent writing, which treats the creature as a metaphor for technology and science. As the golem is conceptualized in this way, its link with the biblical Adam and humanity in general is rejected. In *The Golem Legend: Origins and Implications*, Byron Sherwin surveys the extant scholarship on the golem—namely, Scholem’s—and refers to responsa, or questions posed to rabbis regarding the general issue of golems. Sherwin discusses a particular responsum written by Rabbi Zevi Ashkenazi, reputedly a relative of both Elijah of Helm and Judah Loew, regarding the “question of whether a golem may be included in a quorum for prayer, a *minyan*” (20). Sherwin postulates this example exhibits that the golem and the questions and concerns it raised were a “viable halakhic issue” among rabbis (22).

⁸ In Judaism, *halakha* is the body of religious laws derived from the oral and written Torah. These injunctions include: eating live animals, “having some type of relations with maiden of the country, namely with Canaanite females,” and behaving “contemptuously toward those other brothers who were sons of the servants” (Idel 234).

According to Sherwin, Ashkenazi's responsum also "can serve as a transitional point between discussion of the classical origins and contemporary implications of the golem, "as the text reiterates a number of issues raised by earlier Jewish literature about the Golem while it anticipates a variety of contemporary implications of the golem legend" (22). Such concerns center around the question of whether or not the golem is a person according to *halakhic* law. This is also the "transitional point" between the two halves of the book's title, as Sherwin then focuses on the implications of the connections between the golem and technology.⁹ Citing the definition of a person as "one with rights and duties, with privileges and obligations," he proceeds to highlight the many questions and comparisons following from the metaphorical connection the golem myth with modern technology (23). Sherwin suggests these issues are "matters of crushing contemporary concern," and he outlines some of the questions raised by the connection, particularly how it calls into question the definition of the human.¹⁰ Ultimately, for Sherwin the risk is that humans will become golems, and he argues for

the pressing need for human beings to intensify their quest to realize and to manifest those essentially human qualities that ultimately distinguish us from the Golems we have created. In this view, the omnipresence of Golems in our daily lives offers us a challenge to become more intensely human in order to accentuate those characteristics that make us peculiarly human and which can promise to liberate us from the proto-human golemic state to which we have a tendency to regress. (48)

⁹ In a famous lecture ("The Golem of Prague, the Golem of Rehovoth") delivered in 1965 at Israel's Weizman institute to dedicate its new computer, aptly named, Golem No. 1, Scholem argued for a "straight line linking the two developments," and compares the mythological creature and the modern computer. According to Scholem, Adam was a golem and "only before a tiny bit of God's creative power passed on did he become a Man, in the image of God." "Is it, then, any wonder," he asks, "that Man should try to do in his own small way what God did in the beginning?" This example illustrates the link between Judaic exegeses of the golem and more modern technological considerations.

¹⁰ Sherwin's questions include: "What is the legal status of a Golem? Is a Golem a person? Can a Golem be considered as someone's property? Can a golem be human? Can a human be a golem? Is destroying a Golem be murder? Can a Golem be intelligent? Is an 'intelligent' Golem different from other Golems?" (26). Such questions echo the same ones asked at various times throughout history about marginalized peoples, including slaves.

As people strive to become more human and less “golemic” the golem is the other by and against which they can be measured. Even so, despite the questions indicating the uncertainty of the human raised by the golem in the minyan question, for example, Sherwin preserves a rigid notion of the human by reaffirming the duality separating the self, spirit, or essence from the physical, technological body. Ultimately, Sherwin posits,

The golem provides us with a mirror image of what we once were, but it also offers us a window through which we can perceive—both the promise and the horror—of what we are able to become. Ultimately, what distinguishes us from the Golem, from the machine, is our ability to freely choose the image of ourselves that we wish to become and can become. (49)

To be sure, golems are not humans; however, the issue with the view there is a self that exists independent from the body and which can therefore be liberated from the body is found precisely in the connection between the body and women, one which Sherwin raises early on in observing the view espoused in the Talmud that women are in a “state of unfulfilled potentiality,” only to quickly abandon (10). My point is that given the golem’s link to women it may be tendentious to define the human in opposition to the golem. In this regard, I seek to emphasize the community’s dependence on the golem through the rabbi, and also to highlight the body’s centrality in the creation of the golem, a view counter to its perception as merely a product of the mind, or worse, an obstacle to knowledge. Instead of defining humans in opposition to the golems, my position is that creator and creation, or knowledge and the body, can only be understood through the changes they undergo in relation to each other, and I argue that works explored in subsequent chapters invite rather than resist such engagements.

While the scholarship immediately following Scholem and Idel focused on the creature in the context of science and technology, more recent literary criticism is concerned with exploring the golem as a meta-reflection on Jewish memory and representation. For instance, in *Golem in Jewish American Literature: Risks and Responsibilities in the Fiction of Thane Rosenbaum, Nomi Eve, and Steve Stern* (2007), Nicola Morris explores how writers use the golem to explore ambivalences toward power, specifically “in the light of the Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel” (17). Morris posits the golem as “a particularly appropriate figure for Jewish writers seeking to represent the complexities of the Jewish relationship to power, powerlessness, and justice” (17). The golem potently symbolizes both creation and destruction, and a persistent theme of the myth involves the risk that the creator practices idolatry by emulating divine creativity.¹¹ The golem thereby enables the negotiation of these complexities, as it is, according to Morris, an “intertext,” a notion she compares with Daniel Boyarin’s definition of midrash, or a lived tradition through which “Jews reading [and writing] about golems can read [and write] themselves into the text” (5). Drawing additionally on Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of the “insistent other,” Morris asserts that “the created, (golem or text) demands a relationship with the creator,” and that “it is through this demanding rather than reciprocal process of creation that the creator is created” (25). Hence, Morris illustrates how the golem is connected to writing, literally through the inscription that gives it life, and also as a metaphor for writing and the

¹¹ Scholem writes, “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” (180). He also expresses that the threat of idolatry derives “not so much because of the dangerous nature of the golem or the enormous powers concealed in him as because of the possibility that it might lead to polytheistic confusion” (181). This point illustrates the type and degree of power perceived in the golem’s creation.

creative process. However, one might ask how the golem, which is commonly mute, can hold the creator accountable. In raising such a question, the golem may foreground and articulate the issues vexing its own use as a sign for writing. Along these lines, I argue that as the figure highlights the distinctions between those who can write and those who cannot, the mute golem proves to be a particularly apt symbol for exploring the ethics and politics of literacy, especially in the context of gender in light of its link to women.

Like Morris, in *The Golem Redux: From Prague to Post-Holocaust Fiction* Elizabeth Baer also considers the golem as an instrument or trope for writing as she calls it a text and “intertext” that permits writers to bridge the gulf generated by the *Shoah* between the Jewish past and present. As it is particularly suited for Judaism with its “affirmation of the word, the book, the imagination as redemption” (85), intertextuality, according to Baer, can “be said to instantiate the disruption, induced by the Holocaust, of our notions of human nature, evil, and ‘history as progress,’ of meaning itself” (8). “The use of the golem,” Baer writes, “is an intentional tribute to the Jewish imagination and imaginative literature, as well as to the crucial importance of such imagination in the post-Holocaust period” (3).

Published in 2012, Baer’s study comments on the majority of fiction involving golems published in the past few decades, a body of work she views as reflecting and engaging the issue of Holocaust representation:

In writing about the Holocaust and its legacy, Jewish novelists in the latter half of the twentieth century have embraced Jewish legends that reflect the long and treasured imaginative tradition in Jewish literature. In the United States over the past two decades, an astonishing number of novels that appropriate the golem legend have appeared. Many of these novels are post-Holocaust fiction: they deploy the golem legend as a vehicle for exploring the viability of narrative after the Shoah. Most, but not all, of these novels (which include graphic fiction) are written by Jewish American authors. (2)

In granting primacy to the imagination, Baer's text does not consider the ways in which imagination might be denied to or at least differently empowering for diverse people, especially those represented by the golem as they have been silenced to varying degrees. In other words, the golem may assist in connecting with and articulating history, but only as a means for the writer-creator. I am not denying such potential; rather, I hope to discover what else golems are saying, particularly as they reflect back on the creator with their links to the marginalized and muted.

Jennifer S. Cushman foregrounds such connections when in her generally favorable review she suggests Baer's work misses the "opportunity to consider the (sometimes unintentional) humor in golem portrayal, specifically when he performs menial chores" (74). Cushman writes that although Baer acknowledges the servant roles as a "continuing theme" from many legends and iterations, "she does not comment on the sheer absurdity of the mystical monster being relegated to chopping wood," and in "neglecting to highlight the golem's demotion from savior to domestic servant, she overlooks an important discussion concerning the domestication of Jewish tradition" (74). I interpret Cushman's point as designating the "sheer absurdity" of the strong, powerful creature being relegated to performing such a trivial chore, but I also surmise she refers to the contradictions of gender illustrated by the image. This project, in turn, questions what the performance of traditionally feminine activities of rabbinical society by the strong powerful golem says about Jewish masculinity and masculinity in general. What I find most interesting here is the ease with which the golem, a figure of extreme importance created from the delicate thread connecting the male rabbi and the divine—in

effect, a symbolic actualization of the rabbi's sacredness and importance to the culture—can just as easily perform seemingly menial, feminine labors.

The tensions within the strong and powerful but also feminized golem as well as within its creation might be explained by the views expressed by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, where she refers to the “association of the mind/body opposition with the opposition between male and female, where man and mind, woman and body, become representationally aligned” (4). For women and other groups “aligned” with the body, this can be vexing because of the supreme status attributed to the mind and intellect over the body. To this extent, the golem's embodiment explains why it is conceptually feminized as it is denied aspects like spirit, intellect, reason, and voice endowed to humans. However, the image of the big, lumbering, beast—a hyper-masculine image—sweeping, mopping, and collecting water, all tasks typically removed from the realm of the mind, calls to attention to looseness of the distinctions between male and female, knowledge and the body. Such a point, then, is consistent with Grosz's aim to recover the ways whereby the production of knowledge involves not just bodies but specific bodies—male or otherwise—especially in a culture inscribed by sexual difference. Accordingly, she points to the “the sexual specificity of the body and the ways sexual difference produces or effects truth, knowledge, justice, etc.,” and the ways this “has never been thought” (4). As a purely embodied creature brought to life by the culturally elite rabbi through speech, which, Scholem writes, “to the biblical mind is identical with reason and intuition” (“Rehovoth”), the golem manifests but can also challenge this mind and body duality.

Before proceeding to explain in depth and offering examples of how the golem can subvert the status quo of gender definitions and relations, I should note that the most basic version of the myth of the golem's creation takes place in Prague around Passover, circa 1580, when Rabbi Loew creates the golem in response to a threat posed to the Jews, usually some false accusation promising the blood libel. Desperate to prevent a pogrom, the Maharal performs the ritual to invest the golem with life, which typically requires him to incant the name of God and write "truth," or "*emet*" in Hebrew, on the forehead of the figure he has sculpted from the mud of a nearby river (the Moldau in Czech or Vltava in German).¹² In some versions, the Rabbi places a piece of parchment called a *shem* in its mouth to bring it to life, and then removes it or erases the "a" from its forehead to spell "*met*," or "death," to destroy it. The drama and tension typically result when by some mishap or confusion the Rabbi loses control of his creation. Often, the cause of this incident derives from the misapplication of language, as the golem is a literal-minded being frequently confused by the orders he is given.

¹² In traditional golem tales, the rabbi is accompanied by "two or three adepts who study together and carry out the ritual of golem-making" (Scholem 178), although in most of the stories I discuss the process is performed alone. This may reflect, in part, writers' attempts to stress the hubris and risk of idolatry of creation. However, there is no instance I know of, where creation consists of multiple women. Such disparities may therefore be read light of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's view in *Between Men* that "homosociality," which describes the "entire continuum" of male-male relations, is the source of male power and concomitant marginalization of women and homosexuals (1). Writing of the "relatively short, recent, and accessible passage of English culture, chiefly as embodied in the mid-eighteenth-to mid-nineteenth-century novel, Sedgwick asserts, "the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry and hetero- and homosexuality was in an intimate and shifting relationship to class; and that no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole" (1). In this light, the homosocial scene that may characterize the golem's creation might be read for how it excludes women from the creative process. Such a point might also describe the scene of the golem's creation, as Daniel Boyarin offers that "the stylized repetitions that produced gender differentiation (and thus cultural as well as sexual reproduction) within classical Jewish praxis were the repetitive performances of the House of Study, including the homosocial bonding" (143). The point is that power is predicated on the exclusion of women, whether creation is solitary or performed by a group of men.

Because they “hew closely” and thereby “help affirm the plots, characters, imagery, narration, and impulses of the usual legends,” Baer labels Isaac Bashevis Singer’s and Elie Wiesel’s novels “traditional Retellings of the Golem Legend” (69). However, she also indicates that these versions introduce “modest changes” to “create a palimpsest,” and that in the “resulting layers of old and new, tradition and change, the reader can discern something of the author’s purposes” (69). Similarly, I argue many of the tensions evident in Wiesel’s and Singer’s more “traditional” works reflect both the conservatism and radical potential central to the myth—the resistance and recognition of the golem’s humanity and the stakes for gender. While the former is expressed in the golem’s inevitable lifeless return to the attic, the latter is evinced in the turmoil caused by the golem in its brief but impactful travails while alive. In other words, when the golem runs amok it upends the status quo, and not only calls into question the definition of the human but makes explicit assumptions of gender, sexuality, religion, and the human implicit in the original myth.

Singer’s *The Golem*, for instance, emphasizes the specifically male body of its golem, Joseph, and in doing so highlights the golem’s implied gender. When creating the golem, Rabbi Leib is “careful not to engrave the entire Sacred Name. He left out a small part of the last letter, which was an Aleph, so that the golem should not begin to act before he was dressed in garments” (27). Indeed, his first step in creation is “to sculpt the figure of a man, so he uses “not a chisel but his finger to carve the figure of a golem” (26). And “when it was time for the evening prayer, a large shape of a man with a huge head, broad shoulders, and enormous hands and feet were lying on the floor—a clay giant” (27). Moreover, according to Idel, the golem cannot reproduce, so why must the

golem, presumably also without either male or female anatomy or sexuality, be gendered, and why must it be male? ¹³ Perhaps Singer's golem needs to be dressed not merely to prevent people from wondering why a man was "not at the synagogue for evening prayers" but also to highlight the very "citation" of gender by which the clay figure is categorized as human (27). Even to approximate the human the golem must be a male, for to be a human is to be gendered, as Judith Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler explains that "citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a 'one,' to become viable as 'one,' where subject formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms" (232). Put simply, the "citation" of gender precedes and produces a person's humanity, indicating there is no human prior to the citation of gender. The emphasis on the golem's sex therefore highlights the very "citation," or performance, on which being human—for both humans and golems—depends. Because it is a performance with no essential, unchanging core, gender and quite possibly humanity are available to both the person and golem. Such a moment stands out amidst the various attempts to reduce Joseph's existence to a singular purpose, and displays the potential of the golem to challenge rigid categories.

Along with displaying his gender, Joseph's sentiments about dressing in clothes, which he shares with his maker, demonstrate his approximation of humanity and potential for "maturity and spiritual growth" (62). It is explained, for example, "Rabbi Leib to his disappointment began to realize that the golem was becoming more human

¹³ Referring to the golem's "generative" faculty, Idel concludes they cannot reproduce (233-38). This view is supported by Hayim Bloch in, *The Golem: Legends of the Prague Ghetto* (1925), one of the earliest works of fiction to tell the Rabbi Loew version, where he writes, "The Golem had to be created without any sex instinct; for if he had that instinct, no woman would have been safe from him" (201). This view also suggests that the golem could be a rapist, which further connects it to women in Jewish culture who were viewed as threats to men for being hyper-sexualized by nature. For a more detailed account of men's fear of women, see Adler.

from day to day; he sneezed, he yawned, he laughed, he cried. He even developed a desire for clothes,” when he awakens to the golem “trying to put on his fur hat and his fringed garment and even his slippers, although none of them fit” (65). Joseph’s burgeoning sartorial tastes suggest equally his desire for privacy and to conceal his body, which itself threatens to reduce the humanity he aspires to. His feelings are therefore consistent with Judaic custom and belief, as Eric Silverman explains, “the rabbis contemplated not just clothing but also nudity. They looked upon male nakedness, especially the penis, as an affront to God” (378). They also believed “male nudity was a sordid, non-Jewish custom that violated the boundaries between man and God, Jew and non-Jew, humanity and nature, and social categories” (378). In this regard, the golem covers his body because it obstructs his claim for humanity and his claim to be a Jew. Elizabeth Baer makes the similar claim that Singer’s golem “is an earthy and very human creature and the text full of Singeresque invention,” which refers to the comic union of the sacred and profane common to the author’s work (81). Indeed, the golem’s desire exemplifies “Singeresque invention,” but Joseph also intends very earnestly to assert his Jewishness by performing such acts. Echoing his performance of masculinity, Joseph’s performance of the human subverts the stability and unity of this category.

Compared to other mute golems, Joseph approximates the human more saliently, as one of his distinguishing features is the ability to speak, with which he “seemed to be learning the Yiddish language better and uttered the words more clearly.” Joseph also says, “Golem want Aleph, Bet, Gimmel, Daled” when he stumbles into a Jewish school

while class is in session.¹⁴ Joseph declares, “Golem want Bar Mitzvah” (66), so perhaps this education is essential to perform the ritual marking the Jewish boy’s passage into manhood. Such a performance would result in the fulfillment of Joseph’s overriding aim, as he informs Leib, “Golem no want to be golem” (7). He may be capable of attaining some semblance of humanity, but Joseph is ultimately prevented from doing so on the basis of his spiritual and emotional incapacity. For instance, he is referred to as the Rabbi’s ‘monstrous companion’ whose “mentality was that of a one-year-old child” and “strength was that of a lion” (61). He is also told, “Since you were created for a single purpose, you were given a different brain from that of a man” (37). Additionally, Leib tells him, “You are part of the earth, and the earth knows many things—how to grow grass, flowers, wheat, rye, fruit” (36). As it recalls Scholem’s explanation of Adam’s “tellurian spirit,” Joseph’s denial of humanity is consistent with his treatment as a purely physical object, or as matter deriving from the earth and as a result lacking true spirit, essence, and intellect. Rather, Joseph is viewed as a scary, hideous monster all the women and children run from, and even the animals react fearfully to his appearance with the horses standing on their hind legs and galloping wildly, the dogs barking “madly,” and the pigeons flying up “as high as they could” to circle “over the rooftops” (48-51). How could these strangers and animals be expected to accept Joseph when his own maker says that he is neither human nor animal but “*Nefesh*—the kind of spirit that is given to higher animals” (75)? Therefore, while Jewish mystics distinguished between different aspects of spirit, Joseph’s spirit is clearly lesser than humans’.¹⁵

¹⁴ For Scholem there appears to be contradictory evidence regarding the golem’s capacity for speech (191).

¹⁵ Scholem links the golem’s soul to its capacity for speech. In asking, “could golems speak,” he relates, “It is Pseudo-Saya who puts golems on the highest plane” and that “the recitation of the alphabets

Joseph's full attainment of humanity is foreclosed from the beginning when Leib creates him to protect the Jews, who are endangered when Count Jan Bratislawki, a squire "who had been immensely rich, with many estates and hundreds of serfs" but who lost his fortune to "gambling, drinking, and private wars with other landlord," accuses Reb Eliezer Polner, "an able and diligent businessman" and "well-known banker," of murdering his daughter (4-5). Polner refuses to loan Bratislawki money to pay his debts, so he pays two "witnesses" to claim they saw the murder (13). Desperate to expose the truth before the court renders a guilty verdict, which will spell disaster for the entire Jewish community, Leib rises "Exactly at twelve o'clock at night" for unusual "midnight prayers," when he is visited by a man "who might be "one of the thirty-six hidden saints through whose merit the world existed, according to the tradition" (20). The saint instructs Leib to make a man from clay but to "take care that he should not fall into the follies of flesh and blood" (23). The golem will rescue the Jews, but this curious forewarning raises questions about the "follies of flesh and blood." Do they refer to behaviors like the ones evident in Bratislawski—drinking, gambling, and debauchery—or do they refer to the golem's behavior as he aspires to be a human? ¹⁶

Elizabeth Baer's views show how the saint's admonition denies the golem freedom and humanity by conflating his behavior with the very human capacity for "follies of flesh and blood." She traces these "follies" to Singer's childhood experiences, specifically a passage from his autobiography, *In My Father's Court*, in which his father,

of the *Book Yetsirah* has the God-given power to produce such a creature and to give it vitality, *hiyyuth*, and soul, *neshamah*" (192). Joseph, though, has neither, but can talk nonetheless, which reflects the story's ambivalence.

¹⁶ By the end of the story the Rabbi declares "the golem is not a man of flesh and blood," so "One cannot rely on him" (77).

a Rabbi, interprets the “shrieking” of headless geese as a “sign” and “omen” from heaven, from the evil one, “from Satan himself” (72).¹⁷ According to Baer, Singer’s mother, “the pragmatist,” reacts conversely by ripping out the geese’s windpipes to demonstrate “the wrath of the rationalist whom someone has tried to frighten in broad daylight.” Baer interprets this anecdote as illustrative of the “conflict between the rational and spiritual, which is played out [...] in Singer’s golem tale” (72). This conflict, she contends, is exemplified in the writer’s introduction into his story of “alcoholism and gambling, two human failings not commonly found in golem stories,” which strike “a note of fleshly temptations at the outset of his tale, echoes of his experiences at 10 Krochmalna Street,” his childhood home (75). Baer thus connects Joseph’s behavior as he aspires to become human to Bratislawski’s actions to posit that in the final moments the “tale comes full circle,” as Joseph is “ultimately entrapped by alcohol as was Count Bratislawski at the outset,” so “he has fallen into the ‘follies of flesh and blood’” (79). In comparing Joseph and Bratislawski, Baer reduces behavior to a dualistic relationship between the denigrated body—its temptations and actions—and the esteemed spirituality that Joseph proves incapable of when he behaves like a golem. In other words, Joseph is made into a scapegoat for the very human behaviors—“the follies”—he shares with Bratislawski. That these are maligned behaviors, rather than behaviors shared by all humans, shows how the golem is a repository for the devalued and denigrated qualities and behaviors of humans. This perspective, however, denies that the golem is manipulated into drinking the wine by Miriam, who is actually enlisted by the Rabbi to lure Joseph into temptation and eventually his unmaking. Joseph’s actions are merely the

¹⁷ The “court” of the title refers to the rabbinical court.

culmination of his developing humanity over the course of the tale and, in effect, by becoming more human he condemns himself. The story therefore demonstrates how the golem is in a double bind, as it is destined by the conditions of its creation to become more human, but in doing so threatens the mandate, as espoused by Sherwin, for example, that humans retain their separation from their creations. In resorting to the rigid distinction between golem and the human, Singer's text resists the potential of the golem myth to broaden and make more inclusive the definition of the human.

At the same time, the text implies that along with "flesh and blood" women are responsible for the golem's rebellion. Alida Allison points out that while Leib's Rabbi cares for the golem like a father and keeps him from such "follies," Singer makes women in the story culpable for the golem's behavior.¹⁸ She refers to the episode in which Leib's wife, Grenedel, commands the golem against his prohibition to move a giant rock underneath which money is supposedly hidden, to exemplify that Singer "put the woman at fault" (94).¹⁹ Implied, in other words, is that only men can control the golem, and its running amok becomes a consequence of falling into the hands of women. Furthermore, this episode foments the link between women, money, and manual labor—all which are contrary and inferior to the less earthly matters that engage the golem when it follows the Rabbi's orders.²⁰ This duality thus reinforces the link between Singer's novel's attitudes

¹⁸ I only partially agree, as I view the Rabbi as much more ambivalent toward his creation than unreservedly paternal.

¹⁹ In "From Hens to Roosters: Isaac Bashevis Singer's Female Species," Sarah Blacher Cohen draws the distinction between the domesticated woman whose "customary behavior [...] reassures the Singer protagonist that his sense of reality is not at variance with his expectations of it," and the characteristics of "many of these female characters" with their "symbolic powers, powers which jar us from known to the unknown associations, from conventional to bizarre interpretations" (76). This is a more sober view of the author, who has often been accused of misogynistic renderings of female characters. For a discussion that explains the interpretation of Singer as misogynistic, see Beck's "Misogyny" and "Eve."

toward the golem's humanity and toward women, which attests to the shared stakes of the golem's claim for humanity and the myth's potential subversion of the status quo of gender relations.

The ambivalence toward the golem's humanity in Singer's novel is echoed in the article he wrote for *New York Times*, "The Golem is a Myth for Our Time" (1983), to honor the opening of the New York Shakespeare Festival's *The Golem* by H. Leivick. This perspective also echoes the views espoused by scholars like Sherwin who link the golem and technology. "Why," Singer is asked, has the golem "interested so many creative people in the past," and why "in our epoch of science and technology," does it "continue[s] to do so even today?" He answers by suggesting that people are more impressed by art than science: while they "admire the scientist," they "are not puzzled by him" because they surmise that his achievements can be "analyzed, explained, repeated at will, improved by others." Art is the "opposite," as people feel the "artist must love the matter which he forms. He must believe in it, grant it life, bewitch and be bewitched by it." To put it simply, while science can be explained there is something magical and inexplicable in art. The "golem-makers" skirted this line as they "were the fiction masters of their time" who were "in a way [...] lying to themselves and others, but their lies precursed the truths of the future: men's attempt to endow mechanisms with qualities that God has given to the human brain." It is unclear whether Singer believes the "golem-makers" were liars because they dressed their sophisticated machines in mystical garb or if he feels the makers really did house ghosts in their machines.

²⁰ In rabbinical society women performed the physical and economic duties to permit men to focus exclusively on study and religious devotion.

Nonetheless, for Singer modern golems represent the merging of the seemingly disparate fields of art and science. He writes, “We are living in an epoch of golem-making right now. The gap between science and magic, science and art is becoming narrower.” In other words, the advancement of science entails the increased awareness of the unexplainable; Singer refers to the emergence of quantum physics and related fields in which the scientist “often deals with objects of whose existence he is not sure and whose functions he cannot define.” By the same token, the Kabbalah, according to Singer, signals an attempt to control the unexplainable, which is why the golem is an apt metaphor for scientists’ attempts to control the unknown through technology. In this same sense, however, the Kabbalah and its attendant powers are treated as metaphors representing humanity’s attempt to control its technological golems. Singer observes: “How imaginative and hopeful the Cabbalah appears in comparison with this gloomy cosmology.”

Singer’s metaphor shows how the golem is removed from its Jewish cultural specificity and that the myth is no longer strictly about golems; rather, the myth allegorizes humanity’s relationship with technology. In a point that recalls the saint’s warning to Rabbi Leib in his novel, Singer finishes his essay by stating, “The real and most important war is the one between the lure of the flesh and the aspirations of the soul; between the sublime sense of freedom and the deadly slavery of being and behaving like a golem.” As in Sherwin’s reading, technology is viewed as the golem that must be disavowed to solidify humanity and morality as it threatens to ensnare the human soul. Such a view negates the potential of the golem to call into question and therefore possibly

extend the definition of human from which women and other minorities have been excluded.

Singer's story ultimately denies the golem humanity by linking it to flesh and blood; however, the golem also resists this reading, which suggests how its volatility could be viewed as its imploding of the status quo. If the final, conclusive statement of Singer's essay solidifies the dualism between "sublime," spiritual "freedom," and the "deadly slavery" of the "flesh," his novel closes with Rabbi Leib putting the golem to rest with Miriam's help. Because Joseph believes she is his wife, she can convince him to drink enough wine to fall over so the Rabbi can reach and remove the aleph from his forehead. Instead of ending in the conventional way with the golem's unmaking, Singer's novel ends less conclusively with Miriam and Joseph fleeing together, leaving open the possibility that "Perhaps love has even more power than a Holy name. Love once engraved on the heart can never be erased. It lives forever" (84). The image of "love engraved on the heart" implies the overlap of physicality and spirituality, and hence replaces the Rabbi's life-giving inscription with life renewed and reinvigorated by the capacity for love. That the golem and Miriam can possibly live and love more freely somewhere else implies that the rules and mandates that prohibit their love on the basis of the golem's inhumanity are not entirely given but rather specific to time and place.

Against critics who view Singer's work as "anti-sexual and anti-physical," in "Sexual Love in I.B. Singer's Work" Bonnie Lyons addresses the importance of the interplay between the physical and emotional in Singer. She argues that Singer in his work

insistently distinguishes between sexual love and mere lust, and in his work the achievement of sexual love is a mark of an individual's personal psychic

integration, wholeness and well-being. Sexual love is portrayed as the clearest way an individual avoids self-division, the alienation of soul and body, or in some cases, of mind and body. In Singer's stories and novels, sexual love expresses both the desire of the soul and the desire of the body; the two blend and become inseparable. (61)²¹

This view of the inseparability of the "desire of the soul" and the "desire of the body" helps to reframe the golem's humanity and redefine its desire by illustrating that the golem's love for Miriam is not purely a manifestation of its embodied desire; rather, the golem's love can be both emotional and physical. Along these lines, Mary H el ene-Huet contends that Joseph's relationship with Miriam implies "a woman is the agent of the golem's second birth," and that "The golem is made a complete human being, capable of feelings and thoughts, through Miriam's love" (245). In this way, Lyons' and Huet's explanations furnish telling counterpoints against some of the other critical voices as they perhaps attenuate the distinction between the soul and the body.

Indeed, as Joseph and Miriam depart Singer alters the conclusion of the traditional golem story, leaving the story more open-ended and ambiguous and with it the golem's humanity. By the same token, the ambivalence toward the golem's humanity persists as Joseph and Miriam are compelled to leave society to express their love. Lyons explains, in Singer "sexual love binds the body and soul together, binds woman to man, man to

²¹ For a discussion on Singer as an "anti-physical and anti-sexual" writer, see Eisenberg. Perhaps the tensions of the golem's representation are also explained by Singer's childhood experiences, as in "Magical Realism in the Short Fiction of Isaac Bashevis Singer," Tracy Mishkin offers that Singer's early life explains the "contradictory elements" of his fiction (1). Mishkin mentions his upbringing in both "urban and rural settings, which gave him access to both the folk culture and the modern intellectual culture," and also that his father and grandfather were rabbis but that his mother and brother "provided secular reading materials and sounding boards" (1). Addressing the elements of "magical realism" in Singer's short fiction, Mishkin argues, for example, that "in addition to depicting the supernatural as natural, Singer also uses the magical realistic technique of liminality, or the fluidity of boundaries," and that writing in this loose genre writers approach both "contemporary or historical politics of their countries" but also issues such as gender (7-8). Mishkin does note that Singer's work is magical realism in theme more than style, which she says is more closely realist (9).

woman, and binds the whole person to the community” (74). Joseph’s departure with Miriam, who had earlier expressed trepidation about the Rabbi’s plan when she stated, “I feel as if you asked me to kill a man” (78), indicates that the union of the orphan become golem lover and the golem clashes with society and its prescriptions. Lyons explains, “the failure to achieve sexual love is often the sign in Singer’s work of general existential failure, a signal of a character’s destructive soul/body split that often results in alienation, insanity, and death” (61). Joseph’s alienation, perhaps more literally than for natural humans, threatens to reduce him to his body, and he therefore must straddle the fence dividing human and golem. However, by dramatizing these tensions in the figure of the golem, the novel gestures toward the truth that all humans—and not just golems—encounter this fracture of the self.²²

²² Much of the criticism on Singer’s stories deal with the distinction between his adult and children’s literature—novels and short stories. In *Isaac Bashevis Singer: Children’s Stories and Childhood Memories*, Alida Allison explains, “Singer’s early environment and education defined the narrative techniques and traditionalist standard of his stories” (1). Specifically, Alison details how Singer was initially exposed to many of the themes and tropes of his stories as a child: “The picture he draws of the child who became a writer emphasizes this omnipresent oral tradition that dates back thousands of years and that was fully represented by the important adults in his early life” (3). In addition to the “elders” at the synagogue and home, such as the author’s father, Alison notes the “penny storybooks the child saved his money to buy” as inspirations, as well (3). On this disparity between the writer’s adult and children’s fiction in relation to the golem novel, Goldsmith asserts, “Singer’s aversion to sermonizing in his adult fiction is well known, but he modifies his literary credo when it comes to writing for children” (40). Goldsmith argues the climax imparts a lesson for children in that Singer “ends his novella with the kind of romantic didacticism not found in his best adult fiction [...] This is the simple message that Singer’s adolescent reader might respond to more readily than the eventual triumph of good over evil (anti-Semitism) or the dangers of man’s unleashing uncontrollable forces (nuclear weapons) in his attempt to find security against his enemies. With the unrequited love between lonely monster and orphan teenage girl, the teenage reader may emphasize, but the two halves of Singer’s novella do not fuse, and the sugary closure is an unsatisfactory ending to one of the greatest legends in Jewish culture” (49). It seems he is unable to acknowledge the possibility that Joseph’s love is “requited”; moreover, ostensibly, the “two halves [...] do not fuse” because of the direction they take the golem myth.

Compared to Singer's ambivalent treatment, Elie Wiesel's novelization of the myth, *The Golem: The Story of a Legend*, deliberately eschews the more traditional representation of the creature. The narrator Reuven relates,

In your own head he looks like a monster. You imagine him excessively tall, strong, heavy, dragging his body like lead—some kind of human beast that nature put on earth to mock or frighten it. Well, let me tell you, you are mistaken. I, who have seen him in my childhood, I remember him perfectly; it is as if he were standing in front of me now. I can see him more clearly than I can see you. He was somewhat taller than the Maharal, who was very tall, and somewhat heavier. His bearing was awkward and yet astonishingly agile. Riveted to the ground, but floating in the air. Strange, mysterious, he seemed to plow the earth and heaven all at once. Nothing could stand in his way. Without pity for the wicked, fierce toward our enemies, he was charitable and generous with us. I should add that he was blessed with both intuition and intelligence. (31-2)

Reuven describes a golem that is physically imposing but not monstrous, and which possesses “intuition and intelligence.” This description therefore rejects conceptions of the golem as a big, lumbering, simpleton. “He was said to be a fool, I know. They said he was stupid, backward,” Reuven adds, “but I do not agree” (12). Through Reuven, Wiesel shows that the golem named Yossele, a diminutive for Joseph, “In spite of what you think [...] was not less human than we, but more human” (34).²³ Along with making a case for the golem's humanity, the description also complicates the typical understanding of the golem's embodiment as Wiesel's monster is both “riveted to the ground” and “floating in the air.” This complication is relevant because the golem is denied humanity partially on the basis of its embodiment and corresponding lack of soul, as is evinced in Singer's novel.

²³ By contrast, Singer's Rabbi does not use this term of endearment. Also, unlike Singer's golem Wiesel's “did not eat, he did not drink—at least not in public,” which shows he is different from the golem liable to fall into the “follies of flesh and blood.”

The traditional depiction of the golem, from which Wiesel eventually departs, shows an ultimate rampage that forces its creator to change it back to mud. Recall that Scholem links the golem's imminent rampage to its "tellurian" derivation, and he also explains the source of danger of "golem-making," which,

like all major creation it endangers the life of the creator—the sources of danger, however, is [*sic*] not the golem or the forces emanating from him, but the man himself. The danger is not the golem, become autonomous, will develop overwhelming powers; it lies in the tension which the creative process arouses in the creator himself. (190-91)

To this effect, Wiesel's Reuven observes that Lowe, "could have left us his golem; he should have. What did he fear? A religious movement that would have turned the golem into an idol?" (17). Reuven explains, "We loved him. To us he was a savior. Though mute and unhappy, a savior is what he was" (12). Wiesel thereby unites golem and creator and raises the possibility that Joseph's source of idolatry is not simply in being that which is idolized but that he is an actual, genuine savior. Additionally, if the rabbi is the source of Joseph, does that not make him a savior as well? At any rate, in making his golem the savior Wiesel offers him a degree of humanity uncommon to golems, a point supported by Elizabeth Baer's assertion that Wiesel "envisions the Messiah as human and so his analogy of the golem to a savior makes perfect sense" (88).

As Baer's point suggests, by making the golem a savior rather than merely a protector Wiesel recognizes it has a stronger link to humanity than allowed elsewhere. Wiesel's golem is a savior, though, not necessarily in the sense of protecting the Jews from physical violence and harm but because he offers truth and enlightenment, which he is called upon to deliver when the body of a Christian child is found in the cellar of Shmuel, a "just and charitable man" (21). The Jews, reports Reuven, are accused of the

blood libel: “It was said that we needed Christian blood to make matzos. Such idiots!

Their viciousness equals their ignorance” (19). “Expecting a massacre” they turn to their leader, the Maharal, who

in his wisdom, had understood: the society in which the Jews lived, terrified of the future, had fallen so low that only a Golem—an artificial creature without a soul, a creature of clay, dedicated to earthly matters and excluded from divine inspiration—could still have an effect and save it from perdition. (45)

As this passage shows, for truth and spiritual salvation the Jews depend on the very creature excluded from “divine inspiration.”²⁴ Another major theme in Wiesel’s body of work is testimony and its ethical importance, and in the novel the golem compels the testimony of truth by exposing the lies of Bishop Thadeusz, a former Jew with a “blind and all-encompassing hatred for the people he had repudiated” who “Sometimes through trickery [...] managed to lead a Jewish child away from his parents and his God, and to turn him against them” (68). Indeed, the conflicts derive from the struggle between Judaism as a source of truth and truth’s distortion by those who seek to harm the Jews by marring their faith. In one instance, the Bishop schemes to entice a young woman away from her people and convinces her to tell to the courts she witnessed her father pour the blood of Christians the night before Seder. However, “Thadeusz had not reckoned with the Maharal and the Golem,” and the girl is visited in a dream by her deceased mother who “found the words to move her daughter to repentance” (69). She is told that she will

²⁴ In part, the focus on spiritual salvation is a response to the Holocaust, a major theme of Wiesel’s fiction; Reuven anachronistically predicts the event will befall the Jews: “Ah, if only the Golem were still among us...I would sleep more peacefully. Why did the Maharal take him from us? Did he really believe the era of suffering and injustice was a thing of the past? That we no longer needed a protector, a shield? Tell me, please: our Maharal who knew everything, did he not know that exile, after him, would become harder than before, even more cruel? That the burden would become heavier, more bloody? He could have left us his Golem; he should have” (17).

receive a sign the next day and that “a man will rise up as if from nothingness” (69). It is the golem who uses his ability to turn invisible to materialize in the girl’s room, and “At that same day, at the Court, in the presence of all the officials, instead of accusing her father, she told the truth about Thadeusz” (69). By linking his golem to spirituality and truth, Wiesel, as reflected by Reuven’s initial description of the golem, seems to refuse the neat binary between knowledge and the body integral for dividing the maker from his golem.

In fact, like a rabbi Joseph helps those he encounters to face their own truths. Reuven explains that Yossele “radiated a force which overwhelmed you, moved you, flooded you with emotion,” and “could penetrate the very recesses of your memory, as if he were searching for his own” (32). As such, he manifests the powers of his maker, and while Reuven suggests, “It is the Maharal who understands and it is the Golem who acts. The intelligence of the former allied with the occult powers of the latter, never fails to arrive at the truth and therefore cause justice to triumph” (68), clearly in compelling people toward truth the golem is more than a physical instrument, and perhaps the knowledge and spirituality he is connected to is different but not lesser than his maker’s. In fact, Reuven declares, “Yossele’s own welfare was of importance to the Maharal. I am sure that ultimately the Maharal saw in Yossele more than an instrument—a friend and perhaps much more than that” (42).²⁵

²⁵ The theme of fathers and sons is common in Wiesel’s writing, and *Night*, Wiesel’s famous memoir, tells the story of his survival and his father’s own death in the camps. On the connection between language and Wiesel’s father in *Night*, see Davis, who shows that the degradation and corruption of linguistic mastery is linked to Wiesel’s father, compared to the “curt imperatives of the concentration camp guards” (59). Indeed, this struggle with language is equally central to Wiesel’s work. Most of the available criticism broaches these themes.

Because Joseph is linked intimately with the Maharal, he is not compelled to serve as the scapegoat for the physical violence typically maligned in Jewish rabbinical society. Undoubtedly, Weisel's Maharal recognizes what makes his connection with his golem unique: "Whenever he pronounced his name [...] his voice rang with tenderness and affection. You would have concluded that he wanted to help him, although it was the 'Golem made of clay' who was supposed to help *him*, the Maharal, and us too" (42). By surrounding the "Golem made of clay" with scare quotes, Wiesel not only paints a more intimate portrait of the connection between creator and creation but also acknowledges how golems are typically depicted as mere instruments to be used and then discarded. Joseph, on the other hand, is not an instrument but a "friend," or perhaps "much more than that."²⁶

In "Elie Wiesel, Rabbi Judah Lowe, and the Golem of Prague," Arnold Goldsmith resists the subversiveness implied by Wiesel's novel's aligning of creator and created, and his resistance reflects the general tendency toward conservatism throughout the literature and scholarship. Goldsmith recognizes that Wiesel through "Reuven anticipates that his listeners/readers have a preconceived image of the golem," but criticizes these changes and calls the novel "disappointing" for the lack of difference between creator and created (17). Referring to Reuven's explanation that "sometimes in the street at night or in the

²⁶ Like Singer's, Wiesel's story is considered children's literature. Both are construed as such partially for their treatment of the subject matter and partially for the artwork they include alongside the text. The difference between their artwork, however, further attests to their differing attitudes toward their golems. While Singer's golem in Uri Shulevitz's various pictures looks very much like Paul Wegener's creature from *Der Golem* and shares with it the emphasis on the creature's physicality, in Wiesel artist Mark Podwal chooses to focus on Jewish spirituality through abstract pictures, such as the image of the prayer book from which Hebrew letters float out; in fact, only one of Podwal's drawings depicts the golem, and even in this case he is merely a speck against a broad panorama of the city. Goldsmith suggests that Podwal's "drawings do more than all the words of the text in expressing the mysterious awe of a legend that refuses to die" (26).

enchanted forest, the two shadows would unite for a second and you could feel them having a life of their own which filled you with terror” (33-4), Goldsmith accuses Wiesel of trying to “titillate readers,” as he feels the lack of a rebellious golem epitomizes Wiesel’s denial of the “moral conflict,” the irresolvable tensions between golem and Rabbi (18). Furthermore, he contends that “Wiesel has problems bringing *The Golem, The Story of a Legend* to a close,” and “Since he condensed so many of the traditional stories to a sentence or paragraph or two and not developed any long dramatic narrative, he has not built up to a climax” (24). Goldsmith’s criticism, however, fails to consider that Wiesel’s story, more than retelling the conventional arc of the golem’s story, is concerned with exploring the nature of the Jewish Messiah by linking the golem’s humanity and the Rabbi’s. In other words, the lack of tension may be the point, as both characters are vital and “Without the Maharal and the Golem, the Jewish community of Prague might not have survived. We cannot say often enough how much we owe them” (81). Baer proposes, “By writing the tale of the Golem with post-Holocaust nuances, Wiesel is ‘laying claim’ to this notion of a Messiah, to the use of our freedom for peaceful purposes, to the crucial importance of eradicating genocide from our world” (89). The purpose of the Messiah, as this statement shows, is not to perpetuate violence but to end it, which explains the spiritual golem. This eradication, I offer, is aided by recognizing the similarities rather than differences of people, and this recognition reflects and is reflected by the closeness rather than distance of golem and creator.

Moreover, while Goldsmith expects a rabbi and golem willing to use “brutal force,” both reject this as a viable course of action (19). In Singer’s story, Leib decides the golem must be unmade when it is conscripted into the Gentile army. Echoing this

negative view of force, Wiesel's story emphasizes rather the golem's resistance to physical violence, even when it would seem justified. Reuven explains, for instance, that many people are perturbed by the stranger in their midst, and some even try to hurt Joseph; however, in turning invisible, Joseph can avoid responding to, and harming, his offenders who inevitably bring harm to themselves—one goes blind and another catches on fire. Reuven explains that “Only the godless enraged” Joseph (34). In resisting violence, the golem further resembles the Maharal, who is “known to have become angry only once,” when he discovers the Angel of Death writing his victims' names on a scroll (40). The Rabbi, it is told, grabs the scroll from the Angel, but a piece of parchment is left bearing only his own name. Even with his master enraged, the golem is left out of this battle, which results in the Rabbi's death. Troubled by the golem's inability to protect his maker, Goldsmith indicates that there is precedent in the Jewish tradition for such a context in “*Had Godya*,” a popular and catchy tune “sung at the Passover seder,” which “tell[s] us how God will slaughter the Angel of death” (23); Goldsmith, though, concedes, “What Wiesel is implying here is difficult to understand” (23).²⁷ I offer that the pacifism of both Rabbi and golem, even with their lives on the line, is precisely the point, as Lowe, “attuned to the suffering of his congregation, refused to submit to cruelty. Impotent for the immensity of evil, he chose to question the world above” (44). Ultimately, this response to evil is consistent with Jewish law, which, according to Reuven, “counsels us to oppose violence and bloodshed with words and prayers rather than with more violence and bloodshed” (42). By emphasizing the golem's spirituality, Wiesel's story revises the myth to hew more closely to the values and teachings of the

²⁷ Meaning “one little goat,” or “one kid,” the *Had Godya* is sung at the end of the Passover Seder.

religion. In this regard, the story also interrogates previous assumptions of the difference between humans and golems, and in turn offers a more inclusive definition of human and humanity and espouses a closer affinity between the creator and his creation.

Golems are known for eventually running amok, but Wiesel's golem does not; rather Joseph's affinity with the Rabbi persists to the end of Wiesel's novel, when he grows "melancholy," and Lowe retreats away from public life into solitude and study but still spends "an hour or two" with the golem "every Friday afternoon, speaking to him softly," placidly letting his maker put him to rest (90). Before the golem is unmade Reuven poses a series of questions: "Miracle? What is life if not a miracle? Two beings unite and enrich the world: isn't that a miracle? Or is it a miracle less spectacular than the one performed by the Maharal? I would like to hear the golem's opinion" (91).²⁸ These reflections imply the golem's humanity, and also that the combined generative powers of creator and created powers surpass human sexuality and procreation.²⁹ The deferral to the golem is also explained by the writer's oft-expressed view on the ethical value of silence. In an interview with Heidi Anne Walker, Wiesel explains that he "entered literature through silence," and that "What we can do somehow is change words with silence" as "Silence has its own archeology, its own memory, its own colors; it's dark and gray and long and short and harsh and soft. Silence is the universe itself" (5). He posits that "the

²⁸ While such questions, according to Baer, "leave the reader baffled about the plot and the relationship between the two characters" (86), she is more certain about the symbolism of the number of questions: "Eighteen is a significant number for Wiesel: his number in Auschwitz was 7713, which, when added up, equals eighteen, and in *Gematria* eighteen is the number of *Hair, life*" (89).

²⁹ Although an alternate reading may be more attentive to the homoeroticism of this relationship, and might offer that the Rabbi's relation to the golem does not transcend procreation but, rather, exchanges for it non-generative sexual desire. Such a view would be further warranted by the abovementioned, "much more than that," which describes the relationship.

word itself is a breaking out,” an “act of violence; it breaks the silence” (50). It would seem fitting that the golem’s silence and by corollary voice are given special weight at the end of the novel, for, unlike in Singer, Joseph cannot literally speak. Yet the emphasis on the golem’s speech—whatever form that might take, if not somehow miraculously through silence—subverts the neat division between speech and silence, impossibly proposing that agency, power, and knowledge might be found outside of the expected boundaries. Perhaps this possibility indicates the body’s relation to knowledge and thus reinforces Grosz’s calls for a reevaluation of the body’s role in producing meaning. But such a message can only be heard if the link between golem and Rabbi is recognized and accepted, which requires the acknowledgement of the fluidity and mutual interdependence of creator and created.

Indeed, my analyses of the two novels demonstrate that at times the golem is permitted to share a close relationship with its creator, the Maharal, but alternatively, reaffirming humanity may require repudiating the golem, which represents the body, because it is viewed as an obstruction to knowledge. As I have shown, when viewed through stereotypical attitudes about gender this denial might be read as the rejection of the feminine from the male sphere of knowledge and creation. Recall that Singer’s golem desires to access this sphere by being a Bar Mitzvah. In *The Jewish Lifecycle*, Ivan G. Marcus explains that such rituals “embody the values of a [...] Rabbinic Jewish culture [that] produced extensive written commentaries on sacred texts, especially the Hebrew Bible,” and he also relates that “ancient rabbis called the elaborations of Scripture *midrash*, from the Hebrew root D-R-Sh, meaning to delve into, probe, explore” (10). According to Marcus, rituals in Jewish culture are thereby interpretive acts—or

“performative midrash.” Accordingly, when endowed with such agency Singer’s golem, along with the golems and creators discussed here, render explicit the “implicit and unstated meanings encoded” in Jewish textual history (11).³⁰ These are the stakes of permitting or denying the golem’s humanity; accordingly, in being allowed to render these meaning explicit golems can expose what has been denied or disavowed from the myth’s official history—in effect, they can become rabbis. As Wiesel relates in his interview with Harry James Cargas, we [“poets, historians, and witnesses”] cannot change events but we can change meanings. That’s our force. We use it and we abuse it” (48). The golem, in this sense, testifies to the continuity of the past and its “events,” but also marks the profound changes that can result from changing the past by uncovering meanings that have been effaced or denied. This revelation, I posit, is especially urgent in terms of the golem’s relationship with its creator, who is also affected and transformed by such changes, and is paramount given the import and power of writing and speech and how certain groups have been denied these tools. Indeed, such transformations are given freedom to take hold at the crisis point of the story when the golem breaks the shackles of control and all hangs in the balance.

By highlighting the treatments of gender and related themes in the “traditional” golem stories of Singer and Wiesel, I place them alongside Michael Chabon’s *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, one of the few golem novels to receive ample focus for its consideration of masculinity. By the same token, viewing Chabon’s novel alongside its predecessors helps illustrate that, just as a stable notion of the human

³⁰ This is similar to what Ruth Bienstock Anolik encourages when in reference to Cynthia Ozick’s and Marge Piercy’s golem stories she writes, “The response of some writers to the anxiety generated by these cultural tensions [namely, the exclusion of female voices], is to engage in a Bloomian misreading of powerful texts of their tradition, particularly the folktales of the golem and dybbuk” (“Appropriating” 40).

depends on negating its proximity to the golem, masculinity is stabilized by rejecting the body and forms of masculinity viewed as more closely connected to the body; however, Chabon's novel also exposes the shortcomings of this option and reveals the slippage and proximity between the mind and body. As such, it also endorses the potential when the golem's creator gives up attempting to disavow his (or her) own body and the figuratively embodied golem. In short, the novel offers the benefits of viewing the maker and their product in close proximity. Yet this dynamic is primarily metaphorical in the story, and largely manifests in terms of masculinity and the (male) characters' relationships with their bodies. In my following analysis of Chabon's work, I explain the pitfalls of the attempt to escape through the body—whether through physical heroics or art—and show how embracing the body and its desires is central to the ideal vision of masculinity extolled in the novel. Such a position supports my overall claim of the advantages of acknowledging the closeness and mutual dependency of creator and golem.

In Chabon's novel, the denial of this connection is explored through the theme of escape, which is articulated in the intersecting tropes of magic and comic books. The story details the lives and successes of Joe (Josef) Kavalier, a refugee from Prague, and his cousin Sam Clay (Klayman), a young man who lives with his mother but dreams of becoming a renowned writer. With financial backing from Sam's boss, Sheldon Anapol, the owner of Empire novelties, a purveyor of second-rate gag toys like "midget radios, X-ray spectacles, and joy buzzers," the cousins form the creative duo Kavalier & Clay and produce *The Escapist*, which becomes a smash hit and brings them wealth and fame (170). The setting of the novel is 1940s New York, when comic books and superheroes were just gaining in popularity with the success of Superman, so the cousins' goal is to

capture this momentum with their own. When they pitch their talents and ideas to Anapol, Joe draws a picture of the Prague Golem and justifies it by calling Superman an “American Golem” (145), which highlights the impact of Jews in the genesis of American superhero comics. As Sam claims, “they’re all Jewish, superheroes. Superman, you don’t think he’s Jewish? Coming over from the old country, changing his name like that. Clark Kent, only a Jew would pick a name like that for himself” (1250). While the Man of Steel escapes his imploding home planet Krypton to become the quintessential comic book superhero, The Escapist is a magician and “member of ancient and secret society of men known as The League of the Golden Key,” a cabal who “roamed the world acting, always anonymously, to procure the freedom of others, whether physical or metaphysical, emotional or economic” (289). Both Joe and Mayflower have strong ties to the golem, which for Joe reflects his firsthand experience with the man of clay, as the novel begins with his escape from Prague and the invading Nazis with the help of his former teacher, Bernard Kornblum, a magician and *ausbrecher* (escape artist). To prevent the invading German army from stealing the golem, its protectors hire Kornblum to ship it to the neutral Lithuania, and his plan for getting Joe out involves hiding him in the casket with the golem. In this way, the golem is linked to the overarching theme of escape in the novel on several levels, including aiding Joe’s escape from the Nazis and Sam’s escape from the bedroom of his mother’s apartment and the “menial nature of his position at Empire Novelties” to pseudo-literary renown (19).

More than simply defining escape as unbridled freedom, the novel through the golem articulates the challenges and limitations of escape. The challenges of escape, as they are literal and metaphorical in the golem, are encoded in the distinctions between the

soul, or mind, and the body. For instance, when Joe and his teacher finally discover the golem they have been searching for and begin to move it he remarks on the “lightness of their load,” to which Kornblum responds, “His soul is a burden unto him. This is nothing this [...] Just an empty jar” (137). Similarly, as he moves closer toward freedom alongside the golem Joe felt as if he “weighed nothing at all” (146). Indeed, this distinction inverts the formula ascribed to humans, whereby the body is viewed as an impediment to freedom and agency; here, rather, the golem’s soul, likely as a result of its tumultuous history helping the Jews, is a “burden.” Nonetheless, by shedding its soul the golem can avoid being taken by the Nazis. However, such freedom is fraught and begs the question whether the golem can still be the golem without its soul. This question about the soul’s importance to the golem reflects on the history of golems and the varied degrees to which they have been endowed with souls by their creators, literary and fictional

In Singer’s novel, Rabbi Leib’s beadle, Todrus, procures clothes of “unbelievable size” used “forty years ago” when a foreign circus came to Prague to perform *David and Goliath* to dress the golem (29); similarly, in Chabon’s story Joe and Kornblum disguise the golem as the body of Alois Hora, a circus performer who was called “The Mountain” and is treated by Joe’s father for his glandular disease. When Joe asks, “what if someone notices” the disguise, his teacher in his sage magician’s wisdom informs him, “People notice only what you tell them to notice [...] And then only if you remind them” (134). The golem is ostensibly freed because it has relinquished its soul and also because it has been transformed into a “dead *goyische* giant” by sleight of hand (90). However, one might question if the golem is still the golem, or the same golem, after shedding its soul

to escape. Such a question is particularly apt given that Jews, and especially the golem, are supposed to be buried naked.

This question may be answered at the end of the story when the golem is mysteriously delivered to the Clay residence. While before it was all body and “weightless” without a soul, now observing the golem Joe, who himself has recently returned home, wonders “at what point the soul of the golem had reentered its body, or if possibly there could be more than one lost soul embodied in all that dust, weighing it down so heavily” (1309). Perhaps because it has relinquished its own soul it has now taken on many lost Jewish souls. But as Joe perceives, these, too, are a burden even the golem cannot sustain, as “The speculations of those who feared that the Golem, removed from the shores of the river that mothered it, might degrade had been proved correct” (1306), and that what “used to be the Golem of Prague” is no longer (1277). This outcome shows that escape and transformation, when they require leaving the body or soul behind, can be both liberating and destructive. The golem’s transformation hence attests to the interdependency and inseparability of body and soul, and expresses the consequences of living without either. Ultimately, this perspective reflects the mutual interdependence between golem and maker I stress throughout.

These pitfalls help clarify the shortcomings of escape for Joe, whose journey parallels the monster’s, and who also, it might be said, leaves part of his soul behind when he leaves his family in Prague. It should come as no surprise that interrogating escape in the novel has been one of the main preoccupations of critics. Lee Behlman, for instance, posits the novel “is an extended meditation, with comic books as its central subject, on the value of fantasy as a deflective resource rather than a reflective one,” but

equally acknowledges, “With this comforting gesture may come the admittedly problematic, quintessentially American phenomenon of forgetting” (62).³¹ Alan Berger also questions the viability of escape: “there are two unhappy results of escapism. The first one is that one cannot escape the Holocaust any more than one can escape the impact of Rome’s destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Second, escapism leads to forgetting. And forgetting is the ultimate form of Holocaust denial” (88). While offering worthwhile commentaries on the illusory nature of escape, neither Behlman nor Berger address masculinity, which is central to the novel’s examination of escape. Cathy Gelbin relates Chabon’s treatment of the golem myth “signifies the new rise of Jewish life in the United States from the ashes of its dead European sibling” (170). Similarly, Behlman reads the novel as “classic Jewish immigrant narrative” (62), and asserts, “The Escapist, like America itself, is always set in contrast to the Holocaust experiences of Josef, and is never used as vehicle for the depiction of those experiences, indirect or otherwise” (68). While the Holocaust plays an important role in Joe’s life, it has little actual presence in the novel, so examining escape in the novel requires considering what Sam and Joe are escaping from in the context of the Eastern European, Jewish immigrant’s experience in the post-war U.S.

In contrast with Behlman and Berger, Louise Colbran, in “The Grand Illusion: Hegemonic Masculinity as Escapism in Michael Chabon’s *The Amazing Adventures of*

³¹ In “Embodiments of the Real: The Counterlinguistic Turn in the Comic Book Novel,” Marc Singer charts the progression of representation in Chabon’s novel from metaphor, to metonymy, and finally to “hypostasis.” Singer posits that “because they operate through visual as well as verbal cues, comics [and “comic book novels” such as Chabon’s] also offer a largely unrecognized opportunity to bypass the master tropes of figurative language” (274). He thereby repudiates arguments such as Behlman’s concerning the escape into fantasy in the novel and superhero comics, in general.

Kavalier & Klay and *Wonder Boys*,” explores masculinity by comparing Joe with Harry Houdini, whom Joe is connected with through Kornblum. Colbran writes,

Escapism, as epitomized by Houdini, puts the male body on display and foregrounds male physicality, but, paradoxically, it simultaneously constitutes the masculine as non-corporeal. Masculinity comes to be defined in terms of the ability to overcome the body and the subjection of the body to the will. ‘Real’ identity lies not in the body but in the mindset of the masculine and it is this that constitutes its strength. (120)

In this sense, any failure on Joe’s part results from his incapacity to exercise his will over his body; rather, through his body he is subjected to external forces against which he is powerless. Such attempts at control include foiling the bombing of a Bar Mitzvah by a Nazi sympathizer, repeated fistcuffs with local Germans, and joining the war. All of these attempts, though, invariably prove futile, as in the last case, for instance, Joe ends up stationed in Antarctica, “the embodiment, the blank unmeaning heart of his impotence in the war” (930). According to Colbran, these are all failed attempts to transcend the historically specific body, but Joe can only find happiness and solace when he gives up trying to escape in such ways and return home to resume his life with Rosa and Tommy, the son he has never met.

Joe’s varied attempts at physical heroics are not his only source of paradoxical escape from the body, as he also aims to escape through art:

Joe learned to view the comic book hero, in his formfitting costume, not as a pulp absurdity but as a celebration of the lyricism of the naked (albeit tinted) human form in motion. It was not *all* violence and retribution in the early stories of *Kavalier & Clay*; Joe’s work also articulated the simple joy of unfettered movement, of the able body, in a way that captured the yearnings not only of his crippled cousin but of an entire generation of weaklings, stumblebums, and playground goats. (375)

Presumably, art, and comic books specifically, enable both writer and reader to transcend the limits of the physical body by identifying with the superhero, “the embodiment of the “naked human form in motion.” This same view of art is reflected when Joe writes a graphic novel about the Jewish myth, the 2,256-page *The Golem*:

The shaping of a golem, to him, was a gesture of hope, offered against hope, in a time of desperation. It was the expression of a yearning that a few magic words and an artful hand might produce something—one poor, dumb, powerful thing—exempt from the crushing strictures, from the ills, the cruelties, and inevitable failures of the greater Creation. (1242)

The “magic words” and “artful” hand describe how the body can transcend such limitations, and thereby delimit the transcendent powers of the mind and knowledge from the confined and in this case maligned “ills,” “cruelties,” and “failures” of the body. By linking the body to escape, and Joe to the body through the golem, the novel articulates the difficulty of escaping from those forces—whether the body or the historical forces it is subjected by—beyond any one individual’s purview. At the same time, “inevitable failures of the greater Creation” also reveals that creator and golem, both body and mind, are circumscribed by these limiting forces. To put in another way, both the “magic” and the “body” are part of the cosmos, a view which attenuates the hierarchal distinction between mind and body on which Joe’s (failed) escape depends.³²

Although ironically, Joe does not need to literally escape his body through the wish-fulfillment proffered by comic books, and as a magician performs and in some cases succeeds at acts of daring. Joe’s physical abilities are especially evident when compared

³² As Scholem relates, according to a Hasidic exegesis of the *Book Yetsirah*, “Creation itself [...] is magical through and through: all things in it live by virtue of the secret name that dwells in them” (174). While Scholem makes this point in the interest of defending magic against claims of “perversion,” the omnipresence of creation and magic conveys its presence in the body of the golem, which viewed in this way is continuous and contiguous with the privileged words of creation.

with Sam, who is less “able” than his cousin and who was stricken by polio as a child, “which left him with the legs of a delicate boy” (7). To be sure, it is Sam, who “stood, in his socks, five feet five inches tall,” and like “Like all of his friends, he considered it a compliment when somebody called him a wiseass” (7), who throughout the novel more so than Joe attempts to literally escape his body through comic books and other means; for Sam escape means transcending his physical impairment and his homosexuality. Indeed, Sam by and large represses and conceals his desires, and when Joe goes to war he seals his true self behind the façade of heterosexuality by marrying the pregnant Rosa and accepting the role of father to her unborn son Tommy. Even as they explore masculinity and identity in general, however, critics tend to gloss over Sam in favor of Joe. While Lee Behlman, for instance, writes that Sam and Joe “are both American and Other” (67), Andrea Levine is justified in arguing that the “darkly handsome, brooding Josef,” is the “exception, not the exemplary American Jew,” and has “physical grace Sammy can only envy” (36). In terms of masculinity, Joe, then, idealizes the American immigrant and is primed for success in America, while Sam is marginalized and constrained by “multiple and overlapping forms of embodiment” (Levine 36). Even before Joe’s arrival, Sam is linked to the famed magician, as his “dreams *had* always been Houdiniesque,” the “dreams of a pupa struggling in its blind cocoon, mad for a taste of air and light” (6), and while he can obtain a measure of economic freedom his emotional freedom is constrained by the prohibitions against his desires.

While Joe is ephemerally permitted to escape from the body, as evinced by his “weightlessness” as he escapes from Prague, Sam is permanently anchored in the body by his physical handicap, and he therefore is connected to the golem of Joe’s art, which is

described as being “too heavy” and as looking “like he’s made out of stone” (187).³³ Like Singer’s golem, too, Sam is ostracized by his sexual desires. Perhaps the most obvious proof of their connection is the name “Clay,” the substance of which golems are typically made, and which also in the novel’s title indicates that Sam is secondary to Joe’s “Kavalier,” just like the golem is typically treated as subsidiary to the Maharal. Viewing Joe’s and Sam’s masculinity in this way sheds light on Colbran’s assertion that

The history that his text implies is a history of silenced poor, Jewish and homosexual voices to oppose official versions of history that universalize the orthodox, masculine, white, heterosexual subject position, excluding and denying any voices that do not conform. (119)

The use of “silence” helps connect Sam further to the mute golem. Presumably, it Sam’s masculinity the passage implies is “silenced” in relation to Joe’s; however, this is not explained by Colbran or the criticism at large. The tendency to elide Sam, though, reinforces my claim that Joe’s escape not only depends on escaping the body but escaping and disavowing the marginalized, physically inferior, body represented by his cousin, and also Sam’s homosexuality. Joe’s striving for freedom of the mind and Sam’s connection to the body shows how this duality is couched in terms of the creator and created dialect central to this project.

Because Sam represents the marginalized body and masculinity, comic books provide him a different type of escape than they do Joe. This disparity is evident in the scene that inspires Sam with the idea for *The Escapist* as he watches Joe propel himself through the window of a building from its emergency ladder. In the ensuing image, “Lit

³³ Certainly, Sam is marginalized along several axes, as David Moscovitz notes that his “insecurities” concern his “body, his Jewishness, his closeted homosexuality, and his occupation (the ‘low art’ of comic books failing to fulfill his dream of writing the great American novel)” (309-10), although Sam’s physical and sexual difference most starkly contrast with his cousin, and both are specifically related to the body which his cousin so desperately tries to master through his will and mind.

thus from behind by a brimming window, Josef Kavalier seemed to shine, to incandesce” (245), and

Over the years, reminiscing for friends or journalists or, still later, the reverent editors of fan magazines, Sammy would devise and relate all manner of origin stories, fanciful and mundane and often conflicting, but it was out of conjunction of desire, the buried memory of his father, and the chance illumination of a row-house window that the Escapist was born. As he watched Joe stand, blazing, on the fire escape, Sammy felt an ache in his chest that turned out to be, as so often occurs when memory and desire conjoin with the transient effect of weather, the pang of creation. The desire he felt, watching Joe, was unquestionably physical, but that the sense that Sammy wanted to inhabit the body of his cousin, not possess it. It was, in part, a longing—common enough of the inventors of heroes—to be someone else; to be more than the result of the two hundred regiments and scenarios of self-improvement that always ran afoul of his perennial inability to locate an actual self to be improved. (295)

The image articulates how the character among other such superheroes expresses Sam’s desire to be “someone else,” to transcend the “inability to locate an actual self.” On the one hand, the character might be read as wish-fulfillment, but Sam’s creation also shows how the masks of comic book heroes may provide the illusion there is a real “self” under the mask when in reality the mask itself is the real. When viewed in this way, it is not escape from the body that *The Escapist* and its creation symbolizes; rather, it is the illusion there is a distinction between the body and the mind that can master and control it. Sam’s lack of “self,” therefore, may indicate the “self” is purely a reflection and construct of the body. Because Sam, as I have shown, is linked to the golem—and Sam with his creation of *The Golem* the creator—this perspective attests to the creator’s proximity and dependence on the golem, both as a source empowerment and as an instrument that stabilizes their identity.

The point is not that there is no self, core, or mind, but that the body is central to such concepts and their definitions, which means that it cannot be escaped, just as the

golem, as I argue, is central to the identity of the creator, rather than a physical body against which the creator is defined. As scholars have noted, the slippage of this duality is articulated in comic books through the relation between the superhero and the minor characters constellating around them. This relationship is outlined in *Female Masculinity*, when Judith Halberstam argues that “dominant,” or “epic” masculinity—the masculinity of the heterosexual, white, (middle-aged) white male, often depends on alternate masculinities for its power and definition (3-4). She discusses, for example, James Bond in the film *Goldeneye*, arguing that once all the “prosthetics,” external gadgetry, and the assistance of the surrounding queer characters—like M., Bond’s butch boss who calls him a “dinosaur and chastises him for being a misogynist and a sexist,” and who “most convincingly performs masculinity”—are removed, Bond’s masculinity is exposed as a “sham” (3-4). This conception of masculinity illustrates that there is no essence of a hero outside of the external trappings through which (super) heroism is made possible. In terms of the golem and creator, there is no creator outside of the golem that creates it.

While in the context of comic books alternative identities have been mainly discussed in terms of alter-egos, in “‘Gay’ Sidekicks: Queer Anxiety and the Narrative Straightening of the Superhero,” Neil Shyminski argues that alternative, queer masculinities are typically represented by side characters like the “sidekick,” who “becomes a sort of spot cleaner for the *hero*” by taking responsibility and culpability for actions of the hero that do not jibe with the rules heteronormativity (297). Sidekicks often function as “helpers” to the hero, and with their “incomplete” sexual identities these “queer” supporting characters “carry the scapegoating mark of sexual ambivalence and inscrutability that would be unacceptable if applied to the hero” (297). This relationship

describes Joe's relation to Sam (and the golem), especially given the metaphorical implications of his creation of the golem graphic novel at the end. To be sure, beginning with the ampersand of the title, which distinguishes him from his cousin by designating Sam's secondary role, he is linked to the sidekick, and this link persists throughout the story. For example, in his love affair with the radio actor Tracy Bacon, who, incidentally, not only looks like *The Escapist* but also plays him on the radio ["Bacon was such a perfect *Escapist* that one would have thought he had been cast to play the role in the film, not on the air" (641)], Sam imagines himself as "becoming a professional sidekick" (795), as Bacon is the perfect physical specimen and Sam feels that "No one as beautiful, as charming and poised and physically grand, as Bacon could possibly take an interest in him" (876). Additionally, Sam is literally linked to the sidekick by some of his fellow artists when they remark that he's "got that thing with *sidekicks*" and "It's like an obsession with him," as "He takes over a character, first thing he does, no matter what, he gives the guy a little pal" (1020).

However, the lesson that there is no underlying core concealed by the body reveals the slippage between the superhero and these characters, which signals that neither version of masculinity is superior, more authentic, or real. This lesson liberates Sam after he is made to represent the comic book industry with his testimony in the Kefauver hearings. Initiated by Frederic Wertham's infamous book, *The Seduction of Innocent*, the hearings resulted in the formation by the industry itself of the Comics Code Authority (1954) and its institution of the Comics Code, a series of laws regulating against various depictions—literal or suggested—in comics, such as crimes and illicit sexual behavior. In the language of the Code, Sam's alleged "obsession" is construed as a

prohibited sexual perversion, as the senator asks him, “So you have never been aware, personally, therefore, that in outfitting these muscular, strapping young fellows in tight trousers and sending them flitting around the skies together, you were in any way expressing or attempting to disseminate your own...psychological proclivities” (1316). The implication is that Sam subconsciously uses comic books as a vehicle for disseminating his sexual and political tastes—ironic, considering that he views his own work as an escape from the demand to repress them. The hearings were televised, but up to that point “Everyone knew. That was what made their [Joe and Rosa’s marriage] particular secret, their lie, so ironic; it went unspoken, unchallenged, and yet it did not manage to deceive” (1208). They make Sam’s secret public so he can no longer hide his true self. However, rather than constraining Sam this exposure liberates him, which he discovers when his former mentor George Deasey tells him, “I wouldn’t be surprised if it turned out in the end Senator C. Estes Kefauver and his pals just handed you your own golden key” (1331), to which Sam replies, “My God [...] I think you might be right,” as he “Could not even begin to imagine what it would be like to live through a day that was not fueled or deformed by a lie” (1331). Deasey’s reference to the “golden key” submits that Sam as the putative sidekick can now be the hero of his own narrative, as he will be able to embrace his desires more openly. After his enlightenment, Sam can leave the “never more than theoretical family” that masked his identity, and at this moment he decides he will move to L.A., one the few places he found freedom when he went there with Bacon, where he will write for television. My contention is not that Sam’s exposure itself is liberating, as coming out can, indeed, be perilous, especially when forced and not by choice; rather, my point is that Sam’s exposure as homosexual is liberating to the

extent that it compels him, like Singer's golem, to leave for somewhere where he can freely embrace his desire, and to no longer have to be ashamed of his body.³⁴ Writing of the golem and creation in relation to his "fear of homophobia" (166), in *Maps and Legends* Chabon relates, "Literature like magic, has always been about the handling of secrets, about the pain, the destruction, and the marvelous liberation that can result when they are revealed" (167). As he is given the key to embrace his true self, Sam no longer has to merely sublimate his desires through his creation; unlike the golem (and formerly Joe) his freedom does not have to come at the expense of relinquishing his soul or body. Such a perspective speaks to the advantages for the creator when they embrace the golem, and presents an alternative to the definition of power in the conventional views of the dialect of creator and created. By bridging the difference between the two, creator and created are both liberated, which brings new light to the point made in Wiesel's novel that they can "unite and enrich the world" (Wiesel 91).

Sam's final act of escape signals his attempt to bring his mind and body into closer proximity, and as a result he stands in contrast with his father, the itinerant circus performer called the Mighty Molecule, who "was all muscle. No heart," or "Superman without the Clark Kent" (260). Sam learns that freedom, true escape, and even heroism

³⁴ In "Michael Chabon's *Imaginary Jews*," D.G. Myers suggests, "What really matters to Chabon is not sexual identity but self-discovery through sexual experimentation. He shares the common opinion of the literary intelligentsia that the sexual act is a peak experience, the peak of peaks; and not only that, but is also potentially the defining moment of a person's life" (574). Myers also writes that Chabon's "[first three] novels assumes the form of a coming-out story. Almost invariably the central action involves a man on the periphery, a fugitive from middle-class respectability, what is called in Yiddish a *luftmentsch*, a man who gains readmission to human society by ceasing to struggle against himself" (574). Sam, though, is only permitted re-entry by concealing his true self. Similarly, in "Josef Kavalier's 'Odyssey': Homeric Echoes in Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*," Daniel B. Levine compares Chabon's novel and the epic, and suggests "The author places his own work firmly in the tradition of Philo and Clement: the Jewish experience finds itself refracted as it were, through an Odyssean prism" (528). Obviously, it is Joe who follows the path of the epic's titular character, while Sam is treated as a stand in for the various characters like Telemachus—the hero's son—that populate Homer's narrative.

require one to have both body and soul, or “muscle” and “heart.” Certainly, this point is particularly vital to comic books with their trappings as far as minds and bodies go, and in this light, chapter two argues James Sturm’s graphic novel *The Golem’s Mighty Swing* stresses the importance of attributes and characteristics devalued when measured against the ideals of mainstream, or Halberstam’s “heroic,” masculinity, to argue for a more complex definition of masculinity than offered by the mainstream ideal. I show that Sturm’s novel interrogates this privileged version by deconstructing the diametrically opposed stereotypes of black and Jewish masculinities. Drawing on Daniel Boyarin’s work on Jewish masculinity in *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, I assert in chapter two that the revision of mainstream masculinity in general serves to transvalue Jewish masculinity and manhood. To elucidate this point, I discuss Mark Helprin’s short story “Perfection” about a teenage, Hasidic immigrant who rescues the New York Yankees of the 1950s and 60s, which refers to the connection between the comic book superhero and the hero of the baseball diamond. Consistent with my overall aim, the chapter looks beyond stereotypes to postulate the roles of specific ethnic, racial, and religious bodies in countering masculine stereotype and the notion of heroic concept of salvation with which it is complicit.

Chapter three argues the eponymous character, Ruth Puttermesser, of Cynthia Ozick’s *The Puttermesser Papers*, participates in the construction of the masculinity that has prevailed among male rabbis in stories about the golem. The novel deconstructs masculinity by demonstrating it is not synonymous with the male body, as Puttermesser’s agenda, I argue, requires her to disavow the connection between her female body and agency. This disavowal manifests in Puttermesser’s ambivalence toward childbirth and

her own creativity, a distinction Ozick makes in her writing on feminism. By creating her golem, Puttermesser challenges the stereotype regarding the inferiority of women and specifically the linking of gender and sex with writing style and ability. I show that Puttermesser is deeply ambivalent toward procreation; however, this ambivalence notwithstanding, Puttermesser's rejection of the golem as the embodiment of her body and desires can only be partial, as like the golem which can be unmade but holds the potential to return, the body, too, returns to expose its role in creation. To make this point, I show that Ozick's short story "Dictation" attests to the important connection between the body and mind in creation as it details Ozick's fictionalized account of the attempt by the female amanuenses of the aging Henry James and Joseph Conrad to covertly alter their masters' great works. The artists' ignorance of these alterations mark the dependence of their great minds and works on the literal embodiments of their writing.

Continuing with the focus on the body as a site of knowledge production, chapter four explores the golem's relation to trauma and memory in Thane Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham*. Rosenbaum has been labeled a "post-Holocaust" writer (Royal 6), and my goal is to show the body's (and bodies') involvement in the issues that have been most pressing for scholars engaging the novel and golems in general. If for Puttermesser gaining agency requires repudiating her body, Rosenbaum's novel, I submit, recruits the body in the reconstruction of memory and history, as well as in creating the golem. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, or the forms of memory available to second and third generation survivors, I argue that Rosenbaum's protagonist Ariel Levin creates postmemories and a link to her family past as she makes several golems

tailored to fix her specific needs and problems. Ironically, Ariel's golems, the dead souls of former Holocaust writers, similar to Wiesel's, are purely spiritual, disembodied ghosts, and invisible to all but the members of her family. As they are neither fully souls nor bodies, Ariel's liminal golems acknowledge that meaning and knowledge of history can never fully be attained, although, as I demonstrate, the novel also highlights the importance of connecting with the past. To finish this concluding chapter, I turn to Pete Hamill's novel *Snow in August* to show how the golem articulates the connections between generational and historical differences and ethnic, racial, and religious differences, as Hamill's protagonist Michael Devlin creates a golem to protect his friends and family from violence in post-WWII Brooklyn. Both Hamill's and Rosenbaum's child protagonists, I argue, create golems in attempt to overcome historical rupture and loss. Such moments reveal how the golem and its creator are never fully settled, but they also demonstrate the potential of the golem's unruliness.

Chapter Two

“All Wrong for the Part”: Superhero Golems in James Sturm’s *The Golem’s Mighty Swing*

In *The Jew’s Body*, Sander Gilman explores the stereotype of the weak and malformed Jewish body. The modern version of this stereotype was engendered amidst intense nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe, when countries were consolidating their boundaries and defining themselves against others without and within. In this context, the increased presence and assimilation of Jews equaled their decreased visibility, making it more difficult to define racial difference. Gilman posits that 19th-century medical and psychological discourses attempted to solve this dilemma of identifying Jews and thus reinforcing national identities by adapting the discourse on Jewish difference from the Bible:

The rhetoric of European anti-Semitism can be found within the continuity of Christianity’s image of the Jew. It is Christianity which provides all of the vocabularies of difference in Western Europe and North America, whether it is in the most overt ‘religious’ language or in the secularized language of modern science. For it is not merely that the Jew is the obvious Other for the European, whether of the citizen of the Roman Empire or of the Federal Republic of Germany. Anti-Semitism is central to Westernized culture because the rhetoric of European culture is Christianized, even in its most secular forms. This made the negative image of difference of the Jew found in the Gospel into the central referent for all definitions of difference in the West. (18-19)

In other words, the discourse concerning the Jew’s supposed inferiority would underpin the discourse on difference in general, forcing Jews into the intractable position of embodying difference. According to this discourse, Jews epitomized difference in mind, body, and spirit. Gilman explains that through exegeses of the Bible and its Gospel Christian writers supported the notion that the Jew’s hidden difference was marked on his body and merely required the correct interpretation for disclosure.

As an example, Gilman describes how circumcision was recast as proof of a “false sign written on the body,” marking the “hypocrisy of the hidden language of the Jew” (18). This “false sign” was viewed in opposition to Christianity’s purported connection with God, which was written “on the heart”; this view, in effect, effaced Judaism and the Old Testament as the origin of Christianity. In this rhetoric, Christianity was framed as the true religion forced to overcome the falsities of Judaism, and the “entire story of the Jews is reduced to a preamble to the coming of Christ” (18). Allegedly lacking a true connection with God, Jews were compelled to fabricate one, although the deformed Jewish body supposedly marked the truth. The secularized medical discourses of the nineteenth-century thus ensured the continuity of the image of the Jew-as-other into modern, European history by revising the sacred discourses of the past..

According to modernized anti-Semitic discourses, Jews were purportedly more likely to suffer from and transmit many diseases that had vexed European culture, such as syphilis, and they were also more susceptible to maladies of the psyche like hysteria. As the personifications of illness, Jews could not safely be included in society and the body politic, a burgeoning concept at the time. Exclusion meant Jews were denied the rights of equal status and citizenship under many national governments. Consequently, while Jews were obtaining more rights, especially in Germany, there was a corresponding backlash against such gains. Gilman offers the Jewish foot as an example of the Jews’ socio-political disenfranchisement. The discourse on the Jewish foot, according to Gilman, was translated from medieval discourse on the cloven foot linking Jews to the devil.

According to scientific discourse of the time, his misshaped foot proved the Jew's physical incapacity and lack of morality:

The political significance of the Jew's foot within the world of nineteenth-century European medicine is thus closely related to the idea of the 'foot'-soldier, of the popular militia, which was the hallmark of the liberal movements of the mid-century. The Jew's foot marked him [...] as congenitally unable and therefore, unworthy of being completely integrated into the social fabric of the modern state. (40)

Excluding Jews from military service on the basis of alleged physical inferiority ensured their reception as “‘bad’ citizen[s] of the new national state” (Gilman 39). The uneven progress of the sciences is evident by the fact that Jewish men were viewed as biologically different from their Gentile counterparts.³⁵

Nevertheless, it was empiricism that proved constraining for Jewish medical and sociological scientists seeking to debunk stereotypes alleging Jewish physical inferiority. Jewish scientists had to accept the basic empirical tenets of their time and were forced to work within the established categories and perceptions of Jewish difference. Rather than attempt the impossible by challenging the presumed truths of their day, scientists like the Berlin orthopedist Gustav Muskat sought to blame the Jew's supposed biological differences on environmental factors. The Jew's foot exemplified the “social anomalies inflicted on the body (and feet) of all ‘modern men’ by their lifestyle” (Gilman 49). Citing various contemporary studies, Muskat contended the Jew's foot was a symptom of civilization's effect on the mind and body. However, because the Jew was directly regarded as a cause and effect of civilization and particularly city-dwelling—as Gilman,

³⁵ The impact of this branding of the male, Jewish body is evinced by the later response by Zionists such as Max Nordau and Theodore Herzl to rewrite Jewish masculinity to align with mainstream ideals. For the Zionist revision of masculinity, see Boyarin “*Unheroic*.”

citing both the Czech-German philosopher Karl Kautsky and Leopold Boehmer iterates, the Jew is “the city dweller par excellence as well as the most evident victim of the city”—the Jewish foot remains as evidence of the Jew’s inherent biological difference (49).

The example of the Jewish foot as both the cause and effect of the stereotype defining the Jewish (man’s) body attests to the limits of nineteenth-century empiricism, part and parcel of what Gilman calls the “continuity of Christianity’s image of the Jew,” a heritage that provided all the “vocabularies of difference in Western Europe and North America” (18). The pervasiveness and persistence of Christianity meant that even the Jew’s ability to assimilate was proof of his difference. Indelibly, for Jewish and non-Jewish doctors and social scientists, the Jewish body marked the Jew’s essential difference.

If the prevalent European outlook was based on the views of early Christian writers expressed in Biblical exegeses, then the Talmud as the repository of the attitudes and values of Jewish writers, according to Daniel Boyarin, poses a strong counterargument for the meaning and value of Jewish masculinity. Boyarin theorizes such a framework in reading certain portions of the Talmud where traits like aggression and physical strength, which have epitomized mainstream masculinity, are devalued, while *Edelkayt*, the “gentle,” “timid,” and studious Jew, is privileged. *Edelkayt* is not merely a defensive reaction against degrading stereotype; rather, Boyarin posits, “the Jewish male ideal as countertype to ‘manliness’ is an assertive historical product of Jewish culture” (4). Boyarin’s view exemplifies how stereotypes of Jewish masculinity might be revalued as antidotes against prevailing stereotypes, replacing the valued terms

of the majority with the previously debased characteristics attached to the minority. Even though the Talmud dates back a millennium before the European discourse it refutes, the alternative to the mainstream ideal persists to this day as a possible force against the presumed notion that conformity to the mainstream ideal is the lone option for escaping pernicious stereotyping.

To show the revisionary potential of Jewish masculinity, Boyarin describes how in a Passover Haggada published as late as 1938 a muscular type was vilified as the “wicked son,” and the epitome of *goyim naches*. Through this idiom, which translates to a “dubious pleasure” enjoyed by non-Jews, Jews disparaged those characteristics that “defined men as manly: physical strength, martial activity and aggressiveness, and a contempt for and fear of the female body” (Boyarin 78). This example demonstrates that the terms on both sides of the binary might be inverted, thus transvaluing previously disparaged characteristics and devaluing the preferred ones.

This transvaluation is consistent with writing on the formation and solidification of modern masculinity. Discussing the construction of modern, ideal masculinity, George Mosse posits that it “needed the countertype, and those stigmatized as countertypes either attempted to imitate the ideal type or defined themselves in opposition to the dominant stereotype” (13). The process of revising the favored terms to undermine the stereotype diverges from the standard strategies employed to defend Jewish masculinity, which often involves displaying that Jewish men are capable of imitating the “ideal type.” Typically, the goal of imitation is to prove that Jewish men are biologically equivalent, if not identical, to non-Jewish men. This imitation is displayed, for instance, in Judaism’s

revision of the central myths of its legendary figures to fit the mold of the “gentile heroes,” as Boyarin explains,

It is highly significant, therefore, that as emancipated Jews became desperate to remake the Jewish image of the Anglo-Saxon (in particular) as the ultimate white male of their world, they sought to discover such male models within something they could call Jewish—Hannibal, a transformed Moses; Massena, and ultimately the whole biblical tradition of sovereignty and war-making understood as the antithesis of the Diaspora Jewish wont for passivity. (274)

The qualities originally describing these heroes were eliminated to fit these legends into the ideals of the “white male.” A similar approach is evident in sports where the success of Jewish athletes supposedly demonstrates the equal biological (and moral) stature of the Jewish, male body.³⁶ Indeed, sports, and specifically baseball, have provided an arena in which writers have examined the Jewish male and his body, and James Sturm’s graphic novel, *The Golem’s Mighty Swing*, *Time* magazine’s best graphic novel of 2001, is a case in point.³⁷ A brief moment in the travails of the Stars of David, a fictional, all-Jewish baseball team, barnstorming the American Midwest in the 1930’s, Sturm’s story recounts the dire results when the Stars dress their lone black player, Henry, who goes under the Judaified alias Hershl, in the golem’s gear from Paul Wegener’s *Der Golem*. The crowd is initially allured by the exotic Jewish legend, but interest indelibly gives way to outrage

³⁶ In this sense, the Nazi exclusion of Jewish athletes from the 1936 Olympic games, as part of the Reich’s “Nazification of sport,” may be read as responsive to the value of sports in constructing modern masculinity.

³⁷ Baseball was viewed as a path toward assimilation by Jewish writers since *Jewish Daily Forward* editor Abraham Cahan implored Jewish fathers to let their sons play baseball, so they would be both educated and “physically strong”; the hope was that new world Jews would combine Jewish values with American physiques (August 6, 1903). Numerous Jewish writers, from Phillip Roth (*The Great American Novel*) to Chaim Potok (*The Chosen*) to Bernard Malamud (*The Natural*), have used baseball to explore Jewish identity. For the impact of Jewish professional baseball players on young Jewish boys and assimilation, see Patterson. For the treatment of assimilation in baseball fiction, see Solomon.

and the baseball game nearly turns into a pogrom. Forced into their dugout by the incensed crowd's call for blood, the Stars only manage escape when a rainstorm cancels the game.

Critics have tended to treat Sturm's novel as an endorsement of the complexity of Jewish masculinity. Roxanne Harde, for instance, claims that the story "denies stereotype to combine aspects of national, religious, and ethnic ideologies into shifting and multiple depictions of Jewish American male identity in the early twentieth century" (64). As an example, she argues the cover, which features the headless torso of Fishkin, a marginal player on the Stars, revises the stereotype of Jewish men by privileging body over intellect (64). Viewed in this way, even when they are not the shining stars of their team Jewish men possess diverse and complex bodies and masculinities and do not conform to the stereotype of the bookish, physically inept Jew. Jewish men, in short, are as physically capable as non-Jewish men. Of course, Sturm's Jewish athletes are depicted on a broad spectrum; yet the implications of Sturm's black player masquerading as the Jewish, mythological figure have not been fully explored, as Henry's masculinity has been treated as merely another iteration of complex, Jewish masculinity. This chapter, in turn, shows how the golem in *The Golem's Mighty Swing* underscores the contradictory notions of race and gender embedded in the typical superhero narrative. To unpack these contradictions, I interpret Jewish and black masculinity according to several models of masculinity, including those that have been used to explain the superhero's identity. My approach in this regard is motivated by how the golem in the story is merely a costume

devised to rescue the Jewish baseball team from its economic woes. In a comic book especially, these salvific overtones call to mind the damsel-in-distress trope that takes many forms in modern comic books.³⁸

Given the recent popularity and ubiquity of comic books and their iconography and how masculinity and heroism are commonly signified in this context across a range of mediums, the golem's body might be useful for both invoking and undercutting these conventions. To illustrate this point, I read Sturm's story alongside Mark Helprin's short "Perfection," as both works make it possible to acknowledge the complexity of masculinity and the values of versions of manhood typically treated as inferior. My claim is that Sturm's graphic novel encourages viewing both sides of the duality as essential to the mainstream ideal. Specifically, I argue that *The Golem's Mighty Swing* posits that physical power and strength, which typically occupy the privileged side of the duality, depend on qualities found on the other, devalued side—and the reverse. This critique of power is dramatized in the story's structure, in which the conventionally strong and tough golem is powerless to truly rescue his teammates.³⁹ The golem myth is essentially about power, but contrary to stereotypical depictions of power in comic books where it is fixed to the body, Sturm's story shows this power to derive from the intellect, ingenuity, and

³⁸ In more traditional comic books, this trope was literalized when the hero, say Superman, was rescuing helpless women from burning buildings. Comic books have come a long way from these early narratives, and the stakes have been elevated considerably. More commonly, heroes are rescuing the world from destruction.

³⁹ Sam from Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Klay* offers another model of interpretation in suggesting that the superhero and the sidekick might be read as father and son. While this chapter does not discuss sidekicks, it is relevant that the superhero's complex relation to his or her other—whether external or internal—is overdetermined and cannot be reduced to one formula.

craftiness. In the golem myth, such faculties are employed by the creator to bring the golem to life, and in Sturm's baseball story these qualities enable the Jewish athletes to beat their opponents.

The golem in Sturm's novel highlights the contradictions and ambivalences of mainstream masculinity, a conceit I approach through several theories of masculinity's construction, including Jeffrey A. Brown's notion of "warrior/wimp duality," which is fundamental to his views on superhero identity.⁴⁰ The dualistic construction of masculinity suggests the superhero's identity as a hero—his or her strength and power—is magnified by its contrast with the alter ego. How might the duality be contested and subverted through the very mediums and representations through which it is reinforced? As I will illustrate, scholars have argued for the hero's dependence on alternative identities, whether those identities are external, as in other characters, or internal, as in the rejected aspects of their own identity. Brown stresses, for instance, that:

Superhero comics clearly split masculinity into two distinct camps, stressing the superhero side as the ideal to be aspired to; but unlike the fascist ideology of phallic masculinity as mutually exclusive of the soft feminized Other, comic book masculinity is ultimately premised on the *inclusion* of the devalued side. Even if Clark Kent and Peter Parker exist primarily to reinforce the reader's fantasy of self-transformation and to emphasize the masculine ideal of Superman and Spider-man, they are still portrayed as parts of the characters that are essential to their identities as a whole. (32)

An alternative to the "fascist ideology" of "phallic masculinity" is therefore found precisely in the devalued facet of the hero's identity as it pressures the idealized

⁴⁰ Sturm's novel does hint at the differences, mainly through Henry's anecdotes about his experience in the Negro Leagues. For instance, when Buttercup is beat up by the locals, Henry explains it is not as bad as the spring training when several of his teammates were murdered. Thus, while the story posits the shared plight of minorities, it also expresses awareness of the dramatically different experiences from race to race.

superhero side, much like the demand and desire to conform to idealized masculinity puts pressure on everyday men. David Rosen uncovers these tensions in writing, “In every age, men experience an abrasion between the concepts of privileged manhood that they inherit and try to satisfy and other experiences to which they fit their masculine ideals” (xiii). In comic books, such an “abrasion” is evident, for instance, in Spiderman’s continual struggles to reconcile superhero responsibilities—the specific idealizations of heroic manhood—with his personal desire to live normally as a teenager. Put simply, no matter how ideal manhood may be constructed, tensions persist between the representation of masculinity and the actual, lived experiences of men.

The contradictions of masculinity are similarly teased out in *Female Masculinity* by Judith Halberstam, who examines the relation of marginalized, female masculinities to “heroic masculinity” (2). While male and female bodies have contributed to “heroic masculinity,” according to Halberstam, “female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear as the real thing” (1). Halberstam’s explanation of this rejection shows that “manliness is built, to an extent, on the vigorous disavowal of female masculinity and partly on a simultaneous reconstruction of male masculinity in imitation of the female masculinity it claims to have rejected” (49). In response, Halberstam argues for recognizing various female masculinities whose contribution to “heroic masculinity” have been denied, stressing that female masculinity is actually a multiplicity of masculinities (46). To uncover masculinity’s construction, Halberstam denies the equivalency between masculinity and the body itself, and she argues that masculinity proves to be much more complex and interwoven than what falls easily within the binary dividing men and women. Such a

view is integral to understanding the complex negotiation of masculinity in Sturm's novel and is indelibly central to my claim that the graphic novel reconstructs and revalues masculinity in terms of behaviors and skills not necessarily linked to perceptions of the body, as it shows that body type, appearance, and even gender do not necessarily determine facility.

The duality of "warrior" and "wimp," as well as the relation between "heroic masculinity" and its alternatives, also become salient when viewed through the public and private identities of comic book heroes, which are typically distinguished through the use of masks and disguises. In regards to the tensions of this duality, Robert Voelker-Morris and Julie Voelker Morris posit that masculine ideals restrict superheroes to the public sphere, preventing them from showing a range of emotions or building personal connections. For the authors, this duality is coded in gendered terms, as "narratives of comic book superheroes associate manhood with [visible] [...] mastery over the material world (technology, finances), political situations (war, terrorism), other living entities (enemies) and one's personal destiny (autonomy)" (103). Through reference to the ideas of Joseph Campbell, the authors suggest superheroes' personal connections to family and other elements of their private lives are usually severed to "force the hero into his public role" (104). Thus, like Brown, Robert and Julie Voelker Morris posit that more complex rendering of superheroes would undermine the binary (warrior/wimp, or public/private) and offer more diverse superheroes catering to a broader audience; in other words, superheroes could be more fully developed if the close relations between their private and public selves were acknowledged. In the golem's case, there is no clear distinction

between Henry's private, black identity, and his public Jewish one as the golem, and the confluence of these subjectivities culminate in the overdetermined figure of the Jewish monster.

Sturm's story also encourages reconceptualizing masculinity outside of the parallel and aligned dualities of such constructions of masculinity, namely by transvaluing previously degraded traits like passivity and craftiness that have been relegated to the other side of the duality from power. Both "warrior" and "wimp," or private and public, the novel suggests, are essential to superhero identity and masculinity in general. With its implied connections to superhero conventions and the comic book medium mainly through the golem, these related dualities help to reveal some of the tensions in interpreting the golem, as well as the allegedly antithetical masculinities of blacks and Jews it embodies in *The Golem's Mighty Swing*. If the revision of the comic book duality has sought to emphasize the value and interdependency of both sides, in emphasizing the ability of the Sturm's Jewish baseball players to conform to the mainstream ideal critics have neglected the devalued side of the duality. This tacit exclusion is evident, for example, in Roxanne Harde's dismissal of Henry's spectacle as proof of the performative nature of Jewish identity. She argues, "Henry, as Hershl, occupies a liminal racial space; his taking on of a Jewish persona might seem part of the showmanship intrinsic to the game, but his full integration into the team defines his aging athletic body as one form of Jewish masculinity. That he later becomes the team's golem adds another dimension to his identity as a Jewish ballplayer" (72). Similarly, Laurence Roth views the Stars' golem as "another kind of minstrel show" performed for the white, Anglo-Saxon audience" (15). In short, Harde views Henry as another iteration of Jewish

masculinity, while in Roth's discussion the Jewish golem is subsumed into the discourse of minstrelsy. Both views interpret one aspect of the duality in terms of the other but fail to recognize their distinctness or the intersecting but discrete histories of black and Jewish men. In other words, both aspects of the duality, while overlapping and reinforcing the other, also retain their respective properties. When analyzing this duality, I aim to be attentive to these differences and to distinguish between stereotypes of Jewish and black masculinity even as I acknowledge the overlap and intersections of different minority masculinities. I also strive to consider the construction of these minorities vis-à-vis the mainstream definition, which I show to unstable.

The Golem's Mighty Swing invites such considerations of masculinity as it foregrounds how the stereotypes of Jewish and black masculinities are established as polar extremes—indeed, this is the dramatic, if not ironic, tension upon which this narrative hinges. But through the failure of this formula to play to expectation, the story interrogates this relationship. Black and Jewish stereotypes are made clear in the huckster Victor Paige's devising of his plan for the golem, which he proposes to the Stars as a remedy for their financial woes. At first blush, the Stars think he intends to dress Noah, their team leader and most accomplished player having once played for the Boston Red Sox, as the golem. But Paige, who admits to knowing virtually nothing about baseball, seems to have based his plan solely on racial (stereo)type: "No, no, no, nooooo....! It's not you who would play the golem (you're all wrong for the part). It would be your first baseman, Hershl Bloom" (29). Why does Paige react with such vehemence to the proposition that Noah will play the lead part in his show, and why is it so obvious that Henry should play the golem? Paige's reaction might be read as motivated by the

stereotypes of Jewish and black masculinity, for Paige is clearly not fooled by Henry's secret identity, Hershl, and points out that it is evidently a "conceit" (29). Paige's interpretation of the golem story implies that the creature is a response to Jewish masculine inferiority, a corrective or surrogate for Jewish physical lack. Due to their limited physical abilities, Jews, as the story goes, are not fit to rescue themselves, and this surfeit can only be filled by the excessive masculine presence of black masculinity. These stereotypes of Jewish and black masculinities are the core of the golem as it is imagined and devised by Paige.

Paige's impression that the golem cannot be Jewish reflects Danusha Goska's assertion that while "The golem is created by Jews," his "status as a Jew is doubtful, given his gentile-like behavior" (53). This gentile-like behavior roughly equates to physical labor and strength, as well as a lack of intelligence. According to Goska, earlier literary representations of golems negotiated Jewish anxiety concerning their adoption of such traits and "tactics of what had been the inferior other" (53). As Goska explores the function of the golem in literature concerned with the engendering of the Jewish state, the golem's capacity for physical labor presents a tangible connection between the Jewish Sabra and the gentile, who share the capacity for manual work typically devalued in Jewish culture. In this sense, the golem figure with its dubious subjectivity and religion offers focused contemplation on the contradictions and ironies that attend to Judaism as it was involved in the formation of the Jewish state. According to Goska, the thoughtfulness and questioning that characterized golems in works like I.B. Singer's *The Golem* and Elie Wiesel's novelization of the myth, however, gave way to a less sophisticated version, and the golem changed from "passive to active, innocuous to

dangerous,” as authors, “reveal less anxiety and more confidence in their hero’s violence, immediacy, and divorce from Jewish tradition” (39).⁴¹ This later version, which Goska observes in works like Leivick Halpern’s *The Golem, a Dramatic Poem in Eight Scenes*, with its “violent golem,” is the one Paige subscribes to with his view that Henry would make a better golem than Noah (54).⁴² For Paige, the golem’s capacity for violence and aggression connects it to the stereotype of black masculinity, while on the opposite side of the equation the weak, physically helpless Jew depends on this aggression to be rescued.

Paige never states this attitude explicitly, but it helps to recall Gilman’s claim about how the stereotypes of the Jew’s weakness derives from Christian discourse. Paige’s connection with this legacy is exposed by his company’s name, “Big Inning Promotions,” a pun on “beginning” and an allusion to the opening of Genesis which thus connects Paige with the very Christian discourse that viewed Jewish masculinity as weak and inferior.⁴³ With his plan, then, Paige reads Jewish masculinity according to stereotype, and his attitude about who is right “for the part” suggests Jews are incapable of the physical prowess required to rescue themselves. Symbolically, then, Henry’s ostensibly excessive black masculinity must fill the void of his teammates’ lack, meaning on a narrative level he must rescue them; however, it is this salvific responsibility the

⁴¹ This thoughtfulness is examined in the previous chapter, although I am more sober than Goska about Singer’s treatment.

⁴² Goska writes, “Leivick’s experiences might certainly be seen as justifying his projection of a fantasy who can and does defeat gentiles at what is seen as their own game—brute force” (54).

⁴³ With his plaid suit and pork pie hat Paige resembles a traveling salesman, an occupation that has tended to be treated with skepticism in the American literary tradition. I am thinking of the traveling salesman of Flannery O’Conner’s stories and the titular confidence man of Herman Melville’s novel.

graphic novel recognizes but then repudiates in order to question the logic on which the racialized and gender duality embodied by the golem rests.

Sturm thereby betrays Paige's racist inclination to interpret the golem through the stereotypes of aggressive, masculinity (black)—as a spectacle—and its mirror image, inferior, weak Jewish masculinity.⁴⁴ This betrayal presents a critique of the inclination to read the golem according to the script of mainstream masculinity, a reading evident, for instance, in Elizabeth Baer's critical reception of the novel, which mirrors Paige's reading in a small but substantial way. Like Harde, Baer believes Henry's presence signals "the fluidity of immigrant assimilation as well as the prejudice that serves as an obstacle." Baer also recognizes some of the disparities between Jewish and black subjugation, reading Henry as a "kind of text, a palimpsest on which are inscribed various identities" (127). Baer writes,

When Henry recounts the death of his former teammates during spring training, the lesson seems to be that anti-Semitism is less deadly than racism and that this trumped-up golem—a fake, really—cannot save the Stars of David, the traditional role of the golem. But Henry does ward off the angry crowd by protecting the Stars' dugout and the team does safely exit Putnam. (126)

Despite recognizing the golem is unequivocally a "fake," Baer's reading maintains that Henry is able to "ward off the angry crowd." How can it be, as Baer seems to imply, that Henry "cannot" save his teammates because he is a "fake," but is able to "ward off the

⁴⁴ If black masculinity is exposed on the field front and center literally and through analogy with the monstrous golem, the inverse of this logic in terms of Jewish masculinity is closeted, even queer Jewish masculinity. The intersections of queer theory and Jewish studies are expounded in *Queer Theory and The Jewish Question* by editors Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini: "If *queer* is to be more than a simple replacement term for *homosexual*—and if a queer theory is to be more than a fancy way of saying more of the same—then it is necessary to work at the in-between spaces in which no difference is elevated above all others. These seems to us some of the promises, and some of the challenges, of thinking at the intersection of 'Jew-queer'" (9).

angry crowd by protecting the Stars dugout?” At best, Henry can delay the pogrom, and can “hold off the angry mob,” as they are “fearful of the Golem. The golem and his mighty swing” (84). Yet clearly this is a delay, at best, as Noah relates, “Mr. Putnam has spent a considerable sum for his team. I’m sure he’ll feel robbed unless he sees them thoroughly beat us” (87). Ultimately, it is the rainstorm, “no passing summer shower,” by which the Stars are rescued (87). Yet in the slippage from the acknowledgement that Henry fails to meet expectations to the opposite position that Henry *does* “ward off” the incensed mob it is clear that Baer’s position tacitly subscribes to the golem-as-hero narrative. Such slippage recalls Goska’s assertion regarding the eclipse of the ambiguous, equivocal golem by the Gentile golem with its “brute force.”

This anticipation of Henry’s power as the heroic-golem—and thus Baer’s interpretive slippage—makes sense in light of how the legend has been treated in comic books. Mathew Weiner, for instance, has explored the persistence of golem stories in Marvel Comics, suggesting while “varied and complex” they “all remain faithful to the original golem legend” (72). This means that golems in more conventional imprints hew closely to stories of heroism, often deploying “brute force” in the name of justice. Outside of comics, such as in prose, golems have been used metaphorically to foreground themes like power and heroism. Often, though, their presence in other mediums maintains the comic book resonance. In Michael Chabon’s novel, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, for instance, the golem serves as a literal and metaphorical trope for Superman and the fledgling comic book industry following World War II, in which Jewish creators played an integral part. Reflecting this role, Chabon’s titular protagonists, one of whom creates a graphic novel called *The Golem*, represent

Superman's creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who are often credited with giving birth to superhero comic books. As this graphic novel-within-a-novel shows, the golem is often compared with the Man of Steel. Arie Kaplan, for instance, cites cartoonist Al Jafee as saying that the "terrible daily life experienced by a tribe of Nomads only made it natural for the Jews to fantasize that a Golem—be he from Prague or Krypton—would deliver them from evil" (17). Kaplan also quotes Will Eisner's view on the Superman-golem connection: "[Jews needed] a hero who could protect us against an invincible force. So [Siegel and Shuster] created an invincible hero" (17). Following from these explicit connections, the presence of the golem in comics and like mediums, even when not concretely in superhero themed stories, suggests the superhero comic book theme, which explains the temptation to read the golem Henry's putative role as savior according to the form's prescriptions of heroism.

But just as they have provided artists with resonant materials with which to work, these thematic overtones have constrained those artists trying to break from superhero conventions, as Scott McCloud explains, "when the creative community trained in that field [superhero comics] ventures into other genres, it tends to take many of those rules along for the ride" (115). As superhero conventions are dominated by "musclebound anatomy, exaggerated depths of field, and ever escalating stakes," they tend to work like "Trojan horses," often holding creators to the "hundreds of embedded stylistic 'rules' governing story structure, page composition, and drawing style" ("Revolutionizing" 115). In light of these conventions, the appearance of the golem may signal raw, unadulterated power and toughness, themes, which, according to McCloud, were inaugurated by Jack Kirby in the 60's and 70's, and which indelibly, became the "central motif of superhero

art” (“Revolutionizing” 114). These generic conventions mainly limit portrayals of superheroes to variations on one specific body. From the lean, stringy muscularity of Spiderman’s Peter Parker to the protruding bulkiness of Superman, these conventions derive from the conceptual and artistic roots of the genre that prevail to this day.⁴⁵ Such origins explain why the image of the golem in a comic book, even one outside of the arbitrarily defined genre of superheroes, might immediately invoke the image of the strong, powerful, comic book character, but they also demonstrate why Sturm and other writers may stand to benefit from deconstructing such tropes.⁴⁶ To be sure, as it highlights and then undermines these conventions, Sturm’s graphic novel challenges some of the intertwined expectations hindering comic book creators and the version of masculinity that has been vigorously produced and reinforced throughout the history of superhero comics.

Indeed, Sturm’s depiction of the Jewish creature indicates some of the aforementioned contradictions of masculinity, and specifically of ethnicized and racialized male bodies, for the idealized superhero body is, in most cases, white, and usually without any designated religious denomination. Yet this limited portrayal is highlighted by the blackness of Sturm’s golem, which also acknowledges the

⁴⁵ Of course, within these parameters all different types of superhero bodies are represented, from the lean, limber, flexible, even animal body of Spiderman to the non-muscular but still very adept bodies of male and female characters who do not fit so neatly with the hyper-muscular bodies typified in the medium. It should also be noted that in comic books the diversity of masculinities often complicates the definition of human: Is Spiderman a human? Is the alien Superman human? Is Spiderman human only in his Peter Parker form? The presence of the golem in Sturm’s novel equally poses such questions. Also, consider Marvel’s *The Thing*, a Jew named Ben Grimm who virtually transforms into a golem made of rocks. Can Grimm’s *The Thing* be called human? Not coincidentally, the character has met *The Golem of Prague*. For a detailed discussion of this encounter, see Wiener.

⁴⁶ To summarize my point here: even artists seeking to work outside of this so-called genre are influenced by the styles, motifs, and tropes of the originators. Sturm’s novel reflects on this influence from its title onward.

stereotypical representation of the black male body in popular culture and the paradoxically uneven ratio of white to black characters in comics relative to the population at large. Jeffrey A. Brown highlights the exclusion of black superheroes,

If comic book superheroes represent an acceptable, albeit obviously extreme, model of hypermasculinity, and if the black male body is already culturally ascribed as a site of hypermasculinity, the combination of the two—a black male superhero—runs the risk of being read as an over-abundance, and potentially threatening, cluster of masculine signifiers. (34)

The presence of the black male body possesses simply too much masculinity and its exclusion is the consequence of this presumed overabundance; however, like the contradiction of Jewish masculinity, through the very embodiment of the golem *The Golem's Mighty Swing* shows the “potentially threatening cluster of masculine signifiers” of the black, male body to be contradictory, in that for the black players such threats equate to objectification and punishment. In one of the few references to racial violence in the story, Henry explains that several of his teammates disappeared during a past spring training, and that “Pepper Daniels” was “stabbed four times in the throat for smiling at a white woman” (57). As this particular example describes, violence toward black men—their brutalized objectification—has been routinely rationalized as the alleged protection of white women. Such victim-blaming is merely one example of the lack of agency that is part and parcel of the reception of the black, male body. Kobena Mercer explains the contradictions of black masculinity:

Whereas prevailing definitions of masculinity imply power, control and authority, these attributes have been historically denied to black men since slavery. The centrally dominant role of the white male slave master in eighteenth and nineteenth century plantation societies debarred black males from patriarchal privileges ascribed to the masculine role of ‘father,’ as his children were legal property of the slave owner. In racial terms, black men and women alike were

subordinated to the power of the white master in the hierarchal relations of slavery, and for black men, as *objects* of oppression, this also canceled out their access to positions of power and prestige which in gender terms are regarded as the essence of masculinity in patriarchy. Shaped by history, black masculinity is a highly contradictory formation of identity, as it is a *subordinated* masculinity. (142)

Representations of the bodies of black men as strong and aggressive do not necessarily equate to political, social, or economic empowerment, and Sturm's depiction of Henry as the golem draws out some of these tensions.

In *We Real Cool*, bell hooks further relates the paradoxes of black masculinity when she suggests that contradictory representations of black masculinity derive from the corporatization and commodification of the black male body and the seemingly paradoxical need to feminize it to reduce its potential threat. Hooks explains that

By the end of the seventies the feared yet desired black male body had become as objectified as it was during slavery, only a seemingly positive twist had been added to the racist objectification: the black male body had become the site for the personification of everyone's desire. In the contemporary social context of hedonistic sexual desire where fantasies of domination and submission are represented as 'cool,' the actual lynching, castration, and cannibalization of the black male body is replaced by symbolic slaughter and consumption. The dreadful black male body is transfigured into the desired body. (79)

As they are the "desired body," black men's bodies are subjected to "white sexual lust" because, according to hooks, they embody "bestial, violent, penis-as-weapon hypermasculine assertion" (79). Hooks indicates, however, that "it has taken contemporary commodification of the blackness to teach the world that this perceived threat, whether real or symbolic, can be diffused by a process of fetishization that renders the black masculine 'menace' feminine through a process of patriarchal objectification"

(79).⁴⁷ Certainly, this fetishization is displayed and unpacked by Sturm's graphic novel as Henry is dressed up as the golem and presented before the crowd as a source of monetary gain, yet his failure as a golem and inability to protect his teammates suggests how fetishization of the black male's body is not empowering.

The contradictions between physical power and social, political, and economic empowerment are also evident in the discourse of Jewish masculinity. Freud has famously remarked that Jewish men have been dispossessed of the symbolic power of the phallus through their circumcision, that "circumcision unconsciously equates with castration," and among the nations of the west this coupling translates to a view of the Jew as inferior, and incapable of healthy identification with the paternal figure, the path to mastery and power in society ("Moses" 460). The small or circumcised penis is thus seen in the culture-at-large as a sign of masculine inferiority.⁴⁸ But if femininity is linked to the body and the Jew specifically through the stereotype of the sexually lascivious and predatory Jewish male, then the removal of the very site of this carnality should, by logic, equate to a sexually incapacitated yet masculine male Jew. That the Jew in anti-Semitic

⁴⁷ Hooks posits that black men's hyper-sexuality was a response to their liberation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from the conservative, Victorian values of white society, and that this oppositional strategy persists to this day: "Precisely because black males have suffered and do suffer so much dehumanization in the context of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, they have brought to the realm of the sexual a level of compulsion that is oftentimes pathological" (73). This compulsion is signaled by the violence specifically toward women that replicates the behavior of the oppressor. The problem, hooks suggests, is that many black males "are simply acquiescing, playing the role of sexual minstrel" ("Cool" 50). But by bringing this history into relation with the golem myth via Henry, Sturm's novel, I posit, suggests how hyper-sexuality and aggression are both liberating and constraining.

⁴⁸ Of course, there is the further contradiction that in the U.S a very high percentage of male babies are circumcised.

discourse on the body can be both carnal and sexually effete, or linked to the body yet physically impotent, are just a few of a number of contradictions of this discourse and its view of Jewish bodies.

The contradictions seemingly inherent to the representations of Jewish and black male bodies may result from the changing needs and desires of the ideal version of masculinity as it demands constant reinforcement. Masculinity, particularly for those on the margins, is defined from the outside, leaving little room for self-definition. In this regard, comic books such as Sturm's provide aptly dramatize this objectification, as interiority is limited to a few dialogue bubbles. McCloud defines the "gutter," in which readers are given freedom to construct narrative from panel to panel. But freedom is also inherent to characters' appearances, as Marc Singer explains that "Comics rely upon visually codified representations in which characters are continually reduced to their appearances, and this reduction is especially prevalent in superhero comics, whose characters are wholly externalized into their heroic costumes and aliases" (107). With character and even identity almost wholly reduced to physicality and appearance, comic book characters both dramatize the process of objectification as it comes from without and present readers with opportunities to revise the categories through which identity is defined and fostered—namely race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Even with these freedoms, critics hold varying perspectives on the degree to which this externalization liberates characters and readers as they construct subjectivities. For McCloud, despite the inherent potential of comic books to break from and subvert ideological limitations, change is held in check by the size of the market and from the general reluctance of artists, publishers, and even readers to stray from convention.

McCloud's ambivalence is echoed by Richard Reynolds, who posits that the conservatism of fans has constrained comic books to continuity over change, but who does avow that ideologically superheroes "support a varied and contradictory battery of readings," as they are both the "exotic and [the] agent of order which brings the exotic to the book" (83). Thus, Reynolds takes a systematically structuralist approach to comic books in which subversive potential is mitigated by convention and archetype.⁴⁹ The constraints McCloud and Reynolds highlight, however, have been circumvented in various ways, primarily through self-referential treatments of superheroes, a mode perhaps best exemplified by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, a story about the breakdown of the personal lives of former and present costumed superheroes, as well as the perils of unbridled vigilantism. Following from this seminal work, artists have managed to use heroes more self-consciously by highlighting some of the limitations of generic conventions. Many of these stories employ the contrast between the medium and the representation of the heroes as reminders of the social and historical forces that define and shape heroism.

Sturm's story, then, might be read as continuing this tradition, with the golem emphasizing some of the limitations of comic books and foregrounding their dearth of black characters. Specifically, the golem indicates that power and agency derive from extrinsic as much as intrinsic factors. This effect is achieved through the many and often conflicting responses to the Jews and their golem evident, for example, in Putnam, where in the Stars' final game they are nearly ravaged by the mob. In the scene, various

⁴⁹ This conflict is evident in the frequency with which major characters are killed off only to be brought back, and also by the relative infrequency with which new characters are engendered.

stereotypical discourses are disseminated to warn locals of the golem and the threat posed by the Jewish baseball players. There is the town pariah who warns, “The Golem was not nurtured on his mother’s milk,” and “Not grown in a woman’s womb” (43). There is also the newspaper editorial admonishing the threat posed by Stars to baseball and thus America:

The Golem is not Putnam’s most dangerous adversary. There is greater threat that the Putnam All-Americans must vanquish, the threat posed by the Jews. These dirty, long-nosed, thick-lipped sheenies; they stand not for America, not for baseball, but only themselves. They will suck the money from this town and they will leave. A victory must be had. The playing field is our nation. The soul of our country is what is at stake. (51)

As these varied remarks demonstrate, stereotypes can be motivated by sundry desires and aims, evoking the different needs of the Putnam locals. Furthermore, when read in light of Gilman’s tracing of modern anti-Semitism to early Christian discourse, the anti-Semitic editorial highlights how the need to define the Stars as racially different finds expression in the notion of the duplicitous Jew lacking a soul. As such, this lack means that Jews threaten the “soul” of America, which is aligned with capitalism. In short, new strategies must be devised for articulating Jewish racial inferiority in response to the ability of Jews to pass as Gentiles.

Even the black Henry is difficult to mark physically, as Sturm’s use of black and white highlights the arbitrariness of basing racial distinction on color. Typically, physiognomy is another way by which race might be discerned. Comparing Noah’s long, angular nose with Henry’s short, flat-nose might provide an indication of their identities in some panels, but otherwise the uniform provides the most consistent indication of identity, which is likely the reason critics have read Henry’s complex identity as merely

another permutation of Jewish masculinity. Yet like his teammates Henry is always more than his features or uniform indicate, and the uniform describes how they are defined from the outside as opposed to internally. To that effect, it is apparent that the “wandering” Stars problematize identity as the various places they travel respond and react differently to their presence. Because identity is constructed from outside, the tension between these often conflicting definitions become apparent. As one player recognizes, “Maybe in New York this Golem draws a crowd but out here in the sticks? Who’s foolin’ who?” (32). Identity and reception are specific to time and place, and New York and the Midwest are worlds apart in many ways.

This fluidity of identity differs from Freidrich Weltzien’s view that the “successful performer of masculinity, as displayed in the superhero genre, is the one who is able to stay in control throughout the transformation. The superhero changes identities at will, and in this sense, failed masculinity is that which loses control over this process” (244). Weltzien focalizes the prevailing discussion of superhero identity through the subject of uniforms and determines that superhero masculinity is defined by the ability to change in and out of costume fluidly. As evidence, he interprets an image of Superman midway between the changing of his costume, whether the blue tights and red cape or the usual business attire of Clark Kent, to emphasize that rarely is the man beneath the costume seen. This example shows that for superheroes in general “warrior” and its “wimp” anti-thesis are equally masquerades. Correspondingly, superheroes always inhabit the public sphere to some degree. Weltzien states that the “change of dress does not threaten [to emasculate the hero], but it is a necessary prerequisite for the fixing of the image of masculinity in the first place” (234). As opposed to delineating two types of

masculinity and reinforcing the duality, the superhero costume is designed to grant the wearer authority: if civilian clothes are a kind of “camouflage” permitting superheroes to blend in, “the clothes of the alter ego act as an equalizer that aligns all people on one and the same level” (241). This view of the superhero’s performance resists essentialist notions of masculinity and stereotype, privileging instead the interrelation between environment and subjectivity, as the hero’s identity hinges on his or her needs at the time. However, this prescription still requires that superheroes control the transformative process, and Weltzien offers several examples of heroes and villains viewed as having dubious masculinities as a result of the lack of control over their own transformation.⁵⁰

As implied critiques of superhero identity, Henry and his team’s donning of uniforms, by contrast, are meant to show the lack of control they have over their attire and therefore of the perception of their masculinity. If superhero masculinity is determined by control of the uniform that determines which identity—superhero or alias—the characters inhabit, Sturm’s novel demonstrates that even though uniforms do permit characters a measure of agency in establishing their identities, such control is equally dependent on social and environmental factors.⁵¹ According to Weltzien, the

⁵⁰ Surprisingly, he does not mention Hulk who is often viewed as a threat to the designs of hero and villain, alike, due to his and their inability to control his emotions. As a result, the characters are left bewildered about how to deal with Hulk. Indeed, Hulk is one of the most vexing comic book characters in terms of categorization, which is evinced by his current status as outsider in the ongoing “Planet Hulk” story arch in which he is sent away from Earth because of the dangers he poses. Not surprisingly, Hulk’s greenness has also been viewed as a racial marker. For more on race, comics, and secret identities, see Singer (“Black Skins”), Scott, and Darowski.

Not coincidentally, the connection has been made between Hulk and the golem. In a similar take on masculinity and control, Dawn Heineken suggests, “While traditional heroic texts foreground the establishment of control over others (the ultimate goal of body control), female-centered texts primarily articulate concerns/tensions with autonomy, issues over gaining and maintaining control of the self” (152). This is not to suggest that the golem or the Jews in Sturm’s text should be viewed as females; however, the theme of “control of the self” more adequately describes the type of power these characters seek.

costume permits superheroes to stick out from the crowd and establish their powers as superheroes. Conversely, for the Stars, the uniform, which they rarely take off, permits their blending into the crowd—almost paradoxically, it signals that they are Jews, but such signaling is safety for the way it grants them refuge through visibility. Like the Jews of Eastern Europe described by Gilman, the Stars mark their Jewishness physically and therefore do not threaten the precarious identity of Gentile culture. The dire consequences of taking off the uniform and becoming invisible as Jews are evident when Buttercup takes off his to slink away to a local bar. When the local patrons discover Buttercup’s identity they savagely beat him. Clearly, for the Stars blending in (assimilation) can be perilous.⁵² This necessity explains why the Stars virtually never take off their uniforms as they travel between different cities, as they are always clearly marked as Jews by their uniforms, even when they are not playing baseball. In this sense, the Stars’ identities are always determined by the social realities they inhabit, and they advertise themselves as the eternal “Wandering Jews,” meaning their situation is unlikely to change.

In fact, Henry’s disjointedness when in the golem gear foregrounds the contradictions that result when identity is constructed differently between the typically fluid time and place, which is especially the case for the Stars. Undoubtedly, with its oversized coat, belt, and wig, Wegener’s costume doesn’t jibe with the idyllic, pristine, open spaces of the baseball field. This contrast is especially clear in the few panels in

⁵¹ One of the most striking things about comic book stories is how the characters wear their costumes even when doing mundane activities, which signals the importance of control and perception in the genre and medium.

⁵² Like the smokestacks and other imagery, it also ominously foreshadows the branding that will take place only a few years later in Europe. This connection is suggested by the image of Buttercup stumbling back to his team half-naked, evoking the pervasive images of Jews imprisoned by Nazis.

which Fishkin educates his teammates on the golem legend. With its depiction of skewed buildings and shadows, echoing the shape and form of gothic romanticism, Fishkin's portrayal of the golem tale juxtaposes with the open airiness of a starry night in the American Midwest, as the Stars' bus strolls through the cornfields toward the town hosting their next game. No matter how critics choose to read the autonomy in the Stars' self-construction of their identities, conscious or unconscious, the dichotomy suggests interpretation and meaning are as much functions of external, social factors than of individual agency. Moreover, because these outside forces are subject to change, and do, attempts to posit a singular identity and value reveals only the conditions under which that postulation is made. In other words, the golem's identity and its excessiveness in Henry reveals that masculinity always depends on something outside itself.

As the Stars travel between cities, there is persistent tension between their self-definition and the ways in which they are perceived and received by the surrounding Gentile world. This reception is evinced early in the story as the Forest Grove locals respond to the anticipated arrival of the All-Jewish team, as one resident explains, "I'm not here for baseball, but to see the Jews...thank you very much" (3). While the Stars are regarded as Jews by opposing fans and play to these expectations through the charade of their uniforms, they rarely identify themselves as Jews. In fact, early on Noah makes a point to distinguish his own type of second-generation Jewry from the previous generation's: "My father would be gravely disappointed knowing we are playing on the Sabbath. He will always be a greenhorn. His imagination lives in the old country. Mine lives in America and baseball is America" (2). Despite this dichotomy, however, the Stars decide to pander to the crowd. To some extent the Stars are in control control, but

ultimately they are compelled to embrace their perceived religiousness by forces beyond their control. Ironically, when the issue of the golem first comes up, only Fishkin knows the legend enough to educate his teammates. Equally, in the climactic dugout scene when they do call upon their heritage, it is only in response to the threat looming outside the dugout.

By illustrating how the Stars' control their perception via their uniforms but lack control over external context, Sturm's graphic novel interrogates the notions of heroism and masculinity based on control. If masculinity, as Weltzien posits, depends on the control of one's attire, then Sturm's story reveals that such control itself depends on a myriad of factors, usually beyond the hero's purview. The definition of masculinity is not some internal or essential trait, but is subject to external forces outside of any one character's control, a matter of context and even perspective. Moreover, this dynamic of power and lack echoes, and is echoed by, the golem's similar precariousness—as powerful as golems may grow, their fates are always beyond their control.

Such moments critique notions of the superhero's control and power—notions that have been important to the construction of masculinity; however, the graphic novel also encourages reading purportedly inferior, effeminate traits as beneficial. By bringing black and Jewish masculinity together with the golem, *The Golem's Mighty Swing* shows the relationship between the concepts surrounding these groups, and it reveals that conceptually linked and denigrated qualities, whether stereotype or not, can also empower. As the uniform example attests, performance and masquerade, despite carrying negative associations, also provide minorities with agency. The conflict over these values is evinced when Paige says of Henry, "I'm sure Hershl, excuse me, *Henry*, will embrace

this new role. Negroes, after all, are born performers” (30). In what follows, then, I will show ways in which Sturm’s novel, along with other minority representations in both prose and visual narrative, emphasize the value of ideal and denigrated attributes.

Ultimately, these examples suggest that a shift in perspective might offer an antidote to the prevailing dualities of masculinity, particularly as they manifest in and through the hero. This shift in perspective is possible because the qualities determining masculinity depend on context rather than objective qualities.

This dichotomy between power and devalued qualities in *The Golem’s Mighty Swing* is evident when Mr. Putnam, owner of the local paper mill and baseball team (the All-Americans) alerts his players: “The Jews are crafty players. Patient. They’ve been waiting for their Messiah for a thousand years...so they know how to wait on a curve ball. Do not try to outsmart a Jew. You must overpower him” (44). As Putnam means to disparage the Stars with his characterization, his words exhibits the dichotomy between the mainstream ideal of power—which in this context consists of hitting home runs and throwing fastballs—and the skills possessed by the Jews like patience, survival, and craftiness. According to this logic, the Putnam team can triumph over the Stars precisely by exploiting their lack of physical power. By contrast, the Star’s purported craftiness, also based on stereotype, can be overcome by the sheer will of the more powerful All-Americans. As Boyarin states, though, in Talmudic culture, “dissimulation, intrigues, tricks, and lying were valued when they served the purpose of survival” (38). This view highlights the ways in which the Stars’ craftiness in the game echoes the tactics of Jewish survival in general. In the story, Buttercup demonstrates craftiness in discerning a hitch in Mickey McFadden’s delivery. The major leaguer McFadden is the Putnam’s answer to

the Stars' golem, and like the golem he depends on fastballs to get batters out. Buttercup counters this power when he tells Noah how to tell which pitch McFadden will throw. The result is that Noah is able to guess McFadden's pitch with Buttercup's help, though he still has to be strong and powerful to hit the ball. McFadden is disarmed by the Stars guile, demonstrating the value of both power and craftiness. The Stars prove that they are capable of both power and craftiness, but neither quality holds sway over the other; in fact, they are shown to be mutually beneficial. So, in spite of the fact that Putnam marks these skills as different and denigrates the Jewish players by association, the Stars prove they are capable of both types of empowerment, and more importantly, that such skills are not mutually exclusive.

Mark Helprin's short story "Perfection," the magical story of Roger Reshesve, a fourteen-year-old Hasid who rescues the New York Yankees of the 1950s, explores the mutual interdependency of typically valued traits such as action, strength, and power and their ostensible opposites, including passivity, weaknesses, and bookishness. As in Sturm's narrative, this relationship is explored through baseball, which is described as being

like a clock, in that its wheels turn at different speeds and all its moves require waiting. Eventually, everything pops at once: the detents lift, springs decompress, arms rise, and hammers strike twelve times, even if only twice a day. Most of the time, however, is spent waiting for one wheel to align with another. So it is with baseball and its glorious pauses, which cannot be rushed and which even the announcers mimic with genius. Were the empty spaces to be compressed or done away with, the game would die. (188)

According to this view, action and its embodied characteristics do not exist independent of their opposites, for without the polarized "pop" and "pauses," the "game would die."

The emphasis on the mutual interdependence of apparent opposites reflects the overarching privileging of balance throughout the story, in which Roger's powers and the theme of balance are valued over the dualities that have typified comic book masculinity.

The relation between Roger's heroics and comic book heroics are displayed as Roger's story parallels Superman's. While Superman's story begins with Clark Kent living in relative obscurity as an orphan adopted by farmers, Roger begins his story as a rabbinical student adopted by the Saromsker Jews of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. To rescue the Yankees Roger must leave the insulated (private) sphere of the Saromskers for the spotlight of the Bronx and the House That Ruth Built, similar to how Clark Kent must leave rural Kansas for Metropolis to become Superman. From the outset Roger is destined for such fame, as prior to even meeting his young disciple the Saromsker Rabbi describes what he needs to complete a task:

Who is the fastest and most nimble of our students? Who is smart but not so immersed in his studies that he would be crushed by a truck? Who knows the map, and will be able to come back? Who speaks English as well? And who will make a good impression of Rabbi Moritz of Breel? The student said, 'It's simple.' The Saromsker Rebbe knew that nothing is simple. 'Really?' he asked. 'Yes' 'Who?' 'Roger.' (137)

This characterization foreshadows Roger's exceptional abilities, underscoring the importance that he is studious and worldly, two seemingly opposed traits unlikely to be found in tandem among the Saromskers in their isolation from secular society. Through Roger, however, the story shows that these disparate qualities are not mutually exclusive, as Roger of the Saromskers and Roger of the Yankees prove to be two sides of the same coin. In this sense, Roger diverges from Superman who is firmly divided from his Clark Kent alias. As such, "Perfection" conceptualizes the dualities of superhero identity—

wimp and warrior, and private and public—and like Sturm’s graphic novel makes salient the interdependency of valued and devalued qualities of masculinity.

Through Roger’s eventual heroism the story also suggests that power, strength, and agency are not merely rooted in the stereotypical, heroic body. Much like the bumbling nebbish Clark Kent, it is inconceivable that Roger, “who is not even five and a half feet tall,” and is so “gangly that it seemed he could not have weighed much more than a hundred pounds” could possibly harbor superpowers (175). How can a Hasid with such a stature who has never even played baseball and does not know the game at all rescue the New York Yankees? Again, it is a matter of balance and perspective, as Roger explains, “When the disparate forces of the universe are conjoined, and rest easy in an equality of perfection. Every force that exists is held in balance by a counterpart with which it must be united, and with which it is united, even if the connection be not apparent to us” (184). Roger is able to succeed on the field and view this “connection” as a result of his experiences as a child in Majdanek when a Nazi death squad gunned down his parents and many others, leaving him, like Superman, an orphan. In other words, Roger’s perfection on the baseball diamond constitutes the balance to the tragedies of his youth. However, this perfection is not compensation for his tragedy, as Roger’s goal is not to become a legend on the baseball diamond; rather, his goal is restoration, as he “cared little but to look forward to a life that might in a single place touch upon perfection that blind persistence and love would lead to eventual reunion” (130). Undeniably, the massacre of one’s family does not compare to baseball, an “independent universe” with a “closed set of rules,”—indeed, such a comparison “would offend

God”—but as a *baal shem tov* Roger can understand that such a balance does make sense on a cosmic scale, as he can shift his perspective away from the limitations of humans and glimpse the mysterious ways of God.⁵³

This shift in perspective poses an alternative to the narrow scope through which humans might understand their fates and reveals that things seemingly different might be the same. The initial catalyst to Roger’s quest comes about when he is struck by the resonances between the monotonous lull of the baseball radio broadcaster’s speech and “Talmudic exegesis,” and he was “pleasantly surprised by the unhurried pace, for he had expected thoughtless gushing, and this was careful, tranquil, with long calming space between the words” (137). Not only are these two worlds non-distinct, but the profane world is equally capable of the tranquility which heretofore Roger associated only with Saromsker existence, as opposed to merely “thoughtless gushing” (137). As the example shows, a shift in perspective means the strict divisions between the sacred and profane worlds are no longer a given.

By the same token, Roger’s unlikely superpowers by which he can perform feats like knocking down the gigantic clock in the outfield or can rapidly cover the entire span of the outfield to catch fly balls also become possible. Roger imagines that the legendary rabbis of yesteryear were also able to perform their magical feats by such a shift, as they

actually did fly, even if in earthly terms they did not leave the ground. How was this? To say that they flew, they would have had to have made, in defiance of gravity, a vertical distance between themselves and a point of reference. When Rabbi Vimy of Breel and Rabbi Canopy of Talakreblach concentrated, their point of reference was not the mere earth. They envisioned the limitless universe, in which they floated as freely as sparkling fish. And was it not true that they did float amid the phosphorus-glistening stars? That the earth came between them and

⁵³ The phrase “*baal shem tov*” translates to “master of the good name,” or it can describe “one who has a good reputation.”

what kept them otherwise afloat was a fact and not a dream, but it was not much of a fact in comparison to the gravity-less infinity in which it existed. (140)

Roger can perform these feats by shifting perspective away from the usual and accepted point of reference. This shift also signals an escape from the self-investment that underpins conventional power and tyranny; rather, the rabbis sought to perform magical feats to prove only their devotion to God. This change in perspective therefore suggests that the definitions of their powers have changed—flying is not just flying and is imagined instead as floating “as freely as sparkling fish.” It is only flying in that it is perceived as so in “earthly terms” (140).

Just as Sturm’s novel examines the forms of power epitomized in comic books, Helprin’s story seeks to articulate an alternative through Roger. This refashioning of power also contrasts with the myth of Superman, who partially owes his unlimited abilities on Earth to its distance from his birth-planet, Krypton. Through Kryptonite, its final remnant, Superman’s planet of origin curbs his powers, as the farther he travels from that “point of reference” the more manifest his powers become. By this logic, Superman’s powers might be viewed as a function of his difference, or alien-ness, from Earth and its natives, as they are diminished when he loses his alien-ness. In a way, this formula reifies the aforementioned theoretical construction of the self and masculinity, which is solidified by castigating the threat of difference. Incidentally, this is the same formulation by which stereotypes, as I showed earlier, are constructed. Roger’s powers present an alternative as they do not depend on distance from difference, as they occur on a plane of existence devoid of such dualities and their dependencies, where perfection

and imperfection exist in unity. The “gravity-less infinity” that Roger inhabits shows that the perceived distance between such points—like Earth and Krypton—merely reflect a single perspective, and that for Roger other perspectives are possible.

When this perspective is altered the usual divisions no longer apply, and it becomes evident how Roger the Saromsker and Roger the Yankee are also one and the same. In other words, it is possible to be both aspects of the stereotype, the Saromsker Jew devoted to study and worship, as well as the powerful hero who saves the Bronx Bombers. The story posits this shared identity when Roger initially steps into the batter’s box to convince the Yankees he is their savior. His “astronomical powers” are described as “fed from the billowing fringes and folds of black cloth into the almost-glowing staff,” and on Roger’s “face and eyes, a battlefield look, an expression that comes only when impossible outcomes are guaranteed,” right before he shatters the ball into million pieces (157). As it brings together Roger’s almost militant countenance with the supposed peace and humility symbolized by his Hasidic attire, this description show that Roger’s powers derive from both aspects, which it turns out are not so neatly divided. Physically, Roger demonstrates power of the likes even the Yankees have never witnessed before, “The only thing in his heart at that moment was love, and the only thing before his eyes a passage from the book of Ruth: ‘May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead’” (156). The confluence of these two seemingly opposite emotions reveal that Roger’s power and strength, or his perfection, are one and the same with the suffering he has been dealt, his imperfection.

The emphasis on the balance that can be achieved when perspective is shifted to a cosmic scale applies to time and telos as well, as for Roger the definition of success is not

merely limited to helping his new team achieve victory. When Rogers claims that “What is equal in the end is equal also in the beginning and in the middle,” he is acknowledging that his ethos differs from the perspective of western, or Christian, telos, and from the narrative of salvation in which meaning is promised in the end (183). Through his powers, Roger embodies the shared temporality of past, present, and future. This means that he can embody both the imperfection and perfection symbolized by his terrible past and his heroic present, respectively. Unlike Superman, who must escape from Krypton and evade its elements on Earth, Roger does not have to shed or abandon his past to become a hero. In other words, Roger can simultaneously inhabit secular and sacred worlds.

If in Helprin’s story imperfection and perfection reside mutually throughout all points in time, then whatever truth and meaning are implied by salvation must also coincide in time and space. Such a point is expressed by Roger’s attitude toward the archaic customs of the Saromskers:

The ancient ritual, the black coats, the way of speaking, the languages, the revelations and commentary, the candles, the cuisine, the marriage customs, and the fur-trimmed hats, were things as new as if they had just burst upon the world like the first rays of light. Pop. To think that they were old be only a mistake in perspective. (194)

It is only through *one* version or “perspective” that Saromsker culture and “customs” might be construed as “old.” Conversely, from Roger’s perspective and his resistance to

the divisions of time, these conventionally old practices are as “new” as “the first rays of light,” a chronologically ambiguous metaphor, meant to suggest both the newness of the day’s first light and the creation of the world.

Viewing time in such a way represents a viewpoint perhaps more consistent with Jewish values and culture than Christian theology. This conception corresponds to the different ways by which concepts like meaning, justice, heroism, and salvation, are dispensed between Christianity and Judaism. The latter generally posits that truth will be revealed with Christ’s resurrection. In Christianity, furthermore, God’s word is the decisive basis for meaning, as evinced by the fact that Christians refer to the Bible as “the Word,” and so this word cannot be challenged. In Judaism, alternately, truths are divined and fostered through the engagement with texts and by the dialectical exchange of ideas, for the covenant allows that God be challenged and held accountable. In “Perfection,” it is precisely this accountability by which Roger achieves his momentary perfection, as it is explained, “In Christian theology—and the Yankees were Christians—this is inconceivable. God does not appear in the dock. He does not dispute with those over whom He holds absolutely sway. In Jewish theology, however, He does” (196). The imperfection in the world thereby reflects God’s imperfection, meaning that with this perspective the divisions between the sacred, secular, and profane do not hold.

Such a vision helps to elucidate how power is redefined in Sturm’s graphic novel as well. For example, the headless torso of Fishkin ostensibly in limbo on the cover seems to suggest passivity or even stasis as preferential to movement and action. The tension between this view of power and the more conventional one is made salient by the way in which Fishkin’s body appears to conflict with the overlaid title, in which “Mighty

Swing” moves diagonally and slightly up across Fishkin’s mid-section. Along with the coloring, the font suggests power and strength and most of all movement contrast sharply with stasis. To this effect, such tension may signal the value of qualities directly opposed to the usual ones that have typified superhero identities. The fact that such a striking contrast is made on the cover, a locus especially important to the medium, further suggests the thematic resonances that follow in the story.⁵⁴

These thematic resonances also explain why the Stars define victory differently than do their Gentile adversaries. When all is said and done, Noah avows that “Survival. Perhaps that is a victory unto itself” (90). Against the typical notions of victory and heroism, Noah endorses a definition of success that would run counter to the prevailing norms, as victory here is merely the act of continuing in the present state and not some overpowering or conquering over the opponent.⁵⁵ Like Fishkin’s static body and the source of Roger’s quest, in which victory means retribution, in Noah’s view victory merely means persisting. This different view of victory also suggests an alternate view of the heroes and the qualities or traits that can achieve it. In Sturm’s story, then, getting there doesn’t mean winning the game or conquering one’s foes; rather, success is defined as survival. Accordingly, narrative movement toward a desired goal is no longer a

⁵⁴ Tellingly, the graphic novel’s cover is the only colored art, as Sturm chooses to use black and white shading throughout. Racial distinctions are rather difficult to read from the players’ varied physiognomies and physiques, which further suggests the blending and complexity of their masculinities. For a thorough discussion on the limitations and difficulties of color and drawing race in comic books, see Dittmer.

⁵⁵ Recalling his namesake, the biblical Noah, victory for Noah means surviving but with substantial sacrifice, including not finishing the game and consequently not receiving the much needed profits promised by Paige; it is also implied that nearly experiencing a pogrom leads most if not all of the Stars to retire as baseball players. The major difference, however, is that Sturm’s Noah does not see the world purged of evil like his biblical predecessor, and this is emphasized by the smokestacks throughout the narrative. Echoing the golem myth, the implication is that Jewish suffering does not end through heroic salvation.

prerogative, and stasis becomes valuable in itself. As such, Sturm's and Helprin's texts elucidate the contingency and limitations of success as it is conceived through the singular monolith of Christian ideology, which as Gilman's explanation highlights had distinct roots and motivations in constructing the stereotype of Jewish masculinity. Thus, by shifting outside of the distinctly Christian conception of salvation, heroism, and telos, which, as I have shown, are linked to the marginalization of the Jewish male body, Sturm's and Helprin's stories can transvalue Jewish, male identity.

Both stories revise the negative connotation of the male, Jewish body by redefining success and questioning the tenability of mainstream heroism. Linking baseball and comic books assists Sturm like Helprin in exploring masculinity. To be sure, both mediums have helped to foster and maintain the normative definition and perception of American masculinity; however, as these stories show, along with baseball, the mediums also leave open the possibilities for varied articulations of competent bodies and identities as well as the divergent goals they may fail or succeed to attain.

Beyond simply articulating the diversity of Jewish masculinity, Sturm's golem reconceptualizes power and agency outside of the limited scope of the strong, aggressive, and dominating male. The golem's indelible subjection to extrinsic forces also proposes that the powerful can be powerless, especially when they rely on their radical difference from undervalued stereotypes. As compensation for this powerlessness, the other qualities that have permitted Jews agency throughout their tumultuous history, like those espoused by Boyarin—craftiness, performance, and passivity—can be just as powerful and enabling for those outside of the purview to achieve their ends. As Sturm's and Helprin's stories attest, such qualities are not mutually exclusive from the qualities

attributed to mainstream masculinity; rather, they are integral if not intrinsic to such characteristics. It is the elimination of the gap between strength and its antitheses—between the powerful and the putatively powerless—that these stories endorse by showing the interdependency of both sides. Furthermore, the revised attitude toward power holds that these dualities only exclude one another in one, specific context, and that by moving outside of this framework the hero and his, her, or its narrative can be revised.

Chapter Three

Golem Daughters: Creation and Procreation in Cynthia Ozick's "Puttermesser and Xanthippe"

The previous chapter argues that Daniel Boyarin's writing on Jewish masculinity helps explain the transvaluation of Jewish and black masculinities in James Sturm's graphic novel *The Golem's Mighty Swing* and Mark Helprin's short story "Perfection." According to Boyarin, some strands and passages of the Babylonian Talmud actively seek to invert normative masculinity so that traits stereotypically used to describe Jewish men—bookish, weak, passive, and effeminate—are transvalued over and against stereotypical traits of mainstream masculinity, like power, strength, and aggression. I demonstrate, for example, how Sturm's golem highlights how these minority masculinities have been set up as antitypes through which the mainstream defines itself; yet with their transvaluation these formerly denigrated traits are no longer treated as setbacks but as advantages. Sturm's and Helprin's stories, set within the athletic realm of baseball, show that attributes like patience and intellect can be as valuable and useful as power and force, and these works thus encourage a rethinking of the definitions of masculinity and heroism in ways suggested by Boyarin. In this chapter, I will extend Boyarin's critique of masculinity, for to my mind it has ramifications about gender roles that go beyond simple critiques of mainstream and Jewish masculinity. In doing so, I argue that Cynthia Ozick's golem story "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," from the novelistic collection of stories, *The Puttermesser Papers*, redefines the prototype of masculinity as no longer exclusive to the male body, as its protagonist Ruth Puttermesser takes on aspects of sissy masculinity when she creates a female golem to battle injustice and to transform New York into her version of paradise when she is unjustly fired from

her job at the civil service. Puttermessenger's plan succeeds temporarily, but as her golem grows out of control so does her utopia, and like all the golem creators she must unmake her creation and put her dreams of reform and civic bliss to rest.⁵⁶ Following my analysis of Ozick's golem story, I turn briefly to Ozick's story "Dictation" to elaborate further on the ambivalence toward the male body, and bodies in general, described in *The Puttermessenger Papers*.

But first, I return briefly to Daniel Boyarin's views on Jewish masculinity to show the stakes for Puttermessenger as she makes her golem. According to Boyarin, the claim forissy masculinity does not imply these societies were any more progressive than mainstream societies in which they were found. Boyarin suggests that women "were disenfranchised in many ways in traditional Jewish culture," as it "authorized, even if it did not mandate, efflorescences of misogyny" (xxi). He thus argues against equating the Jewish male's insistence on being nonmale in the Gentile sense as his self-identification as female. Boyarin declares that the reversal, or inversion, of male subjectivity was not equivalent to men's identification with women. He professes, "By suggesting that the Jewish man was in Europe a sort of 'woman,' I am thus not claiming a set of characteristics, traits, behaviors, that are essentially female but a set of performances that are read as nonmale within a given historical culture" (5).

In "historical culture[s]" in which a binary gender system is maintained, how was it possible that males could resist identifying with the mainstream's definition of men without implicitly or explicitly identifying as female? Essential to understanding this

⁵⁶ "Puttermessenger and Xanthippe" is the second of five chapters, each chronicling a moment from a separate decade of Ruth Puttermessenger's life. The chapter, along with the preceding one, "Puttermessenger: Her Life, Her Work, Her Ancestry," was originally published in 1982 in *Levitation: Five Fictions*, a collection of stories.

contradiction is that unlike mainstream societies the rabbinical world deliberately opposed equating maleness and “active spirit” and femaleness with “passive matter.” During the era in which the Babylonian Talmud was composed, Boyarin explains, an antidualistic attitude prevailed, so men could be spiritual without deprecating the body in the way that, for example, Christian ascetics would. Along these lines, Boyarin argues in *Carnal Israel* that Jewish men along with being spiritual and embodied could also be sexual. As he explains in *Unheroic Conduct*, for Jewish men “feminization was not “coeval with ascetism” (6); in other words, “Rabbis had—indeed were—bodies,” and these bodies could be sexual (8). In the master-narrative of Gentile culture, the male body and specifically the penis were disavowed and women were relegated to their bodies. These disavowals were presumed necessary to free men from needs and desires viewed as antagonistic to higher concepts like reason, civilization, spirit, and mind.

Ironically, this same discourse described Jewish men as physically and hence morally inferior because they were circumcised, which was viewed by anti-Semitic discourse as the removal of the phallus. Boyarin explains, though, that rabbinic culture mocked this contradiction with its seemingly equally paradoxical assertion that the penis and the phallus are not coextensive but also not diametrically antithetical. In their own antidualistic worldview, Jewish scholars could be both sexual and scholarly, which did not present a paradox because the penis and the phallus, as the symbol of power, were not mutually exclusive.⁵⁷ In Boyarin’s view, Jewish culture rejects this duality between the

⁵⁷ Scholars like Susan Bordo, for instance, have argued extensively against equating the penis and phallus. In *The Male Body*, she compares the correspondence between the human and phallus to the “biometaphors” in the animal kingdom, asserting that unlike other phallic “biometaphors” the human phallus does not function as an advantage in competition; it embodies, instead, “*generic* male superiority.” “Biometaphors,” in other words, literally give the male of the species some advantage over other males. The phallus for humans, on the other hand, does not supply any literal advantage; rather it “proclaims its kinship with higher values, with the values of ‘civilization’ rather than ‘nature,’ with the Man who is made

penis and the phallus, and in such antidualistic formulations Boyarin sees potential in the concept of Jewish oppositional masculinity: “It is not the identification with women that bears here the ‘feminist’ potential but the “refusal to be a man” because “Sissy” masculinity identifies with a “femininity” that is not viewed as “castrated” or as “lack”(11).⁵⁸

Yet Boyarin also concedes that with their “assertive” deconstruction of mainstream gender traditional Jewish societies still maintained sharp gender demarcations (4). Such lines must be understood, however, in the context of these societies, which were different from the larger, Gentile ones (4). They were constituted such that the privileged, interior space the “House of Study” became the “public space” and women occupied the “private sphere” of commerce. Boyarin writes, “within the structure of rabbinic Judaism it is the ‘indoor,’ somewhat private realm of the ‘House of Study’ that defines the social prestige and power of men over women, and not the estate of getting and spending, of economic power, that produced such distinction in bourgeois society” (161). It was thus in the homosocial space of the “House of Study” that the bonds of patriarchy were maintained through the exclusion of women. This structure of male domination inverts the structure of the dominant culture in which women are

in God’s image, not *Homo sapiens*, the human primate” (89). These higher values, ironically, depend on repudiating the physical penis, as it is perceived as posing a threat to the freedoms of the higher values because of its base needs and desires. It is routinely pointed out that these qualities are projected onto the female body.

⁵⁸ Boyarin writes of the “knowledge of gender that powerlessness makes available,” which suggests that those who have experienced oppression might be more sympathetic to it in others (23).

confined to the private, domestic sphere, and where men broker economic, social, and political power in the privileged public one. As such, in contradistinction to Jewish men who spoke only Hebrew and were

withdrawn from the world, [Jewish] women of the same class were speaking, reading, and writing the vernacular, maintaining businesses large and small, and dealing with the wide world of tax collectors and irate customers. In short, they were engaging in what must have seemed to many in the larger culture as masculine activities, and if the men were read as effeminate ‘sissies,’ the women were read often enough as phallic monsters. (Boyarin xxii)

Jewish society placed a premium on written and oral discourse, and women were denied agency in their exclusion from the masculine realm of study and prayer. In this context, the historical examples in which women gained agency through writing are relatively sparse compared with the legendary figures of scholarship and devotion in Judaic history. In her essay, “The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah,” Rachel Adler brings to the fore one of the rare examples in the Talmudic figure of Beruriah, notable as a learned woman able and in some cases even licensed to challenge sexism; it was said that Beruriah “learned three hundred laws from three hundred teachers in one day” (7). According to Adler, Beruriah therefore posed a problem for the rabbis who couldn’t reconcile her abilities with their belief that women were intellectually inferior. In their stories, for example, women were usually depicted as “flat” characters merely there to serve the needs of the “rounded” male characters. Beruriah therefore presented a “conflict” because she was a “rounded”

female character—this was a “conflict” between “character” and “context,” between a self portrayed as morally significant, and a sexually polarized society in which moral significance belongs to the opposite sex (7).

As Adler relates, the rabbis were nonetheless intrigued by Beruriah because she presented a seemingly rare exception to the rule. Adler postulates that the rabbis’ ambivalence and willingness to entertain the possibility of Beruriah stemmed from their interest in testing the laws set down by the Torah and desire to achieve a more “encompassing context” as a test for “universal principles.” As such, Beruriah represented “an outrageous test case proposed as a challenge to all contextually reasonable assumptions: What if there were a woman who was just like us?” (7). This intrigue lasted as long as the rabbis did not view Beruriah as a threat, for like all women she was expected to be licentious and seductive, as “Sexuality was regarded as women’s most compelling characteristic, and it constituted, in the rabbis’ opinion, an insurmountable barrier to any relationship other than a sexual one” (7). The rabbinic world was defined by rigid control of passions, desires, needs, and wants, and sexuality was viewed as not only a “metaphor for the disequilibrating potential of female power,” but for the male rabbis represented the “untamable, unpredictable, and lawless in human beings” (7) Adler suggests Beruriah’s case demonstrates that rabbinical epistemology was incapable of considering the manifold ways she might have challenged-their views.

She was viewed instead as the exception that proved the rule: a singular “woman with a moral life like a man’s,” and not as the “test” that revealed the limitations of their epistemology.⁵⁹

The problem of voice and women’s agency remains a concern for modern writers and scholars, and the varied, often contradictory stories surrounding Beruriah exemplify the challenges facing Jewish women, particularly when it concerns their admission to the “male” sphere of the intellect. These issues have commanded the attention of Ozick who in prose and essay is seldom hesitant to weigh in on the subjects of women’s place in the Judaic scholarly realm and the notion of the “woman writer,” specifically the “Jewish woman writer.” Like Adler, Ozick has expressed interest in figures like Beruriah who, in her essay, “Notes Toward Finding the Right Question” (1979), Ozick suggests was “reinvented as a seductress”—connecting her representation as a “kind of bluestocking” and “licentious woman”—because of the dangers inherent to “female sexuality,” which in Beruriah was coupled with her willingness to “speak satirically of women” (“Notes” 129). Along with Glückel of Hameln, Rebecca Tikitner, and Toibe Pan, Beruriah’s is among the female voices that have been lost or effaced because of the religion’s attitude toward women’s voices and agency. In Ozick’s view, the loss of these voices is on par with the many voices past and future “excised” in the Holocaust. However, she contends that feminism for Jews is a social and not a theological issue, which means there is a chance for repair and repentance (“Notes” 126). In literary circles, these issues could

⁵⁹ Even in the rare cases when the rabbis acknowledged Beruriah’s victory over one of their own, losing to Beruriah was read as a sign of insufficient masculinity, rather than as a testament to Beruriah’s ability. Boyarin sees this same attitude as a call for a critique of the “sissy” male for his oppression of other Jewish men [...] namely the ignorant who were sometimes characterized as being ‘like women’” (xxi).

equate to greater acceptance of women writers and their freedom to write as Jews as opposed to “women.” It could also result in expressions of more “rounded” female characters at the centers of their own narratives.

Ozick posits that the locus of change is *Halakha*, or Jewish religious law, and even though it treats “woman *qua* women” as a “subdivision of humanity, not the main class itself,” change remains a possibility (“Notes” 124). Ozick argues that because *Halakha* is “flexible, adaptive, attentive to need and actuality” it must assume the responsibility of adapting to the equal treatment of women. Citing various scholars, including Adin Steinsaltz, who compares the Talmud to a tree, which even though it may stop changing “substantially” at some point, will continue to “live, grow, proliferate,” Ozick suggests Judaism is adaptable and amenable to change. This includes the Torah because it does not refer to the equal (or unequal) treatment of women (136). The prime venue for this change, in Ozick’s view, is “scholarship,” a “major Jewish value” defined by the “immersion in Torah, thought, poetry, ethics, history—the complete life of a people’s most energetic moral, intellectual, spiritual, lyrical soarings and diggings” (136). Ozick concedes that while some progress has been made and women have more freedom to write, they often remain segregated from men through the affix “woman,” which automatically marks them as a specific type of writer. Ozick’s views on gender and the value of “scholarship” to Jewish culture and thought, which must adapt to the changes in the world at-large, suggest a departure from so-called second-wave feminists and their ethos regarding the equal but distinct natures of men and women. Ozick considers herself a “classical feminist,” opposed to any divisions based on sex. For example, Daniel Walden explains that Ozick “rejects the phrase ‘woman writer’ as antifeminist” (45). The

union of her views on Judaism and feminism is summed up in a statement concerning the way women are typically addressed in the synagogue:

In the world at large I call myself, and am called, a Jew. But when, on the Sabbath, I sit among women in my traditional shul and the rabbi speaks the word 'Jew,' I can be sure that he is not referring to me. For him, 'Jew' means 'male Jew.' When the rabbi speaks of women, he uses the expression (a translation from a tender Yiddish phrase) 'Jewish daughter.' He means it tenderly. 'Jew' speaks for itself. 'Jewish' does not. A 'Jewish daughter' is someone whose identity is linked to, and defined by, another's role. 'Jew' defines a person seen in light of a culture. 'Daughter' defines a relationship that is above all biological. 'Jew' signified adult responsibility. 'Daughter' evokes immaturity and a dependent and subordinate connection. When my rabbi says, 'A Jew is called to the Torah,' he never means me or any other living Jewish woman. My own synagogue is the only place in the world where I, a middle-aged adult, am defined exclusively by my being the female child of my parents. My own synagogue is the only place in the world where I am not named Jew. (125)

Undeniably, Ozick's attitude toward the adjectives that, in effect, attenuate and trivialize her Judaism accord with her views on the designation "woman writer."⁶⁰ A few years before "Notes" was published, she published a controversial piece on mainstream treatment of women—women writers specifically—and the rationalization of their exclusion from literature and their relegation to the domestic sphere by cultural "Myths." In the essay "Provisions for the Demise of the Dancing Dog," (1971) Ozick rebukes the "Ovarian Theory of Literature" and its "complement," the "Testicular Theory" (266). Ozick's satirizing of both attests to her attitude toward the equation of biology with destiny.

Ozick acquired insight on the extent of this issue when she devoted a year to "Examining the Minds of the Young"—the noble undertaking of teaching a freshman English class. Ozick tells of her students' astonishment when she informed them that

⁶⁰ Given that her self-definition depends on her status as a Jew, as they question her Judaism these views also attenuate her status as an adult subject with agency.

Flannery O'Connor was a woman, and how they went on to describe her "woman's prose" as "sentimental," an attitude derived in part of from the tradition that says women are "sentimental, imprecise, irrational, overemotional, impatient, unperseveringly flighty, whimsical, impulsive, unreliable, unmechanical, not given to practicality, perilously vague, and so on" ("Previsions" 267-8). But Ozick's chief disillusionment comes about in discovering that her mostly male colleagues held the same views about writing as her freshman students.

Another problem she finds with the linking of biology and writing with gender roles in general is that the rationale is employed to exclude women from writing on account that it may interfere with their obligation to produce and rear children ("Previsions"); this view, she posits, is further rationalized by the comparison made between procreation and art, both of which are sentimentalized as creativity. Ozick ridicules the perception that a woman "does not need to make poems, because she is privileged to make babies. A pregnancy is as fulfilling as, say, Yeats's *Sailing to Byzantium*" ("Previsions" 269). She continues by asserting that such comparisons are "slur[s] on the labor of art. Literature cannot be equated with physiology, and a woman through her reproductive system alone is no more a creative artist than was Joyce by virtue of his kidneys alone, or James by virtue of his teeth (which, by the way, were troublesome)" (271). For Ozick, such views naturalize and normalize what are clearly social matters. In this sense, they are fundamental to a culture-wide myth of the "home" shared by men and women. Ozick uses "Myth," "cult," and "attitude," interchangeably to describe the ways whereby women's lives are endowed with meaning despite the fact that "home" is really just a way to "generate the products, and the products utilize the

attitudes” (276). In other words, “Children,” like “Home,” is a way to exclude women from art so as to minimize the competition for men. “Children, “home,” and the notion of the “homemaker”—the “heroine of the fairy tale”—are symbols, inventions, and abstractions there to “bolster the whole airy system of make-believe,” and to justify a conditional or constructed system through appeals to nature and biology (276). Ozick thus critiques the treatment of women in a system that guarantees its own perpetuation via the “myth” of meaning that places women at the center—as the heroes—of a narrative that requires nothing from them but their bodies to achieve its telos.

Despite her outspoken criticism of the subjugation of women and their exclusion from literature, however, Ozick’s relationship with feminists and their movement has been quite vexed. Her ambivalence stems in part from her refusal to categorize herself as a “Jewish woman writer.” While male counterparts have viewed themselves as “male writers possessing a Jewish heritage”—almost as if religion was incidental to their writing— “Ozick, on the other hand, sees herself as a writer who perforce participates in that Anglo-American literary tradition but identifies with her Jewish background, that is, as a Jewish writer who writes in English” (Lyons 13). Ozick has even questioned the word “writer,” pitting it as antithetical to her self-recognition as a Jew. In her interview with the author, Elaine Kauvar cites Ozick as stating that “To be a Jew is an act of the strenuous mind as it stands before the fakeries and lying seductions of the world, saying no and no again as they parade by in all their allure. And to be a writer is to plunge into the parade and become one of the delirious marchers” (358). This perspective is clarified by Ozick’s views in another essay, “Toward a New Yiddish,” in which she criticizes much of contemporary—i.e., experimental—fiction for being about art itself, or, in other

words, turning art into idolatry. In reference to the “psychedelic consciousness” of Allen Ginsberg, which she equates with “Christian grace” and the idea that all religions are one, Ozick claims that such “Monism is the negation of monotheism,” and that “When man is turned into a piece of God he is freed from any covenant with God” (163). For Ozick this covenant instantiates the moral and ethical imperative of being a Jew, and the central duty is to stand for monotheism and anti-idolatry.

Ozick’s ideas, however, are unstable and routinely contradictory.⁶¹ In the same interview with Kauvar she stresses that literature should be about “freedom” and freedom from ideology. Yet how can she reconcile this view with her parsing of the “Jew” and “writer?” Maybe the key to making sense of these contradictions can be found in Ozick’s views on the Jewish writer’s relation to the dominant culture. Ozick suggests that the Jewish writer must be in exile from the reigning “aesthetic paganism,” or “the religion of Art,” by which she means the valuing of art for its own sake. She writes, “The religion of Art isolates the Jew—only the Jew is indifferent to aesthetics, only the Jew wants to passionately wallow in human reality” (“Notes” 165). She argues that instead, for the Jewish writer literature must be “centrally Jewish, or “liturgical,” meaning “in command of the moral imagination,” rather than of the isolated “lyrical imagination.” An example of such liturgical concerns is evinced in her interview with Kauvar when she condones the use of “Midrash,” which originally meant Biblical exegesis, to refer to literary criticism. When asked by Kauvar about her brand of feminism, she performs her own “Midrash” on “Scripture”:

the primary text tells us that ‘male and female created He them,’ and that humanity is ‘made in the image of God,’ you have the primary text making feminist statements--that is, if feminism is to be defined as holding the sexes as

⁶¹ For a thorough analysis of the fundamental contradictions in Ozick’s writing, see Ni.

equal in worth. What else is feminism if not the equal worth of the sexes, before God and humanity, and equal access to whatever needs doing in the world, or to whatever the world calls you to do? (Kauvar 371-2)

One thing that “needs doing” is to “stand before the fakeries and lying seductions of the world,” and one of the issues Ozick is called upon to do as demonstrated by her writing is to advocate for women as writers by pointing out the ways those “fakeries and lying seductions” have kept them from literature and confined to the “Home.”

This urgency has captured the attention of scholars in their approach to Ozick’s body of work. In her essay, “Ozick as a Jewish Writer,” Bonnie Lyons discusses Ozick’s attitude on writing as a Jew through the lens of the relationships between mothers and their children in her stories. Lyons asserts that growth and development are the focus of much of Ozick’s fiction, which she embodies in “figure of a child,” a reflection of “her moral stance” and “part of her artistic credo” (18). From “The Shawl” to the “The Pagan Rabbi,” her fiction plumbs the depths of familial bonds to expose some of the myths that tie people to one another and break them apart. As for the tension between creativity and family, perhaps no story reveals more than “Puttermesser and Xanthippe.” Lyons suggests that Ozick’s fiction depicts the struggle between the “light” and “dark” of the imagination, and that while the “light side is the source of energy, the creative faculty,” the dark is “very force that struggles to snuff the redemptive corona, by tearing down meaning, interpretation, and the rational.” “Thus,” Lyons writes, “great art grows out of internal struggle; it wrestles with its own body” (18). Applying this formula to Ozick’s golem story suggests that through the eponymous protagonist Ruth Puttermesser’s ambivalent and ambiguous relation with her golem-daughter the notion of growth symbolized by the child in much of her work is exchanged for a model in which the child

becomes, or is, the monster that threatens “meaning, interpretation, and the rational” (18). Puttermesser’s golem is the dark side of her own psyche that destroys her rationale, civic Paradise.

Many critics have read Puttermesser’s creation of the golem as the author-mother giving life to her repressed desires.⁶² They have also explored this theme in the context of Ozick’s views on Jews and monotheism. Amy Elias, for example, compares Puttermesser’s idolatry to the Pygmalion myth and suggests that Puttermesser’s golem, which she names Xanthippe after Socrates’ shrewish wife, “acts as an ego-extension of Puttermesser and then as the pestilence that sweeps the land as punishment for the overreacher” (72). In her reading, Miriam Sivan also emphasizes the connection between art and motherhood, suggesting that through her golem Puttermesser “gives birth to a number of her longings,” which enable her to become the “Mother persona [that] contains both the passion of the id and that of the redeemer” (47). These examples show how creation and motherhood are often fused; however, such readings do not regard Ozick’s repeated, emphatic delimiting of the two throughout her writing. In another example, her essay, “Reviving the Golem: Cultural Negotiations in Ozick’s *The Puttermesser Papers* and Piercy’s *He, She, and It*,” Ruth Beinstock Anolik closely links creation and generation in relating that “The original golem folk tales are remarkable for being birth narratives from which mothers are completely absent. Ozick’s revision of the golem story reveals a poignant longing for the possibility of a female presence within the line of tradition” (45). However, in light of the views expressed by Ozick in “Previsions for the

⁶² For a comparison between Ozick’s treatment and Gershom Scholem’s views on golems, see Kauvar. For the golem in relation to Ozick’s stance on idolatry, see Katz or Parrish. For Puttermesser’s feminist paradise, see Daemmrich. For memory and identity in the novel, see Powers.

Demise of the Dancing Dog” and “Notes Toward Finding the Right Question,” this chapter reads Ozick’s golem story alongside her views on the stakes for women in their relegation to procreation and domesticity. I argue that “Puttermesser and Xanthippe” questions the symbolism connecting creation and procreation as it asks what it would mean for a woman to inhabit the symbolic realm of scholarship and linguistic mastery; this question is warranted by Puttermesser’s privileging of scholarship and creativity and ambivalence toward motherhood. Ni contends, “it is indisputable that Puttermesser is the first woman who created a golem” (83). By imagining the first female creator of the golem as well as the first female golem in literature, the tale of Puttermesser’s creation ironically suggests that conviction, dedication, and competence are necessary to writing and art—just as they are for creating golems—as the story rejects anatomy as a foundation of intellect, or as Lyons puts it, “the notion of the writer as a sexual being” (15).⁶³ My central argument is that the golem in “Puttermesser and Xanthippe,” and Puttermesser’s depiction throughout the novel, recall the disparity between creation and procreation, a dichotomy central to Ozick’s story and perhaps much of her feminism. Puttermesser may prove capable of creating a golem, but to do so she must repudiate motherhood and even her body. She may succeed in the former, but she ultimately learns

⁶³ The first female golem was created by Ibn Gabirol, a point acknowledged by Puttermesser and Ozick. Ni explains that in a “speech accepting a Doctorate of Hebrew Letters, awarded by Spertus College of Judaica in Chicago, Illinois, Ozick contended that Ibn Gabirol’s so-called golem was more of a mannequin than an independent mind and claimed credit for the invention of the first and only female golem” (83). Since the writing of this project began, there have been two novels published, Helene Wecker’s, *The Golem and The Jinni*, and Jonathan and Jesse Kellerman’s, *The Golem of Hollywood*, as well as a promise of a third, *The Golem of Paris*, featuring female golems.

the impossibility of the latter. The golem's ability to return reflects the body's uncanny return in and through writing, a point I will explain at the end by turning to Ozick's story, "Dictation."

In this sense, Puttermesser's creation of the golem contests the views of "New feminists" with their insistence "that all people write as women or men and that male is not a better or wider or more rationale or authoritative category"; it also reflects Ozick's repudiation of the belief "that women often neglect or edit out their deepest perceptions and avoid their most compelling themes out of fear of being labeled women writers" (Lyons 15). Conversely, as Ozick's creation, Puttermesser, along with her creation of the golem, derive from her very "deepest perceptions," suggesting that she does not fear creation. At the same time, creation of the golem typically demands the authority to engage God in the pronouncement of the holy name. The creator of the golem might be said to demonstrate the supremely "strenuous mind" that stands outside and against the "delirious marchers."

Creation does not only require studious devotion, but might also be said to itself instantiate an act of writing, what Marie H el ene Huet describes as "paternal propagation:"

For all its versatility, however, and for all the different beliefs it was meant to represent, the legend has maintained several invariable elements: it describes the creation of a man, and this gesture of giving life is accomplished through the use of letters. One would call it a *symbolic* birth, entirely determined by the father in opposition to the rich maternal imagination that had produced the monsters of earlier times. The creation of a golem by means of letters, recitations of letters, inscriptions of letters on the creature's forehead, or, in other popular versions, by means of a scroll inserted in the mouth of the statue of clay could serve as a powerful image of giving birth in the symbolic, the linguistic order. Not only does the father of the golem give life, but he does so through a linguistic feature, relying on either the alphabet or one of the secret names of God, the ultimate

symbolic father associated with the power of the word and the omnipresence of the Law. The Name-of-the-Father literally inscribed on the forehead of the inanimate statue brings the human life to shape. (244)

Ozick's reimagining the creation of the golem in the "*symbolic*" or "linguistic order" but performed by a woman subverts the effacement of the female body and mind by "paternal propagation." While creating the golem mostly requires speech, the inscription on the forehead also placed it in the domain of writing; in this sense, with her protagonist Ozick also shows it is possible to counter the patently male writing of the golem that has excluded women from creativity, but without reverting to female anatomy as the basis of creation and specifically writing.

Consistent with Ozick's feminism, "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" expresses ambivalence toward motherhood as it deconstructs the exclusion of women from writing. Despite scholars' linking of creation and motherhood, from the moment Puttermesser discovers a naked body lying in "the bed of Socrates," a "civilized bed" (38), this ambivalence is evident in the ambiguity surrounding this process. Puttermesser observes that though it is a "child's body the limbs stretched into laxity and languor," and it "had a look of perpetuity about it as if it had always been reclining there," meaning that it could not be her creation (38). She is unequivocal: "The girl did not resemble Puttermesser at all: she was certainly not one of the imaginary daughters" (37). Instead, it is "ugly," and she puts "out a correcting hand to improve the nose, finish the mouth, and to push the tongue back into its mouth, all the while "wish[ing] she were an artist" (39). Whether this act symbolizes procreation, Puttermesser feels that it is in tension with her desire to be an artist, so with reluctance she puts the finishing touches on the golem; her detachment makes these final moments before the golem is brought to life feel like a disconnected

and intellectual exercise. Creation is literally expressed as such when Puttermessenger discovers what appears to be a blank white slip of paper, and “she whose intellectual passions were pledged to every alphabet” read the name of God that was already inscribed on the sheet of white paper, as “it was not so much a seeing as the sharpness of a reading” (40). This description of creation as a “reading” highlights the tensions of Puttermessenger’s process as it questions the degree of her role in Xanthippe’s creation.

Puttermessenger’s ambivalence about creativity is also revealed by her engagement with Xanthippe once she is injected with the animating spirit. Like Frankenstein’s monster, her famous literary predecessor, Xanthippe implores Puttermessenger, “Mother. Mother,” and “You made me,” but the latter responds, “I didn’t give birth to you.” Puttermessenger delineates between creation and birth, but the golem as human-made artifice does not differentiate, so Puttermessenger is her mother because she pronounced “the Name and brought me to myself” (42). As it recalls the ambivalence of Mary Shelley’s work, Puttermessenger’s opposition suggests that creator and the creation define their relationship differently, and perhaps that scholars should be mindful of too closely aligning creativity and biological generativity. The omnipotent narrative voice that throughout the story rebukes fantasy with truth then enters the debate to further distinguish the two by reiterating that Puttermessenger “would never give birth. Yet she had formed this mouth—the creature’s mute mouth. She looked at the mouth: she saw what she had made” (42).

In “Cynthia Ozick’s Golem: A Messianic Double,” Miriam Sivan recognizes Puttermessenger’s uncertainty regarding creation, but affirms that Puttermessenger aims to take on responsibility by creating Xanthippe and thus “becoming a mother.” Sivan also asserts that this act of responsibility “for life” is foreshadowed when Puttermessenger gathers a

“plethora of houseplants to take care of in her modern high rise Manhattan apartment” (51). Responsibility is instantly abandoned, however, or is at least ironic, given that Puttermesser observes, “on the sill and under the sill every pot was cracked, every green plant sprawled. The roots, skeletal and hairy, had been torn from their embracing soul—or rather, the earth had been scooped away. The plain earth, stolen” (39). To create life, life must be destroyed. Do the plants serve as a metaphor for Puttermesser’s own life, which might be considered “stolen” if not “destroyed”—at least, uprooted—by the bringing to life another?

A similar view of motherhood as creative and destructive, of child or mother, is evident in Puttermesser’s reveries of reading Goethe’s “Der Erlkönig” as a child. This nostalgia is tied to her fantasy of giving birth to daughters, an idea she has not yet abandoned. In the poem, a boy is threatened by potentially evil spirits that his father dismisses as natural events. The tension of the poem shifts around these different explanations and the mother is completely absent; motherhood in the story is represented, rather, by the spirit’s mother who it claims “Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand,” which translates literally to mean “[she] has many a golden robe.” Because reference to the poem immediately precedes Xanthippe’s appearance, it must be asked how the poem dictates the story’s orientation toward motherhood and parentage. That the only mother in the story is likely an illusion designed to entice the child does not present motherhood in a favorable light, and because of the poem’s centrality to Puttermesser’s fantasy of having a daughter it suggests Ozick’s ambivalence toward motherhood ⁶⁴

⁶⁴ It is also revealing that Puttermesser’s own childhood “burns away” and vanishes “among the cinders” when it is “ravaged” by arsonists (25).

Whatever reservations Puttermesser may have and which are expressed in the symbolic connection with “Der Erlkönig,” Puttermesser buys the promise of the “golden robe” offered by Xanthippe and accepts full responsibility for creation, but only when she accepts that she must in order to execute her PLAN (67). In, “The Idea of the Golem,” Gershom Scholem delineates the various conceptions of golem, between the symbolic, “psychic experiences” of early creators and the literal, “objective manifestations” recognizable today. Early golems were created to manifest their creators’ relation to God and were ends not means; the later creators saw themselves in competition with the esteemed rabbis of previous epochs and created golems to prove their worth. Their golems fulfilled more earthly purposes and resemble the mindless automatons that populate science fiction and other genres. When Puttermesser accepts Xanthippe it is more so as an “instrument,” or a means to an end. The obeisant golem tells Puttermesser, “Two urges seeded you. I am one, this the other. A thought must claim an instrument. When you conceived your urge, simultaneously you conceived me” (67). Precision with language is incumbent on the creator, so she corrects the golem by describing the “electric moment exactly: the PLAN swimming like an inner cosmos into being, the mere solid golem an afterthought” (67). Xanthippe is merely there to aid Puttermesser—certainly not the ideal relationship between parent and child. Nor is Xanthippe the “light” or “dark” side of Puttermesser’s ambition, as she serves a purpose and aids creation (18).

With Puttermesser dedicating her life to intellectual pursuits and her intertwined ideals while the golem enables this by performing the less glorified tasks, their relationship, I offer, parallels that of husband and wife in the historical context described by Boyarin. Xanthippe is there to serve as her “amanuensis” and to traverse the city

collecting signatures for a petition to elect her mother as mayor, which is part of the “PLAN FOR THE RESUSCITATION, REFORMATION, REINVIGORATION & REDEMPTION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK” (67). She also takes care of the domestic chores, including cleaning and cooking. Xanthippe’s toil gives Puttermesser the necessary freedoms to live out her fantasies, which involves fostering her vision of Paradise that includes the Crotona Park library branch, where because it is “timeless” she can endlessly digest books on “anthropology, zoology, physical chemistry, philosophy,” along with Kant and Nietzsche, “the linkages of Jeans,” quarks, primate sign language, race, civilization and Stonehenge—Puttermesser will read Non-Fiction into Eternity; and there is still time for fiction” (13-4). Like the rabbis of today and yesteryear, Ozick invests her time and energy in higher pursuits, which leaves the nitty-gritty in the hands of her female golem.

Puttermesser’s reading list includes literature on golems, so she knows that golems welcome such roles. The list also includes Scholem’s essay, in which he explains that one of the questions that has bothered scholars seeking to understand the true nature of the golem “might be formulated as follows: does he with his magical power create a purely magical being, or is it a being related to the tellurian origins of man?” (174). In other words, for scholars the magic used to create the golem was either a perversion of God’s power, or purely an extension of it. Puttermesser, in turn, views the creation of a golem as purely rational and in accord with the laws of science, an act that establishes her place in the line of like-minded thinkers, scientists and rabbis:

[she] was unattracted either to number or to method. What interested Puttermesser was something else: it was the plain idea fact that the golem-makers were neither visionaries nor magicians nor sorcerers. They were neither fantasists no fabulists nor poets. They were, by and large, scientific realists—and, in nearly every case

at hand, serious scholars and intellectuals: the plausible forerunners, in fact, of their great-grandchildren, who are physicists, biologists, or logical positivists. (48)

Puttermessenger thus aligns herself within a tradition of golem-makers and their progeny whose only magic manifests the plausible and rational; she sees herself as being among the great thinkers who have glimpsed the mystical in the plan-as-fact. Moreover, that she is less interested in “number and method” suggests the emphasis on writing corresponding to Scholem’s view that the “letters are the structural elements, the stones from which the edifice of creation was built” (168). In her version of the creation, Puttermessenger’s books—from secular to profane—contain the recipes she used to envision and implement her PLAN, including creating a golem to “help her become what she was intended to become” (65).

Puttermessenger uses her golem to expose and undermine the falsehoods that impede this destiny, and as a “writer” her view that it is politically advantageous to interpret the golem’s creation as science and not fantasy or even magic is shared by the first Jewish writers to include golems in their novels. In their essay, “How the Golem Came to Prague,” Edan Dekel and David Gantt Gurley explain that characterizing golem creators as scientists enabled Jewish writers like Ludwig Frankl, a bohemian poet and one of the first to use Rabbi Judah Loew, the Maharal of Prague, to repudiate stereotype. These writers were responding to the German Romantics who, starting with Jakob Grimm’s 1808 story of the golem’s creation by Polish Jews, associated the legend with the “sensational pitfalls of demonic desire and the charnel house of monstrosities” that they

attributed to Jewish mysticism.⁶⁵ This anti-Semitic view espoused in the fiction of German Romantics like Archim von Arnim, an editor for the journal in which Grimm's story was first published, who in his novel *Isabella von Aegypten*, features the golem as an estranged bride characterized by her "pride, lewdness, and parsimony" (243). The authors explain that following the popularity of Arnim's novel,

by the middle of the century, the Golem had become folded into a larger set of Romantic motifs that included the doppelganger, galvanization, Faustian sorcery, and various automata including, most famously, Mary Shelley's Frankensteinian monster. Succumbing to the Romantic appetite for all things legendary, the ancient rabbinic story of man's mystical simulation of the divine creation becomes a trope of mutability. (244)

It was this mutability that lead Dekel and Gurley to label the golem tale an "ecotypified" legend, meaning it could "take on the locality of the place it arrives in because it is essentially and narratologically located in no one place" (24-6). It was precisely against this "ecotypified" nature that Jewish writers sought to combat these negative associations of Jews by attaching the golem to sixteenth century Prague and the figure of Rabbi Loew.

Dekel and Gurley highlight "the two crucial features" of Grimm's version to explain its anti-Semitism. First, they suggest, he removes "mention of sources" to give the "false impression that he is presenting a contemporary oral tale that he has collected and transcribed." Second, they offer that Grimm removed the name of R. Elijah (the Rabbi initially attached to the legend) and the city of Chelm, as he attributes the creation of the golem to 'Polish Jews' and an ambiguous 'they'" (250). Both these features suggest "When the audience hears the story for the first time, the legend is for a brief

⁶⁵ They explain that the golem's popularity gained "momentum from a short entry" made by Grimm in the literary and folklore journal *Zeitung für Einsiedler* (Journal for Hermits), "the principal organ of the Heidelberg Romantics" (242).

moment skeletal, unauthorized, and plastic” (250). Moreover, of primary emphasis in Grimm’s version is the “utterance of the holy words as the key to the animation process,” whereas Jewish versions “emphasize the act of writing” (251). This is why Rabbi Loew, a figure beyond reproach who was in fact not considered a kabbalist, was important, as his required a mastery of the “holy words, a practice highly regarded as the patrimony of the scholarly elite” (251); furthermore, that these “holy words” were written and not spoken supplanted associations with kabbalistic magic for “literacy, an act of reading, studying, and writing, which are all meditations on the nature of God” (251-2).⁶⁶

Though a secular Jew, Puttermesser, too, endorses these activities. Her zeal for “reading, studying, and writing” links her to this tradition of rationalist, golem-makers envisioned by the first Jewish writers to anchor the story in the Maharal; however, in her battle with fakery and deception she requires a more immediate, direct connection to the tradition—Puttermesser must “claim an ancestor. She demands connection—surely a Jew must own a past.” “Poor Puttermesser has found herself in a world without a past,” so she conjures her own Rabbi with her uncle Zindel, “a former shames in a shul that had been torn down” (12).⁶⁷ In Adler’s view, Beruriah’s story and its receptions over time became palimpsests precisely because she was denied access to the rabbinic sphere, as the rabbis were incapable of imagining Beruriah as one of their own, which meant she was unable “to provide herself with a teacher and get herself a companion that leaves her isolated in the rabbinic world (23). Puttermesser, too, is isolated and without a direct connection to

⁶⁶ Puttermesser describes Rabbi Loew’s unmaking of his golem in scientific terms: “he smashed the magnetic links that formed the chain of being between the atoms,” which suggests the creature is a product of science and reason, rather than magic (98).

⁶⁷ A *shames* is a caretaker of a Jewish synagogue.

the past and tradition to which she feels she belongs. Adler explains, “The crucial difference between Beruriah and the rabbis is that no teacher claims her as student, that no student quotes her as teacher, and that Beruriah herself quotes texts but never names teachers. Whatever her gifts and capacities, they funnel, ultimately, into a void because Beruriah lacks authority” (24). In this sense, she resembles Puttermesser, as both are virtually outside history with no direct link to specific rabbis of prestige.

Puttermesser must then imagine a more tangible connection to Zindel who with his connection to history and the masculine sphere of Judaism offers her the “authority” and connection to the history and tradition from which she has been severed. Sarah Blacher Cohen suggests that Zindel is the link to the “masculinity of Yiddish life,” the modern iteration of the rabbinical world described absent because “America is blank” (17). Zindel connects Puttermesser however briefly to the world “Behind the parents, beyond and before them, where things teem,” and he also iterates the tension between modernity and tradition as he urges her to take a more modern name. This tension concerns Jewish masculinity specifically, as Zindel relates that “Puttermesseer” translated literally means “butter knife,” a fact distinguishing between the masculinity she performs via intellect and masculinity prescribed through physical power. Moreover, “butter knife” may equally refer to the feminized act of cooking and serving food, tending to the needs and pleasures of the body, especially in light of Puttermesser’s attitude toward maternity. Zindel informs her, “A *messer!* *Puttermesser*, you slice off a piece of butter, you cut to live, not to kill” (15). Living for Puttermesser, however, means pursuing matters of intellect; yet the image of the blunt knife suggests the limitations of this against which she struggles as a woman, for Puttermesser attains power and agency through intellect—

her books and language she acquires from Zindel, perhaps the first golem she creatively invents to help fulfill her desires.

Indeed, Puttermesser's knowledge derives from Zindel's teaching her Hebrew grammar, as she is fascinated by the "permutations of the triple-lettered root elated her: how was it possible that even a whole language, hence a whole literature, a civilization even, should rest on the pure presence of the three letters of the alphabet" (5).⁶⁸ But Puttermesser rejects this fantasy when Zindel describes the letters as pregnant, telling her "First see how a *gimel* and which was a *zayen*. Twins, but one kicks a leg left, one right. You got to practice the difference. If legs don't work think pregnant bellies. Mrs. *Zayen* pregnant in one direction, Mrs. *Gimel* in the other. Together they give birth to *gez*, which means what you cut off" (16). This is where the authoritative voice of the narrator enters to state,

Stop. Stop, stop! Puttermesser's biographer, stop! Disengage, please. Though it is true that biographies are invented, not recorded, here you invent too much. A symbol is allowed, but not a whole scene: do not accommodate too obsequiously to Puttermesser's romance. Having not much imagination, she is literal with what she has. (16)⁶⁹

The "biographer" must "disengage" because the imagery of reproduction seemingly threatens Puttermesser's self-definition—it is only when Zindel wades into the use of this language that Puttermesser eschews fantasy. This is one of those "myths" of "home" and

⁶⁸ Sivan asserts, "It is quite significant that it is through language and texts that Puttermesser beats her path to redemption. For like the Messiah [who] was born on the day the Temple fell, the transition from an oral to a purely written tradition also began with the destruction of the Temples" (50-1)

⁶⁹ The narrator intrudes again later to confess that "if this were an optimistic portrait, exactly here is where Puttermesser's emotional life would begin to grind itself into evidence. Her biography would proceed romantically, the rich young commissioner of the Department of Receipts and Disbursements would fall in love with her. She would convert him to intelligence and to the cause of Soviet Jewry. He would abandon boating and the pursuit of bluebloods. Puttermesser would end her work history abruptly and move on to a bower in a fine suburb," but "This is not to be" (12).

the “homemaker” that is viewed as an obstruction to women writing, Sara Blacher Cohen identifies Puttermesser’s repudiation of this fantasy as an avowal of the “fertility of imagination” over “regeneration,” meaning that creativity in her view is opposed by reproduction (90). Zindel also recommends that she change her name in order to meet a “A nice young fellow,” and his version of this romance ends with Puttermesser in Israel: “You’ll meet someone,” he implores here, “You’ll marry, you’ll settle there” (16). That Zindel’s narrative is abandoned when he alludes to pregnancy testifies to his student’s ambivalence, as this imagery threatens her access to the intellectual realm.

Puttermesser views these trappings of motherhood and perhaps matrimony as impediments to her fulfillment of her desires, so from the beginning she avoids them, like when she refuses to go along with her mother’s request that she marry Joel Zaretsky, “who is divorced now no children thank God so he’s free as a bird as this say his ex the poor thing couldn’t conceive” (4). These trappings are at odds with Puttermesser’s eventual goals to foster truth and “Justice,” which are linked to what one deserves through ability and hard work. As she describes it, Puttermesser had a “strenuous mind” from a young age: she was “highly motivated, achievement oriented. Also she had scholastic drive,” up to her success in law school: “I earn my way. I scored highest in the entire city on the First-Level management Examination. I was editor-in-chief of Law Review at Yale Law School. I graduated from Barnard with honors in history, *summa cum laude*, Phi Beta Kappa” (32). Conversely, the men around her, from Rappoport the adulterer to her fellow male lawyers at Midland, Reid, & Cockleberry, to the various department heads at the Department of Receipts and Disbursements, are all guilty of “fakeries and lying seductions.” At Midland, such “fakeries” hold her back because she is

a Jewish woman, as “Three Jews a year joined the back precincts of Midland Reid, (four the year Puttermesser came, which meant they thought ‘woman’ more than ‘Jew’ at the sight of her)” (6). Unlike her male coreligionists who she hears “hissing” from the bathroom, though, she is willing to tolerate her treatment. She describes the difference between Jewish and Gentile men: “Only their accents fell short being identical: the ‘a’ a shade too far into the nose, the ‘i’ with its telltale elongation, had long ago spread from Brooklyn to Great Neck, from Puttermesser’s Bronx to Scarsdale. These two influential vowels had the uncanny faculty of disqualifying them for promotion” (7). As for her own accent, she takes pride in the fact that she no longer had one. Her motivation to succeed surpasses her Jewish pride, as she relates, “It was right that the Top Rung of law school should earn you the Bottom of the Ladder in the actual world of all-fours. The wonderful thing was the fact of the Ladder itself” (6). She is confident that as she does with her Jewish accent she can overcome such obstacles through determination and ability, and it is only when the partners refer to the Jewish “wedding canopy” at an “anthropological meal” that she grows “weary of so much chivalry,” and leaves Midland (8). In other words, she is willing to bear the ignominy of institutional racism, but when the effrontery starts to involve connubial issues she finds it unbearable.

From there Puttermesser goes to the Department of Receipts and Disbursements, where as “the only woman” she encounters ignorance and overwhelming nepotism, and despite giving years of her life to its service she is demoted and eventually fired to make way for political appointees—the “fakeries and lying seductions” seem to have prevailed (9). While Puttermesser is adept with the work and was “seen to be useful” because “she had stuck her little finger into every cranny of every permutation of the pertinent law,” as

“Precedents sped through her brain,” (29) she becomes expendable when the new commissioner needs to make room for a friend. The language used to describe these men is the very same language Ozick uses to define the antithesis of the Jew, as Puttermesser is replaced by “young men who had been trained to pursue illusion, to fly with a gossamer net after fleeting shadows. They were attracted to the dark, where fraudulent emotions raged. They were, moreover, close friends, often together” (33). If “She loved the law and its language,” they are “bad spellers” and their memos were “alive with solecisms” (27). They “did not understand the work” and only cared for the “spoils quota,” which allowed them to enhance their positions (27-8). Puttermesser is denied what should be rightfully hers in her “immigrants dream of justice”; instead, the “spoils quota” rewards those least deserving. Puttermesser’s adversaries epitomize the “lying” and “fakery” that Ozick herself rails against and against which she defines Judaism.

Her desire for comeuppance and justice impels her to create the golem. In the most well-known version, Rabbi Loew must create a physical barrier to protect the Jews, so his golem has to be big, strong, and fast. But in some variations, he must also disprove lies about the Jews such as the blood libel (the accusation that Jews use the blood of Christian children in the making of their Passover matzo) by playing detective on missions outside of the Jewish enclave. In this way, Puttermesser’s election requires Xanthippe to collect signatures as the campaign manager for the ISPI, the Independents for Socratic and Prophetic Idealism, “so that my mother should become what she was intended to become” (65).⁷⁰ The PLAN succeeds and briefly the city is an earthly, rational Paradise:

⁷⁰ In “Notes,” Puttermesser distinguishes Jewish theology from Christian by the fact that in the former Eve is not responsible for The Fall, and rather that both men and women are imperfect from the

It is essential to record only two reflections that especially engage Mayor Puttermesser. The first is that she notices how the City, tranquil, turns toward the conventional and orderly. It is as if tradition, continuity, propriety blossom of themselves: old courtesies, door-holding, hat-tipping, a thousand pleas and pardons and thank-yous. Something in the grain of paradise is on the side of the expected. Sweet custom rules. The city in its redeemed state wishes to conserve itself. It is a rational daylight place; it has shut the portals of night. (78)

Puttermesser the rationalist creates an equally rational paradise—the “conventionally and orderly” vital to its sustenance. Paradise is “conventional and orderly,” not magical or majestic in any fantastical way. It seems like this could last forever, but Puttermesser has read all of the golem stories— “what had polymathic Puttermesser not read about the genus golem?” (43)— so she knows that something will intrude to prevent this self-conservation. Perhaps the “expected” is contrary to human desire and inhibition and the very rudiments of Paradise are the roots of its demise.

If paradise harbors the seeds of its own imminent destruction, then the golem through whose energies it is built helps the process along. Zhange Ni writes, “Paradise secludes the body, especially the female body that is also ethnic, aging, and mortal; whereas the body, the ultimate troublemaker, threatens to ruin the perfect paradise” (77). The dissolution of Paradise begins with Puttermesser noticing that Xanthippe continues to “grow and grow” (on account of its voracious appetite). “How long would it take for Xanthippe to grow out of over one hundred dollars’ worth of clothes,” she wonders (63).

start. Such a reality augurs the failure of Puttermesser’s paradise, but it also suggests that it is not Xanthippe, the hyper-sexualized female, who is responsible.

Xanthippe's initial gustatory indulgences transform into sensual ones. "Eros had entered Gracie Mansion" when Xanthippe, unlike her mother who is distracted by Socrates, can satisfy Rappoport's sexual wants (82).

Xanthippe's affair with her mother's former suitor reveals for Puttermesser their merging unity, and she "wonders, who is the true golem? It is Xanthippe or is it Puttermesser? Puttermesser made Xanthippe; Xanthippe did not exist before Puttermesser made her that is clear enough. But Xanthippe made Puttermesser Mayor, and Mayor Puttermesser too did not exist before. And that is just clear. Puttermesser sees that she is the golem's golem" (78-9). In effect, Puttermesser is being created by the golem, whose "Eros" therefore threatens her. Golems are usually unmade because they grow too large and their creators are unable to stop their growth; Xanthippe, on the other hand, signifies desire—"Eros" and motherhood—that cannot be contained, as she declares, "I want a life of my own. My blood is hot" (84) and "longs for daughters! Daughters that can never be!" (88). But only Puttermesser can create a golem; as Moshe Idel explains, "there are opposing attitudes regarding the possibility of conferring a rational power to the Golem. However, as far as another faculty is concerned, the generative one, it seems that there is a unanimous opinion, namely that the operator is unable to bestow such a faculty" (237). Golems cannot reproduce, so as Puttermesser's double Xanthippe threatens her because she represents the lingering desire to procreate.

Puttermesser's realization of this desire through Xanthippe and her subsequent repression of it reworks a common trope of golem stories. Scholem explains,

Golem-making is dangerous; like all major creation it endangers the life of the creator—the sources of danger, however, is not the golem or the forces emanating

from him, but the man himself. The danger is not the golem will become autonomous and develop overwhelming powers; it lies in the tension which the creative process arouses in the creator himself. (190-91)

Puttermesser's tension lies in her creativity and its relation to procreation. To this effect, by having Xanthippe represent both sexuality and the lingering desire to procreate Ozick also questions the stereotype of Jewish women as as "phallic monsters," according to Boyarin a product of their "speaking, reading, and writing the vernacular, maintaining businesses large and small, and dealing with the wide world of tax collectors and irate customers" while their husbands were busy studying and praying (xxii). As Ozick reiterates in "Notes,"

a pious view of women is that they are dangerous temptations to men. A man cannot sit near a woman—not for prayer, not for study—because he is inherently weak and she will arouse him sexually: he will be 'distracted.' The woman, on the other hand, is not considered to be a sexual creature, easily aroused or 'distracted when close to males. At the same time, a woman in public is regarded solely as a sexual provocation. (140-1)

The supposed influence that women are supposed to have is revealed to be men's "weakness," which women are then made to pay for. As a scholar, Puttermesser, however, controls her sexuality as she does the golem and is literally able to put it to rest. At the same time, she controls her "longing" for daughters; both of these are centered on the female body, and she undermines the stereotype through her ability to unmake her golem.

Puttermesser thus rejects the body—her own and Xanthippe's—for the mind. Puttermesser's final reflections in the golem chapter concern her periodontal issues; following surgery, "the roots of her teeth are exposed. Inside the secret hollow of her hood, just below the eye sockets, on the lingual side, she is unendingly conscious of her

own skeleton” (101). This uncanny return of the body does not only lay bare the truth of Puttermessaer’s own aging body, but also deconstructs the dichotomies separating words like “mind” from “skeleton” and even “lingual,” which conventionally belong to the body, for no matter how much Puttermessaer depends on elevating herself above the body she cannot escape it. Like the golem, which is unmade but which promises return, the body also threatens to return. This deconstruction exposes the mutual interdependency between the mind as an elevated idea and body as a maligned obstruction—the exposure of Puttermessaer’s teeth suggests that the distinctions between the brain, mind, body, and skeleton are only conventions, as Xanthippe herself explains to Puttermessaer, “I am made of earth but I am also made out of your mind” (42). As Boyarin indicates, the rabbinical society from which she attains her inspiration was against such dualisms, and the rabbis didn’t view mind and body as mutually exclusive. Ozick’s story, in turn, reveals their interdependency, for instance, in the flowerbeds beneath which Xanthippe is buried—the last civic project executed by Puttermessaer before she is replaced as mayor — and “that whoever touches or picks those stems of blood-colored blossoms soon sickens with flu virus—or, sometimes a particularly vicious attack of bursitis” (101). The civic, or the mind, is merely a device for covering up the body, which like the golem always threatens to return.

This deconstruction of the mind and body duality as it relates to writing is the subject of “Dictation,” as Ozick returns to exploring the distinction between mind and body nearly a decade after *Puttermessaer*. Though it doesn’t involve a golem, “Dictation,” a fictionalized account of the relationship between Joseph Conrad and Henry James, expresses concern with writing and the body. Similar to Puttermessaer, both aging authors

come to depend on their own mediums—typewriters and amanuenses—when their bodies fail them: “James had been compelled to introduce the Machine into his labors after years of sweeping a wrist across paper’ gripping a pen had become too painful” (5-6); Conrad, too, tells of, “Those long-ago voyages in the tropics, Malaysia and Africa” that “had left him debilitated—the effects of malaria contracted in the Congo, and a persistent gout assaulted his joints; his writing hand was no good” (8).

Initially, Conrad denies his body, which he views as an obstruction to his art; however, he ironically resorts to a metaphors of the body in describing his “Writing,” which meant dipping his pen in his own blood and pulling out pieces of flesh (8). This description attests to the uncanny presence of the body, and that it cannot be effaced even in the supposedly exclusive province of the mind where great works are produced. Taken literally, Conrad’s words also suggest the destruction of the body attending the rigors of the mind. “The novelist, he argued (while out of the blue a shooting pain was assaulting his knuckles), surely the novelist stands confessed in his works?” (11). These pains which intrude on his mind even as he expresses his views on art result from his travels and travails in the “Tropics, Malaysia and Africa”; therefore, the very subject matter of Conrad’s inspiration physically inhibits his articulation of his views. Thus, as with Puttermesser’s recognition that “Eden sinks from a surfeit of itself” Conrad’s artistic inspiration “sinks” as a result of a “surfeit” of itself. By treating the body of the prolific writer like a golem destined or doomed to encounter its logical outcome or limit, “Dictation” exposes the consequences for the body in the high art ordinarily associated

with the minds of the great masters of literature. Conrad's inability to deny his body signifies the story's deconstruction of this duality, and like the body at the end of "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," Conrad's body cannot be effaced.

To set up this uncanny return, "Dictation" begins with the first meeting between the two writers when Conrad, who has only published one novel, *Almayer's Folly*, visits the more experienced James at Lamb House and is ashamed by his entourage: his young son Borys, who is described as a "noisy, unpredictable, and certainly precarious three-year-old boy, and one with so un-English a name" (4); and his wife Jessie, "plump" and "made all the plumper by a plethora of bulging and writing bundles, among them a screeching child forcibly lifted over the threshold, a multiform traveling nursery to serve his exigencies, and a dangling basket of ripe plums" (7). Upon their arrival, wife and son are shuffled away to the garden, or the "floral precincts" as described by James who also observes that the younger writer "kept apart from his wife and son, as if they had been strangers who were for some unfathomable reason attaching themselves to his affairs" (7). Conrad feels that his family impedes his greatness in the same way the medium of an amanuensis might: "Dictation? Dependence? Inconceivable separation of hand from paper, inner voice leaching into outer, immemorial sacred solitude shattered by a breathing creature always in sight, a tenacious go-between, a constantly vibrating interloper, the human operator!" (7). He thus dreads "The awful surrender of the fructuous mind that lives on paper, lives *for* paper, paper and ink and nothing else," and envies the elder James, who leads "an unencumbered bachelor life, altogether freed to his calling" (5). Conrad's initial envy turns into alarm when he espies "in the far corner of the room" the Machine (6):

stood headless and armless and legless—brute shoulders merely: it might as well have been the torso of a broken god. Even at a distance it struck Conrad as strange and repulsive, the totem of a foreign civilization to which, it now appeared, James had uncannily acclimated. The thing was large and black and glossy, and in height it ascended in tiers, like a stadium. Each round key was shielded by glass and rimmed by a ring of metal. (5)

The prized tradition to which he and James belong can only be tarnished by the “Machine,” a “totem of a foreign civilization.” Conrad’s vexation early in the story ties together family and the human and mechanical mediums, both which he views as artifices that hinder art. He questions, “As for style [...] was there not an intervening influence, a contamination or crippling, however you may tell it when the roiling abyss, in whose bottommost bowel the secrets of language lie coiled, is thrown open to mundane elements?” (12).

Conrad professes to be in full control of his art as well as the Self that manifests in its true form via art. Yet the events of the second half of the story, which deal with the aging versions of the artists, counter that the writers, like all golem creators, are not fully in control of their works. Nicola Morris posits that writers are like golems because once the readers are privy to their words they are no longer in control; they are, in effect, created by their readers (25). “Dictation” takes this a step further by questioning the writer’s autonomy and knowledge of his or her work. In the story’s outcome, the works of both Conrad and James are, in a sense, revealed to be “foreign civilizations” to the writers themselves, who are unable to detect any changes when their amanuenses, Miss Lilian Hallows and Miss Theodora Bosanquet, succeed in their plan to gain infamy by covertly switching passages written by each other’s’ masters into their works. What is deemed as the natural extension of a writer’s mind is exposed as artifice. In “Speaking in

James: Cynthia Ozick's 'Dictation' and 'The Jolly Corner,'" Jessica A. Kent argues that the story "shifts the focus away from the individual and toward a larger cultural context" (102). I suggest that part of this larger context entails the body. The women's plan slowly unfolds with Bosanquet's attempted seduction of her accomplice, which hints at romance but ends unrealized as Hallowes regrets neglecting her duties. She initially objects out of her reverence for the autonomy and essence of art, but Miss Bosanquet replies:

Plot? Should art be dismissed as conniving? The will to change nature's given is the font of all creation. Even God, faced with *tohu vavohu*, welter and waste, formlessness and void, thought it suitable to introduce light and dark, day and night: the seamlessness of disparity. Or regard the mosaic maker, painstakingly choosing one tesserae to set beside another, in a glorious pattern of heretofore unimagined juxtapositions—yet because the stones as they were found have been disarranged, shall he be despised as a violator? (43)

Hallowes gives in and eventually they succeed with the authors' obliviousness to the changes made to their works. Conrad's fear of usurpation by the "living limb of the Machine" is eventually justified; however, the authors' ignorance of this conspiracy implies that art depends on the body, as the very medium that is supposed to have no influence or effect on expression is revealed to be invisibly present, as "Theodora and Lilian humanly, mindfully, with exacting intent, dictate the outcome of their desires. Lilian wills her hopeful fragile spite. Theodora commands her fingerprint, all unacknowledged, to be eternally engraven, as material and manifest as peak and crater" (50). This gives new meaning to Conrad's prior understanding that "His thoughts ran straight through her, unchanged, unmitigated, unloosed. Without a doubt the same was true with respect to James and the spirited Miss Bosanquet: every vibration of James sensibility ran through the woman who served and observed—how could it be otherwise?" (15) Thus, "Dictation" reveals the importance of the body for the writer,

which exposes an invisible but lasting presence. This example attests further that Puttermesser's denial of her body—her own and its symbolic manifestation in Xanthippe—can never be complete.

Applying this same lens helps expose the ways Jewish masculinity of the Talmud may most rely on the body. Puttermesser is propped up by her golem and is seemingly freed to pursue her ideals. Yet this same propping up of her mind at Xanthippe's physical expense will like Conrad's experiences and writing lead to a physical destruction that literally exposes the body's return: "The golem's soufflé' was excellent; she had also prepared dessert that was part mousse, part lemon gelatin. Puttermesser, despite her periodontic troubles, took a greedy second helping. The golem's dessert was more seductive even than fudge; and fudge for Puttermesser was notoriously paradisaical" (50). But it is not only the body, as the sexual imagery employed by Bosanquet to Hallows rewrites the sexual metaphor of the writing pen as penis with the addition of the physical manifestations of the body—the amanuenses—on which the aging writers depend. This symbolism suggests the proximity between the creative and the generative, but is a connection that is not based in the physical-sexual anatomy of either writer or medium.

Chapter Four

Golems of Past and Present: The Language of Creation in Thane Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham* and Pete Hamill's *Snow in August*

The previous chapter looked at the attributes of alternative, “sissy” masculinity as it is described by Daniel Boyarin and suggested that in taking on traits like intelligence and bookishness Cynthia Ozick’s Ruth Puttermessenger eschews the equation of biology and destiny. By comparing Puttermessenger and the Talmudic figure Beruriah, a woman who compelled the rabbis to question their views of gender, I showed the importance of rabbinical power and prestige for Puttermessenger in creating the golem. Puttermessenger appropriates the power attending the golem’s creation and also disavows motherhood as she unmakes her golem and with it her civic paradise. For Puttermessenger this unmaking becomes necessary because the golem, Xanthippe, endangers Puttermessenger’s achievements and desires by suggesting her power is procreative rather than creative, a distinction Ozick repeatedly stresses in her writing. While Puttermessenger tries to distance herself from Xanthippe, she also recognizes the ways in which they are linked and calls herself the “golem’s golem” (78-9). Despite the link between Puttermessenger and her golem, their differences are salient as Xanthippe ends up buried beneath the flowerbed, and at the end of “Puttermessenger and Xanthippe” Puttermessenger can go on with her life, having disentangled herself from her creation.

While writers ranging from Gershom Scholem to I.B. Singer formerly employed the golem-creator relationship to examine technology—a trend I detail in chapter one—the relationship between the golem and its creator will be discussed in this chapter in light of the Holocaust. Thane Rosenbaum’s *The Golems of Gotham* and Pete Hamill’s

Snow in August present stories that reconfigure the golem in terms of a sense of loss and being cut off from Jewish tradition which results, in large part, from the Holocaust. By specifically alluding to the Holocaust, the novels are distinct from those of I.B. Singer (*The Golem*), Elie Wiesel (*The Golem: The Story of a Legend*), and even Cynthia Ozick (*The Puttermesser Papers*), all of which display meaningful understandings of and engagement with Jewish tradition through the golem myth. And unlike Michael Chabon (*The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*) and James Sturm (*The Golem's Mighty Swing*), both Rosenbaum and Hamill can arguably be said to address cultural ruptures in a more straightforward way than the other works that have been considered in this study.

The personal history of Thane Rosenbaum would seem to have entered into his choice of subject matter, for Rosenbaum grew up in Miami, the son of Holocaust survivors. Many of Rosenbaum's characters "live in the aftermath of Auschwitz and deal with the surreal circumstance of having to live in a genocidal age with full knowledge of having genocide in one's genes—the absurdity of starting anew in a world of madness and indifference," according to author's own words (Royal 3). In *The Golems of Gotham*, this circumstance is explored through Rosenbaum's child protagonist, Ariel Levin, who creates several golems in the form of ghosts to save herself and her father Oliver. Ariel is unhappy because Oliver is depressed, which stems from his own upbringing by Rose and Lothar, survivors of Auschwitz. While Oliver was away at college, his parents killed themselves in a "*Shabbos* suicide pact" in front of their Miami Beach synagogue's congregation (9), abruptly ending Oliver's "silent childhood" (267), itself an effect of Rose and Lothar not knowing "how to be good parents" (85). Like Rose and Lothar, who "could never figure out how to be good parents" because they "were robbed of the

essential qualifications for the job—faith in life, and humanity,” Oliver is emotionally remote and is therefore unable to be a good father to Ariel (85). Moreover, Ariel was abandoned by her mother, Samantha, when she was two, and as a consequence of her literal and emotional abandonments, Ariel’s “text was fixed; her life was its own crib sheet. Her father’s childhood was her childhood—only one generation removed” (81). Ariel can identify with Oliver because “she had inherited those same feelings” (81); however, she also feels she can cure her “broken family” by calling upon painful, lost memories in the form of the golem-ghosts of her grandparents (266). Creating the golems thus marks Ariel’s attempt to bridge a cultural rupture that results from the Holocaust and its devastating impact on successive generations.

Pete Hamill, born and raised in Brooklyn, the son of Irish-Catholic immigrants, would seem an unlikely author of a golem story, and, not surprisingly, he takes it in a direction that differs from that of Rosenbaum. In *Snow in August*, the protagonist Michael Devlin creates a golem “as dark as Jackie Robinson” to combat racism and anti-Semitism in post-World War II Brooklyn (305). The son of Irish-Catholics, Michael is taught how to make the golem by his friend Rabbi Judah Hirsch, yet in order to learn about the golem and how to bring it life he must struggle against ruptures that divide people of different religions, races, and ethnicities. If the golem, as I argue, signals the attempt to connect with Jewish history and tradition in Rosenbaum’s novel, in Hamill’s novel the Jewish monster and its creation are also reimagined as responses to the perceived detachment from Jewish tradition. Thus, in both novels loss manifests through the reimagined spiritual and black golems, respectively. The authors’ reimaginings of the golem myth attest to the enduring loss of the past and mark the impossible attempts of their child

protagonists to overcome social divisions. However, the authors' invocations of the golem myth, a tale told again and again of struggle and the imperative to respond, suggests the demand to continually look to the past in order to reconstruct identity.

I begin the chapter by invoking Marianne Hirsch's notion of *postmemory* to show how Rosenbaum's novel reflects on these ruptures—namely, Oliver's and Ariel's disconnect from their family history and Jewish tradition—through both the golem and the process of its creation by turning to Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory. This concept explains how Ariel and Oliver can heal by connecting with their family past, but also why Rosenbaum diverges from the conventions of the golem myth. I then refer to the notion of *working through* employed by theorists of trauma to describe how postmemory enables Oliver to connect with his past, albeit in a limited way. Following my reading of Rosenbaum's novel, I demonstrate how Hamill reimagines creation to be attentive to the gaps separating people, and I display how these gaps enable rather than prohibit creation and connection.

My exploration of the golem in terms of loss is consistent with the extant research, in which scholars have interpreted Rosenbaum's novel in light of debates on the status of language after the Holocaust. In *The Golem Redux*, Elizabeth Baer, for instance, analyzes the narrative in the context of Theodore Adorno's oft-cited prohibition against representation after the Holocaust: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). Adorno's words have led to questions as to whether the Holocaust and its aftermath can and should be artistically represented. In response, Baer posits that Rosenbaum's story exemplifies the "crucial validation of the key role of the imagination in post-Holocaust literary texts," which constitutes thereby an "explicit rejection of Adorno's prohibition"

(169). In Baer's view, the golem is a text and intertext that permits writers to bridge the gulf between the Jewish past and present generated by the *Shoah* (85). By employing intertextuality, writers, according to Baer, can recruit the historical texts of Judaism and recognize the "disruption, induced by the Holocaust, of our notions of human nature, evil, and 'history as progress,' of meaning itself" (8). Because to Baer the golem is both a text and intertext, it negotiates this disruption to recuperate what remains, and it helps reaffirm a Jewish focus on "the word, the book, the imagination as redemption" (85).

The need for redemption through imagination is suggested by Rosenbaum's subject matter in his fiction. *The Golems of Gotham* is the third of three stories written by Rosenbaum dealing with life after the Holocaust, and while the first two, *Elijah Visible* and *Second Hand Smoke*, explore loss, mourning, and rage, the central themes of the golem novel are healing and repair (Royal 6). In his essay, "Myth, Mysticism, and Memory: The Holocaust in Thane Rosenbaum's *The Golems of Gotham*," Alan Berger examines the use of the golem to negotiate the complexities of post-Holocaust representation, and he explores, specifically, the types of repair that are possible. In contrast with Baer, Berger is careful to acknowledge that *The Golems of Gotham* "is a novel whose goal is rescue. Not redemption" (18). Ariel can rescue her father," and the "golems attempt to rescue the world," but their heroics, or "*Tikkun*," as Berger describes it, "is only partial," for after the "Holocaust how could it be anything else" (18).⁷¹ Berger's emphasis on rescue over redemption and the limits of repair reflect the devastation of the Holocaust and how narrative cannot rationalize death and despair, or

⁷¹ "*Tikkun*," short for the Hebrew term *Tikkun Olam*, means the "repair of the world."

make “sense of the senseless” (12). The possibility of partial repair suggests the bifurcated quality of Rosenbaum’s narrative, as both a means to heal and to recognize “that what was lost is never coming back” (12).

This recognition of loss beyond the possibility of recovery is displayed in the spiritual form of the golems in Rosenbaum’s novel. Ariel intends to bring back Rose and Lothar as golems, but during her séance she becomes dizzy when she starts to think about concentration camps and accidentally resurrects the souls of the dead writers Primo Levi, Jean Améry, Paul Celan, Piotr Rawicz, Jerzy Kosinski, and Tadeusz Borowski (7). These men wrote “some of the most important books and poetry about the Holocaust,” and are called “atrocious writers” because they “made art out of death” and “defied the limitations of language and used words to describe a scream and the sound of agony” (76). While the writers tried to express the unbearable and ineffable pain of their experiences, they all felt like “failures as artists” because their “words could never speak to the Holocaust” (Rosenbaum 114).

Ariel looks to the golem for help, but because her remedy requires giving expression to her family pain a conventional golem, which is typically mute, will not do the trick. Neither will the golem she initially makes, which looks “puny, less like a monster than a Star Wars toy. A Jewish Buddha, or Jabba the Hutt” (49-50). Ariel notes her first creation is “not very threatening or alive. It didn’t look like it could ever rescue this family, or any other” (49). Rosenbaum instead creatively transforms the “atrocious writers” into golem-ghosts, highlighting how the golem myth is centrally about miraculously solving problems through language. In Wiesel’s novel, for instance, “the heavenly answer to the Maharal in his dream contained only ten letters from the Aleph-

bet: they were sufficient to create the golem, or at least to project him into the world. If the message had contained all twenty-two letters, it would have meant a perfect being was needed” (45). The privileging of words in the creation of the golem, as demonstrated by Wiesel’s story, explains why Ariel summons the writer golems, all of whom were masters at their craft. However, these men were not perfect in life, for they all felt like failures; nor are they perfect in death and as golems, as they lack bodies, a standard criterion for the Jewish creature. To explain this divergence from Jewish tradition, Berger notes how in the “original golem myth the Golem was all body,” but Rosenbaum depicts the golems “in opposite terms. They are all spirit. These ephemeral and invisible creatures have no body” (7). According to Berger, Rosenbaum has thus “re-imagined how the golem myth could possibly be employed in spiritual terms in order to address the issues of meaning and identity among the second and third generations” (7). These issues stemmed from the beliefs of some Orthodox Jews that only their abandonment by God could have resulted in Nazi genocide. Other Jews, however, compared the Holocaust to prior devastating events, like the biblical episodes of the enslavement by the Egyptians, the exodus, and the destruction of the first and second temples, which indicated God had abandoned the Jews for breaking the covenant. Nevertheless, the loss of the connection with God, as either symptom or catalyst for the events that befell the Jews, is reflected for Berger in the paradoxical immateriality of the golem, which highlights the vexing nature of Jewish spirituality in the post-Holocaust world.

While the golems are reimagined in “spiritual terms,” the process used by Ariel to bring them to life, conversely, is reimagined in bodied terms (Berger 7). This version of creation suggests the difficulty if not impossibility of bridging the gap with the past, for if

the famed writers had difficulty expressing their experiences, the challenge of connecting with and representing the past for Oliver and Ariel is even greater, for “Children of Holocaust survivors are not survivors of the Holocaust” (294). Because Ariel is severed from Jewish tradition, to rescue her family by creating her golems she must devise an alternate method of creation.

To bring her golems to life, Ariel mixes “Hudson River mud” with her own blood and plays “Invitation to the Dead,” an “uncalled-for ingredient in the golem recipe,” with her violin, in “an empty attic filled with yortzeit candles” (48-9).⁷² But before Ariel can create golems, she must play the music that eventually becomes integral to her creative process. When Ariel initially discovers the violin in the attic, she is unaware it had belonged to her grandmother. Through the instrument Ariel plays klezmer, the music of the destroyed world of her grandparents’ Eastern Europe.⁷³ Rosenbaum call this “the musical analog of Yiddish like the spoken language of the shtetl, which, like the music itself, had gone silent” (19). Ariel explains,

⁷² Ariel laments that her father would not have given her permission to travel all the way to Prague, “no matter how magical the mud might be there” (29), but she realizes that “it wasn’t the mud that was magic, but the memories and souvenirs that were left back here, the story I didn’t know yet, the one that still awaited my father” (205). If Ariel had traveled to Prague to make her golem, she might be compelled to make her golem in the Altneuschul, where, famously, Rabbi Loew once made the first golem, although she can find it in New York, as well, as the Brownstone’s attic miraculously transforms into an “exact replica of the Altneuschul” (207). However, in keeping with the detachment from history, the Torah is missing, as “the empty Ark, except for a few cutouts of Hebrew letters teetering sideways and toppling over like Toy soldiers” (208).

⁷³ Klezmer is derived from the world of the shtetls of Eastern Europe, and in Rosenbaum’s novel it is the offspring of the “Classically trained musicians [...] forced by the Nazis to serenade[d] the condemned [...] on their way to the gas with the sweet, death march music of Mozart, Brahms, and Chopin,” and who were used to fool the Red Cross into believing “high culture could somehow exist even in places that practiced lowbrow cannibalism. Ersatz for the ears.” And then once the need for “pretense” was no longer needed, the musicians “were soon transformed into treble clefs of wispy smoke” (122). But it is also suggested that Ariel’s playing of the music “was their way of still making music, taking discordant revenge” (122). The linking of Yiddish and “revenge” also suggests its link with the golem.

the good thing was that my playing of the klezmer violin was completely based on instinct, or something like that, and it wasn't like I had to think about it so much. I just got up there and slid the bow back and forth, up and down, my fingers pressing down on strings and scaling the frets as if I was reading Braille, my body bent forward, and music pouring out on random play. (249)

The music belongs to the lost past, but Ariel did not experience this past and the knowledge of it has not been passed down to her through family stories. She therefore can only play the violin randomly and with her “instinct.” With her “body bent forward,” Ariel plays Klezmer and recalls the annihilated world of “Yiddish without the words and yet a musical clone of all those sobbing sounds made by cantors, grandmothers, and mourners trapped in that intense zone of emotion between ecstasy and anguish” (19). Rosenbaum is perhaps the first to incorporate Yiddish into creation, alongside Hamill, and Ariel knows all the “secrets to making those sounds and notes” (21) of klezmer, its analogue, without really knowing, but she plays the music to “turn this mud into something alive,” which refers to the lost shtetl world and her ghostly golems (31).

Ariel's ability to create the golem and play klezmer without knowledge and through her body suggests she creates a form of postmemory, the term by which Marianne Hirsch describes how generations separated from the past by traumatic events might bring the past back to life. Postmemory, according to Hirsch, “is [memory] not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (107).⁷⁴ Postmemory signals Ariel's attempt to connect with the past from which she is cut off. Hirsch also explains that postmemory may take the form of “not memories” communicated in “flashes of memory” and “broken refrains” that are “transmitted

⁷⁴ Hirsch admits that the word “memory” may be misleading, as “Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is ‘post,’ but at the same time, it approximates memory in its affective force” (109).

through ‘the language of the body’” (109). Hirsch’s explanation suggests how Ariel, by playing klezmer through her body with the violin that once belonged to her musician grandmother, can channel the world of the shtetl that had “gone silent.”

Ariel is in a privileged position to create postmemory because the family is the locus of postmemory, as the “familial” signals the “intergenerational” transfer of “embodied experience” of memory (Hirsch 110). According to Hirsch, postmemory involves “nonverbal and non-cognitive acts of transfer” (112), and in the story it is acknowledged,

yes, perhaps there is some psychological validity to the idea that living in the same household as people who had survived genocide and witnessed atrocity at such close range—breathing beside them, observing their every movements—invariably exposes children of Holocaust survivors to second hand smoke, plaguing them with cattle-car complexes, and that these symptoms and pathologies are more than mere metaphors. (295)⁷⁵

The exposure of the children of survivors to family pain goes beyond mere metaphor, as the body seems to carry and transmit traces of experience. Reflecting along these lines, Nicola Morris briefly refers to postmemory but limits her discussion of the role of postmemory in the novel to the *secondary memory* of the second generation (34).

However, as a member of the third generation, Ariel can create postmemory too, and her body is a conduit for her creation, which is illustrated further when she is cut while attempting to dig up the mud she plans to use to make her golem. Ariel recognizes that she bleeds too much for the cause to be a “sharp rock” and wonders if she is cut by “some glass” (31). Eventually, Ariel discovers that the glass had been broken by Oliver in the wedding ceremony to “sanctify” his marriage to her mother (96). Hence, through her

⁷⁵ The references to “smoke” and “cattle-car complexes” link *The Golems of Gotham*, *Second Hand Smoke*, and *Elijah Visible*, which includes a chapter titled ‘Cattle-Car Complex.’

body Ariel has a personal connection with mud and glass that cut her deeply, just as she is unknowingly connected with her grandmother's violin. Along with klezmer, this mud becomes one of the main ingredients Ariel uses to bring her golems into existence.

While Ariel succeeds in creating the golem, the uniqueness of her process and product suggests how she is cut off from the Jewish past destroyed by the Nazis. Ariel's process in creating the golem differs from the more conventional method of creation described throughout this project, in which the golem is brought to life when the rabbi inscribes the word "*emet*," or "truth," on the forehead of a figure made of mud or clay. Ariel instead aligns herself more closely with the golem—which, as I show in previous chapters, is treated as a purely embodied, mindless creature—when her body is brought into the creative process. The views expressed by Rosenbaum in an interview with Derek Parker Royal help show how the unity of creator and golem might facilitate Ariel's creativity:

fiction writing is risky, an act of voodoo and black magic. In fact, I would say fiction is at its best (and surely this is even more true of post-Holocaust fiction) when it shows humanity slightly out of control and off-kilter, as if every novel in some way has its golem moment, where a riot breaks out and we are faced with the flattening of our expectations, and where our comprehension of reality and assumptions about the world are entirely upended. The novel loses its balance, the fictional world tilts away from our perceived axis of truth, and the imagination of the novelist hijacks whatever rigid orthodoxies guided it. Yet despite the disruption, we somehow choose to read on and discover some reconciliation, so that we are eventually rewarded for having willingly suspended all that disbelief. (21)

Rosenbaum's linking of the unpredictable "voodoo" of "fiction" and the golem myth shows how creators might alter "reality" and "truth" as they abandon the "rigid orthodoxies" that may hamper access to the past. Ariel, the "Jewish witch" (Rosenbaum 41), can access the truth of the past, or the version of it represented by her golems, when

she surrenders control of her body and uses her “black magic,” despite the fact that the reality of the past and its memory have been annihilated.⁷⁶ By privileging her body as the source of creation, Rosenbaum imagines for Ariel a bridge that links her to the past as well as the golem. The paradox, though, is that for Rosenbaum to imagine Ariel’s connection to the past he must depart from the conventions of the golem myth.

The gap between the present and past liberates Rosenbaum in some measure, as he is freed to let his reinterpretation of the golem myth run amok. His characters Oliver and Ariel can thus transform inherited memories because they “are not survivors.”⁷⁷ Lothar distinguishes between the generations when he implores Oliver, “We gave you this disease, after the Nazis gave it to us. But it is not part of our family’s genetic code. It is not like eye color or fingerprints. This you can change” (245). Ariel’s creation of the golem through postmemory, as Hirsch theorizes it, enables her to create a link with memories and experiences beyond recall, and to change her own destiny. Ariel is thus freed in creating postmemory, but she is also constrained from bringing back the “unvarnished, intimately experienced” truth of the Holocaust experienced by the survivors (Rosenbaum 202). These limitations explain why Ariel cannot create real, embodied golems and also why she must turn to an alternate method of creation. Moreover, in the original version of creation the secret method and formula are handed down from rabbi to rabbi, but Ariel, lacking a connection to her family past, does not

⁷⁶ “Somehow,” Rosenbaum writes, “the fictional narrative voice can leave testimony, pronounce judgment, speak to historical truth, and find some sense of resolution of reconciliation for those who suffered unspeakable injury” (Royal 17).

⁷⁷ Ariel’s creation of the golems is not, however, the unbridled fantasy referred to Lee Behlman in his endorsement of “the value of fantasy as a deflective resource rather than a reflective one” (62). Rosenbaum’s golems, rather, attest to the imperative of connecting with the past even as they demonstrate the impossibility of doing so.

belong to any such tradition. Ariel states, “as a golem performance artist, there I could have used real lessons. Hebrew school is not enough of an education. You can’t learn how to make this kind of things over the web. Nobody can walk you through it. And you’re supposed to be a lot older before you can dabble in the kabbalah” (249).

Consequently, Ariel’s personal experiences are at once the inspiration and source of her creation.

As Ariel devises her plan for creation, she realizes “the mud from the river wasn’t going to be do it all by itself. I needed to learn the magic myth, the secret of those numbers,” but not the mystical numbers of gematria typically associated with golem-making but, rather, the numbers imprinted on her grandparents’ skin by the Nazis. Those “numbers,” Ariel states, “are what makes my family special; our secret arithmetic” (43).⁷⁸ Ariel also does not use the secret name of God but further improvises by sprinkling in the names “Auschwitz, Birkenau, Madjanek, Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen...” to merge “the mystical with the musical” (48). Ariel finds her numbers in the few pictures of Rose and Lothar she discovers among her family pictures secreted away in the attic. Hirsch describes the “key role of the photographic image—and of family photographs in particular—as a medium of postmemory,” when she explains,

as archival documents that inscribe aspects of the past, photographs give rise to certain bodily acts of looking and certain conventions of seeing and understanding that we have come to take for granted but that shape and seemingly reembody, render material the past that we are seeking to understand and receive. (117)

⁷⁸ On a practical level, Ariel also understands that she “couldn’t go all the way to Prague, no matter how magical the mud might be there. No way Oliver would understand that, even though I was doing it for him” (29).

Just as Ariel is connected to the past through the mud, glass, and music she uses to create the golem, her grandparents and their experiences are re-embodied for her in the pictures. These bodies, of course, contrast sharply with their disembodied forms as golems, which attests to the limitations of postmemory.

Ariel, seemingly, can identify and create the golem with the help of her family pictures because, as Hirsch explains, the “idiom of family can become an accessible *lingua franca* easing identification and projection across distance and difference” (115). However, the process of golem-making requires Ariel’s imagination as much as it does the numbers inscribed on her grandparents’ arms, as “confronting the big jigsaw puzzle of my broken family,” it is her

job to move the pictures around, reuniting images that hadn’t seen each other in years. But they didn’t fit very well: the photos were mismatched and, when brought together, fuzzy. I wound up starting all over. I lined up the ones of my parents, overlapping them as if I was trying to get the pictures to kiss, or at least hold hands like Kodak’s answer to Ken and Barbie. (45-6)

The “mismatched” fuzziness of the pictures reflects the difficulty of accessing the past, and Ariel attempts to sort them out in order to make sense of the fragmentation. Ariel’s reference to Ken and Barbie suggests a child-like effort to piece together and fix her broken immediate family, a practice stressed by Hirsch’s point that “even the most intimate familial knowledge of the past is *mediated* by broadly available public images and narratives” (112). The cultural emblems of Ken and Barbie facilitate and hinder Ariel’s construction of postmemory, and suggest that as much as she attempts to recuperate her family history, as through her use of the embodied pictures of Rose and Lothar to make the golem, she ultimately cannot because she is cut off from her family’s past and Jewish tradition.

Obstacles to Ariel's connection with her family history like such emblems as Ken and Barbie may be viewed as a type of "screen," a Freudian concept Hirsch adapts to describe a main limitation of postmemory. The "screen," Hirsch explains, is a space "of projection and approximation and of protection," especially for those not there to experience the event firsthand (116-7). The screen emblemizes how postmemory recreates the past but also limits recalling the lost. Limitations result because on the screen are "project[ed] present or timeless needs and desires [that] mask other images and concerns" (Hirsch 120). Ariel's challenge in distinguishing her own memories from those of her family is illustrated, for example, by her statement on the "The enduring versatility of the scarlet letter, that first symbol of the alphabet that can spell a variety of transgressions and can also, imprinted on a forehead, give life to a golem. When a mother leaves both a child and a husband, what it spells is abandonment" (136). Ariel's reference to the "scarlet letter" suggests the confluence of her own abandonment and her grandparents' abandonment of Oliver. Ariel, in other words, cannot sort out one abandonment from another because of the screen. However, the golem she refers to is not only an obstruction to her creation of postmemory but also a catalyst, as evinced by the reference to the versatility of the scarlet letter. Hirsch elaborates on the complexity of pain and memory when she refers to the "bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath, the ways in which one trauma can recall, or activate, the effects of another" (104). In other words, the overlapping and interlaced scenes of trauma from Ariel's life and the Levin family history, while they obstruct, also create the golem

through which she connects with what has been lost. As postmemory permits Ariel to bring her golem to life, it simultaneously marks how she is cut off from Jewish history as well as her attempt to bridge this gap.

In the novel, this challenge is also described in the language of trauma, particularly for Oliver. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra defines trauma as a “disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in existence; it has belated effects that are controlled with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered” (41). According to the prevailing view as described by Cathy Caruth, trauma results because the brain is unable to process and assimilate traumatic experience into memory. Caruth explains that the pathology of trauma derives “solely from the *structure of the experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its *repeated* possession of the one who experiences it” (4-5). The word “belatedly” is key, as it describes how trauma returns after the “truth” of the experience. Caruth writes, “truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language” (4). This description of trauma as unknown, belated, and an affliction that cannot be mastered indicates how Ariel and Oliver are irrecoverably cut off from their own histories as well as their family histories.

Theorists of trauma also use the word “haunting” to describe how traumatic memory that has not been fully processed returns to haunt the subject in “dreams, flashbacks, and hallucinations” (Kaplan 34). Oliver’s troubles, accordingly, manifest as a haunting, as he writes “gothic mysteries” and “legal thrillers” in an “aesthetic [that] never qualifies as emotionally complex or intellectually challenging” (33). The gothic tone of

Oliver's writing and his life in general, reflected in the Gothic brownstone where he and Ariel live, attest to the lingering presence of ghosts in his life even before the golems arrive. These ghosts derive from the effect of the Holocaust on his family, but Oliver nevertheless declares, "I'm not a Holocaust writer" (78). Consequently, his stories offer no "insight into life, no glimpse of the human condition, no window into the inner workings of a troubled soul" (33). Even though Oliver refuses "to emotionally confront all that had gone wrong" (34), he is convinced his "inner demons would have to come looking" and that he "would always remain one step ahead" (34).⁷⁹ The persistence of ghosts and demons and Oliver's responding with avoidance are consistent with LaCapra's notion of *acting out*, also borrowed from Freud, in which "one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes whereby the past returns or the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholy feedback loop" (LaCapra 22).⁸⁰ Oliver's inability to traverse beneath the surface and his inclination to write formulaic, gothic literature suggests how he acts out the traumas of his youth. His dilemma also indicates his bifurcated relation to the past, as he manifests symptoms but is unable to connect with his

⁷⁹ Rosenbaum and Oliver share several autobiographical details: they were both lawyers who turned to fiction writing, and both grew up in Washington Heights and later moved to Miami Beach. These connections express how both seek to connect with their histories through the golem; however, I should also note that Rose's and Lothar's suicides are purely Rosenbaum's invention.

⁸⁰ "Working through" and "acting out" are not pure binaries, and neither is the past and present when it comes to trauma. For the sufferer of trauma acting out cannot be "fully transcended toward a state of closure or full ego identity," but the "processes of working through may counteract the force of acting out the repetition compulsion (LaCapra 22). In other words, the trauma victim will "act out" as they "work through," and the reverse. The nuances of the distinction are vital to understanding how these two alternatives manifest in Rosenbaum's characters' relations to the past.

own lived experience or that of parents. The past only returns to haunt Oliver in its partial, immaterial form.

Evading the “demons” of the past eventually leads to Oliver’s “writer’s block,” in which the “words wouldn’t come, as if all along they had been on loan, and now the debt was being called in. Each one became a synonym for another, a syntax without rhyme or reason” (37). Oliver’s situation follows his emotional avoidance and repression, and his inability to find the correct word indicates how trauma interferes with cognition and particularly recall, as his “writer’s block” is accompanied by “voices and visions” (36).⁸¹ However, by confronting these “voices,” “visions,” and “demons,” Oliver can work through his traumas (LaCapra 22). According to LaCapra, in *working through* “one is able to distinguish past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future” (22).⁸² Oliver has the opportunity, or is compelled, to work through his trauma, “because for the artist, the outtakes of a life loaded down with disappointment inevitably get reimagined as art. The artist has no other alternative. Repression is not an option. Neither is forgetting nor denial. The artist becomes the warden of his own prison, a jailer without mercy” (32).⁸³ The golems facilitate Oliver’s working through, which

⁸¹ In the novel, “writer’s block” can also result from too much concentration and reflection on the past, as Primo Levi is “sabotaged by a mind that had for too long reflected much too deeply on the losses and pain of his people” (59). Both repression and obsession with the past can debilitate the writer.

⁸² The term *working through* was first used by Freud in the essay, “Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through” (1914), and he used it again six years later in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle.”

⁸³ Against criticism from Ruth Franklin that Rosenbaum and other children of Holocaust survivors write fiction that “somehow privileges and misappropriates the suffering of children survivors to an even greater extent than the suffering of the survivors themselves,” he responds, “Given the enormity of the Holocaust, why wouldn’t it be the case that the children of survivors simply have something unique, lived

begins with him confronting golems Rose and Lothar and the literary history he has managed to avoid.⁸⁴ In the novel, the golem Paul Celan says about Oliver, “This is the only way for him to fix himself and heal. He must write about it” (148). Rosenbaum similarly refers to the healing potential of language when in an interview with Derek Parker Royal he relates, “Trauma is the result of a great failure of normal, prescribed expectations. We end up shocked and numb. The world has let us down, so we retreat from it and seek solace in some other world, one that will rescue us or at least keep us safe until it’s time to return to our world” (Royal 13). Oliver illustrates this point by retreating into his world of fantasy and refusing to return, which is why the golems as they take the form of ghosts and inhabit the liminality between reality and fantasy can help the Levins fix their problems.⁸⁵ In other words, the disembodied golems are the fitting solution to a dilemma that resists reality. As one of the golems explains, “The original Golem was created to protect and defend against an external enemy. But we came not because of the outside world, but because of the broken world inside Oliver—the enemy within” (275).

with people who are unique, so that their experience is singular, private (in the worst sort of way), and, yes, exclusive?” (Royal 5).

⁸⁴ When he first encounters the golems Oliver does not know who they are. To Rose’s astonished question, “You don’t know who these men are, do you,” Oliver responds, “No, should I?” (75). Regarding such ignorance, Alan Berger observes Oliver, “refrains from working through his second generation on two levels. He neither reads about the *Shoah* in the context of Jewish history, nor does he understand why Rose and Lothar committed suicide” (9).

⁸⁵ In his interview with Derek Parker Royal, Rosenbaum says of the Holocaust, “You can’t kill that many people, under such unspeakable circumstances, and expect their spirits to vanish so easily. For me, the post-Holocaust universe is a perpetual way station of interrupted life, and for this reason, the post-Holocaust, by definition, must offer some elements of a ghost story” (12).

Ariel aims to fix this “broken world” by reconnecting Oliver to his past through postmemory, and her creation of postmemory proffers the Levins a link to the past, however tenuous and immaterial that link may be. This link facilitates Oliver’s working through and construction of postmemory in the form of his novel *Salt and Stone*, a meta-representation of Rosenbaum’s book. The golems help Oliver to write his book and to stop trying to evade his demons—Rose and Lothar are, in fact, these demons. The golems thereby become more than the figurative ghostwriters of Oliver’s life, for despite their immateriality they permit Oliver to write a story with substance and depth (61). Oliver declares, “This book in your hands, the words inverted in your eyes, is a new beginning for me” (34).⁸⁶ In contrast with the “gothic legal thrillers” (36) Oliver was writing before the golems’ arrival, the “emotions in the book were relentless, like the whirring lights and bells of a jammed pinball machine” (22). “Along the way” of its writing, Oliver

not only stared at the scars, he opened them up wider, peppering salt all over the place, not even bothering to wince from the pain. No internal thought was deemed too personal, no injury too unpleasant to recall. The buried past was now the unself-conscious present. Oliver had become a truth-seeking missile. Like an Oedipus, he wanted to know who committed the crime, and he wouldn’t stop asking even if one day he wound up the accused. The buttons of his vest were violently snapped and nothing, absolutely nothing, was now kept too close inside. (228)

Oliver’s confrontation with the past is described in such bodily terms as the opening of scars, much as Ariel connects with the past through her body. Oliver’s own pain should correspond to a similar effect on readers, as

a real artist doesn’t care about facts, details, adventure, intrigue, or even plot—just truth, when art is pumping on all emotional cylinders, when it shakes itself loose from what the mind will believe, when it aspires not to copy but to reinvent,

⁸⁶ Oliver says to the golems, “You live in this book, and in my head. I just can’t figure out how you and your friends wound up becoming so real to me” (240). This view reflects my earlier contention that Ariel is able to create a different version of “real” when she makes her golems.

not to please but to disturb—to rub everyone the wrong way—the result can split your veins, crush your heart like a piece of fruit, make you gasp and breathe backwards. (34)

Rosenbaum's statement here constitutes a manifesto on art that physically disturbs writers and their audiences as opposed to superficial "facts, details, adventure, intrigue, or even plot." Moreover, the manifesto suggests that the embodied process through which Ariel creates her golems and through which Oliver finally writes when he directly faces his pain can be transmitted to people who have not had the same familial connection to the traumatic events.

Connecting with physical pain enables Oliver to transmit painful memories, but at the same time there are limits to what he can transmit. The effect of art espoused by Oliver's manifesto might be explained by Matthew Boswell's concept "Holocaust impiety," which articulates both what can and cannot be shared inter and intra-generationally. Boswell uses Holocaust impiety to describe works that "deliberately engineer a sense of crisis in readers, viewers or listeners by attaching the cognitive and cultural mechanisms that keep our understanding of the Holocaust at a safe distance from our understanding of ourselves" (3). Boswell refers, for instance, to stories that blur distinctions between victims and perpetrators as they compel readers to identify with both.⁸⁷ Boswell suggests that this type of "discourse circumvents the dry objectivity that would be implied if we were to see the texts simply as works of historical analysis, while at the same time avoiding the misnomer of 'memory' that is often applied to any contemporary work" (11). Holocaust impiety may thereby articulate the importance of

⁸⁷ Boswell argues, for instance, that viewers of Quentin Tarantino's film *Inglourious Basterds* identify with both the Jewish soldiers inflicting their vengeance on the Nazis and, through the camera's angle, the Nazi recipients of that justice. Boswell similarly reads Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*.

identification but also the tenuousness of identifying with the victims, as well as how engagement with a painful past is confined to the individual's experiences. The reader's identification with both victim and perpetrator when reading works of Holocaust impiety roughly describes Ariel's and Oliver's relationships with their family pasts as they seek to connect and identify with the generation of survivors. Holocaust impiety, like postmemory, may therefore connect Oliver and his audience with the past, but also acknowledges how this past is closed off from those who did not experience it.

Despite its limitations, Holocaust impiety articulates the value of attempting to connect the gulfs of personal and collective history. As Oliver's situation shows, Holocaust impiety attests to the importance of representation, and therefore responds to critics like Gillian Rose who, following from Adorno's prohibition, argue that the complexes of traumatic experience preclude artistic responses. Rose compares her notion of Holocaust piety with the "ineffable" and explains that "according to this view, 'Auschwitz' or the Holocaust are emblems for the breakdown in divine and/or human history," and the "uniqueness of this break delegitimizes names and narratives as such, and hence all aesthetic or apprehensive representation" (243). Boswell, however, contends "the prohibitive tenets of Rose's 'Holocaust Piety' "constitute a basic misreading of human psychology," and he posits that "enigma, mystery and the inexplicable tend to feed human curiosity, inspiring artistic and scientific exploration rather than leaden indifference" (8). The "ineffable," or insurmountable distance from the past, such as Oliver feigns before he transforms his art and is transformed by it, is a spur to creation rather than its foreclosure. That such gaps induce creation explains the function and importance of Rosenbaum's golems, who as ghosts are nothing if not

“ineffable,” mysterious, enigmatic, and “inexplicable,” and therefore induce in Oliver “shock” in his engagement with the past, which he can then share. Boswell’s Holocaust impiety helps illustrate the potential importance of confronting the past, even if such an engagement is barred or is, at best, only partial given cultural rupture and loss.

In *The Golems of Gotham*, Oliver seeks to transmit his own pain to his readers through his novel, *Salt and Stone*, but because he is severed from the past he is limited in his ability to transmit it to others. Oliver, however, is still compelled to overcome such limitations. Similarly, Ariel’s attempted link with the past ultimately transcends her own familial space and the entire city is connected through

the teardrop notes that spilled from the child’s violin [that] seemed to recall to the listeners another time that couldn’t actually be recalled at all—just simply felt. With each assured stroke, and those arranged skips and hesitant hops, also came the slicing of their souls. The echoes were faint but, even from that distance, unmistakably sad. (18)

“Even though most New Yorkers are not Jewish” (251), Ariel can connect with them because, as Hirsch explains, “Postmemorial work strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/natural and archival/culture memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (111). Hirsch labels this type of postmemory “affiliative,” a “result of contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation combined with structures of mediation that would be broadly appropriable, available, and indeed, compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission” (115).⁸⁸ Rosenbaum dramatizes this feature of postmemory, as Ariel can unite the city by playing klezmer, an

⁸⁸ Hirsch evolves this distinction from Jan and Aleida Assman’s work on “individual and collective remembrance,” although her model diverges from their work as she considers the challenges posed by trauma to memory (110).

“expression” of her family’s past. However, the “echoes” are described as “faint,” and instead of being transported by the “young lady’s violin” to the shtetl where the music originated, the New Yorkers are “taken back to a place, a home, that seems familiar to each of us” (251). In other words, as with readers’ experiences with works of Holocaust impiety, the connection with the past facilitated by Ariel’s postmemory eventually returns the people of the city to their own lives. Moreover, Ariel’s body is the medium through which she plays klezmer, and Oliver intends his literature to viscerally affect his readers, “because that’s where the story lies, in the stomach, where everything, not just the food, goes after it gets ingested, and before becoming buried” (139). The New Yorkers, correspondingly, connect with the music through their bodies—the past Ariel brings to them cannot be “recalled” but “simply felt.” Whether it is “familial” or “affiliative,” postmemory can connect family and non-family members of generations subsequent to survivors; however, postmemory attests equally to the limits of such connections as it offers a version of the past viewed hazily through the screens of personal history. Postmemory, nevertheless, is devoid of intellectual content, such as knowledge of history, and as a result, it can quickly devolve into kitsch, and the Holocaust then ceases to have any meaning.

While in Rosenbaum’s novel cultural rupture and loss manifest in the obstacles to connecting with the past, in Pete Hamill’s *Snow in August* rupture and loss are explored through the challenges Michael Devlin, the ten-year old son of Irish-American immigrants, faces as he attempts to befriend Rabbi Judah Hirsch, a refugee from Prague who narrowly escaped from the Nazis. Over the course of the story, Michael is transported to the various scenes of Hirsch’s life pre-America: his mother’s

abandonment; his encounter with Kafka; his burgeoning love affair with his wife Dvorele and their covert battle against fascism; and even the story of the golem which is familiar to Hirsch because he descends from Rabbi Judah Loew, for whom Hirsch was named, as he tells Michael. Through all of these stories, Michael feels “as if he were at a movie” (108), and as he accompanies Hirsch, “he imagined himself as the rabbi when he was a boy, Judah Hirsch in Prague, knowing he would never see his mother again” (92); and “then he was coming out of the house with Judah Hirsch, and the young man crossing the street was Franz Kafka, who was some kind of writer” (94).

The layered historical associations within Hamill’s novel can lead to a sense of historical imprecision. Michael’s journey seems to transcend identification, time, and space, as “wandering with Rabbi Hirsch in this ancient Prague, Michael felt mystery and wonder on all sides” (96). In response to Michael’s empathy, Baer asserts, “By using a child narrator, Hamill creates the perfect conditions for raising anti-Semitic stereotypes and puncturing them” (132). By contrast, however, Cathy Gelbin more reservedly contends, “Hamill conflates the historical experiences of the diverse ethnic groups making up the American population, a strategy that ultimately obscures the prevailing positional differences of Blackness and Whiteness in U.S. society, and the social power connected to them” (167). Baer and Gelbin ostensibly disagree about the novel, but I view Michael’s depiction and particularly his creation of the golem as both subverting stereotypes and showing awareness of “positional differences.” As I explore Michael’s creation, I will show how *Snow in August* recognizes the limits of cultural unity and the consequences of maintaining divisions between different cultures.

Much of Michael's recognition of the challenges to overcoming cultural rupture and separation comes by way of his acquiring languages and learning about them. The importance of language in the story is highlighted when Michael must decide whether to tell the cops he witnessed Frankie McCarthy, the leader of a local gang called the Falcons, assault Mister G, an elderly, Jewish shopkeeper. Frankie has threatened to hurt Michael if he "rats" him out (312). Hirsch counsels Michael by drawing from his experiences in Prague with the Nazis' occupation, "You keep quiet about some crime, it's just as bad as the crime" (135). Michael is therefore torn between the moral imperative to tell the truth and his desire to abide by the code of the streets that prohibits ratting to the cops about what he saw; eventually, he agrees, "without words, to Frankie McCarthy's reminder that he had seen nothing in Mister G's candy store" (72). Michael's quandary recalls Hirsch's experience in Prague with the Nazis and suggests the ability of words to connect people battling against tyranny. Michael can be a silent bystander, or he can be a hero by putting Frankie away for good. It is equally apparent, however, that the power potentially proffered Michael by words does not mean he can automatically control and use them beneficially, and even though he keeps his secret about Frankie from the cops he is still accused of being a rat. There are no guarantees when it comes to using words on the side of ethics and morality.

Michael also discovers that because words can mean different things they can also be used destructively, such as through stereotypes, which initially hinder his connection with Hirsch. They first meet in the middle of the snowstorm on the Sabbath when Hirsch is in need of someone to help him turn on the lights, a *Shabbos goy*.⁸⁹ Before meeting

⁸⁹ Work typically performed by non-Jews from which Jews are prohibited in the Sabbath.

Hirsch, Michael had never met a Jew, for “there were no Jewish kids at all” in the neighborhood (45), and he knew of them only what he had heard from his friends, Sonny and Jimmy. Upon entering the synagogue, Michael imagines that “secret rites, maybe even terrible crimes, took place behind its locked doors,” for “after all, didn’t everybody on Ellison Avenue say that the Jews had killed Jesus?” (17). When Michael tells his friends about his experience, they warn him to be careful because “all the Jews, they give money and jewels and rubies and gold and shit like that to the rabbis,” who then “bury it. They hid it. They keep it there” in the synagogue” (52-3). Whenever he meets with Hirsch early in their friendship, these notions bubble up and Michael wonders where the treasure might be hidden, despite his doubts as to the supposed nefariousness of the Jews. Eventually, Michael learns that these stereotypes are absurd, and he abandons his lingering prejudices. Michael comes to realize that these stereotypes do not reflect the truth, for “on the street and schoolyard, he’d heard all the stories about Jews being greedy and sneaky Christ-killers. But when this man, this Jew, poor Mister G, had been beaten so savagely, Michael felt no elation. If Jews were bad, then Frankie McCarthy should be a hero” (36). Thus, much as Ariel uses her tenuous connection with history to create postmemory, the misleading uses of language permit Michael to question the moral paradigm his friends have built from stereotypes, which suggests that cultural, or linguistic, rupture, can connect people, and need not be only an obstacle identification.

Michael’s witnessing of Mister G’s beating, furthermore, shows how the body and pain can help people identify with one another. Eventually, Frankie and his gang beat up Michael, and as a consequence he sees his face as being “as dark as Robinson’s face, as

he got up and hauled his cast into the bathroom again and stared at the mirror. They made me into Jackie Robinson, he thought. They did to *me* what a lot of people want to do to *him*. They made me into him. Into Jackie Robinson. My blackened face is like Robinson's. I'm as helpless as he is. (223)

Michael's hardship enables him to identify with Robinson not merely because his bruised, "blackened" face resembles Robinson's but because they share physical and emotional pain as a result of racial hatred. Frankie targets Michael not only because he is a witness but because he aligned himself with Jews by befriending Hirsch.

Hirsch and Michael also align themselves with blacks by identifying with Robinson's plight as he has risen through the ranks, as "Rabbi Hirsch did understand how important it was for Robinson to succeed. 'For the colored people, it is very important.' [...] And for poor people, all kinds. And for us too, for the Jews'" (208). Michael, too, compares all of their struggles, as in his

mind, they began to merge into a group. Jackie Robinson, the Jews, the Catholics in Belfast, Benny Goodman and Lionel Hampton, Gene Krupa and Roy Eldridge, Rabbi Loew and Dvorele. And coming out of the smoke, sneering and hard, the goddamned Nazis and Brother Thaddeus and Frankie McCarthy swaggering with the Falcons. (144)

Michael thus learns that pain, particularly as a result of racial, ethnic, and religious hatred, can connect people through the shared experience of suffering. Elizabeth Baer suggests Hamill wishes to privilege "not 'just' imagination but *moral* imagination" (137). Moral imagination is central here, for Michael also discovers how pain can solidify moral distinctions. The pain inspires the moral imagination that permits him to create the golem, as in witnessing Robinson face prejudice "he thought: Jackie Robinson needs the Kabbalah. Jackie Robinson needs the secret name of God" (205). By connecting people

of various cultures, the novel suggests there are commonalities shared in traumatic experiences even when the specifics of those traumas are not necessarily the same.

Identification is crucial for Hamill to bring the golem to life in his story, but perhaps he must reimagine the myth because he is not directly linked to the Jewish tradition. As Elizabeth Baer reflects on Michael's encounter with Judaism in light of the author's biography, she sheds light on Hamill's motivations. Baer refers to a scene from the young Hamill's life when he is moved to learn more about Jews after watching a newsreel account of their rescue by American soldiers at Buchenwald. Baer explains that as a child Hamill had little contact with Jews, and his attempts were "futile" when he tried to "get an adequate explanation from his parents to his question of how" the Jews were treated so horribly (131). Baer explains that although his "personal knowledge of Jews and Judaism was limited Hamill recalls being haunted by the images of the Holocaust" (131). Michael's encounter with Hirsch thus would seem to reflect Hamill's experience with Judaism as a child. But the scene from Hamill's youth also suggests that Hamill imagines a way for Michael to overcome his childhood limitations. Hirsch tells Michael about the golem and eventually entrusts him with the formula to bring it to life, which suggests that through Hirsch and likewise through the golem Hamill imagines even for himself a connection to Jewish culture. Hirsch provides the fictional answer to a childhood desire for a connection to Jews and their history. Michael may be bit more savvy than the young Hamill, for he reads about Judaism in the encyclopedia, but Hirsch remains the main source for his knowledge of and connection with Jews.

As Michael and Hirsch grow closer, they teach one another about their cultures, and "like magicians, they were showing each other that nothing was what it seemed to be,

that one name for a thing might be hiding another name. A secret name” (85). This education is a prelude to Hirsh explaining to Michael how to make the golem, although he warns him, “We only go to the Kabbalah [...] if all else fails” (208). When Hirsch is savagely beaten by the Falcons and Michael and his mother are threatened with death because Frankie has acquired a gun, Michael decides the time is right for the golem. Michael begins the golem-making process by “whispering an Our Father”; he then combines the “secret name” with the ceramic box Hirsch brought with him from Prague, and with a spoon he forms the required “*emet*” on the “brow of the head” while chanting a combination of the English alphabet— “*A, and B, and C, and D*”— in English then Yiddish, the “*aleph-bayz*. Seven times for each letter, followed by the letters that Rabbi Hirsch had told him stood for the secret name of God.” He also chants the Hebrew name for God, “*YHVH*,” until the “mud began to glow” (302-4).

Michael thus yokes together diverse languages—English, Yiddish, Hebrew, and even Catholic prayer—to create a golem “as dark as Jackie Robinson” that wears a cape secured by an “I’m for Jackie button” and is accompanied by “Sticky, the magic dog” from the Irish folk tales his father had told him (305). The golem thus manifests the diverse process through which Michael brings it to life and thereby gives expression to Michael’s fantasy that that perhaps “the Irish are the lost tribe of Israel” (128). Hamill employs the golem myth, but he reimagines it so as to indicate how he and his protagonist may manufacture a connection to Jewish culture and history.

By including elements from diverse culture, Hamill may resist the “obscuring of differences” referred to by Gelbin. The golem, in other words, does not “conflate positional differences” between blacks, Jews, and Irish, but simply reflects the shared but not

necessarily identical experience of trauma (Gelbin 167). With the resemblance to Jackie Robinson, specifically, the golem seems to respond to the ambivalences between blacks and Jews. Addressing the “Jewish connection to Jackie Robinson,” in particular, in which many Jews saw affinities between themselves and blacks in “integration and assimilation” (2), Rebecca T. Alpert argues this view “obscured the real differences between the fates of blacks and Jews in mid-twentieth-century America, and the “difference between America’s brand of anti-Semitism and its pervasive anti-Black racism” (2).⁹⁰ Michael, however, can connect with Robinson through Hirsch, whose experiences with the Nazis in Prague more closely resemble racism in the U.S. ⁹¹

⁹⁰ The use of children to represent the Holocaust and its repercussions may present another reason for critique. Discussing this trope, Mark M. Anderson argues it can result in “ideological distortion” (19), as the “mobilization of “loving children” can have more to do with “conservative American notions of family values and Christian spirituality than with any real encounter with past or present politics; it can neutralize historical understanding while claiming to celebrate ‘memory’” (20). In other words, using a child to represent the event may mask real historical atrocity and conceal crucial differences between victims, survivors, and everyone else. With regard to Hamill’s novel, I offer that Michael’s attention to the boundaries separating him from Hirsch counters, to some extent, such “distortions. Rosenbaum’s novel, though, is more attentive to this problem, as it resists viewing children as a source of hope through the empty baby stroller pushed around by the golem Piotr Rawicz, which appears intermittently throughout the story. The stroller, it is said, “carries Piotr’s dead children” (115), and refers to, perhaps, the fatherhood he would never have and the Nazis’ destruction of the hope embodied by children. While Ariel represents hope for Oliver—at one point she is compared to a lighthouse: “I’m a lot like the lighthouse. All kids are, really—tiny lighthouses trying to rescue their parents” (26)—there is no hope for the victims, as they and their children were murdered or orphaned. This point attests further to the ambivalence of working through and forging forward expressed in the novel, as the hope represented by the lighthouse metaphor is countered by the annihilation of hope. The point also speaks to the breakdown of the family as a unit of safety. For example, in his response to the journal writings of an “anonymous young girl” imprisoned in the Lodz ghetto, Langer relates, “The nostalgia that invades so many of our memories of the Holocaust from our own safe perspective prompts us to imagine that despite severe ghetto conditions, at least families clung together, serving one another’s needs when help from outside failed. Unfortunately, much of the evidence draws us in less happy directions” (42). Put simply, the discourse of family, which posits the child as the beacon and bearer of hope, was negated by the Holocaust.

⁹¹ There is scant writing on the relationships between Irish, Jews, and blacks, with George Bornstein’s *The Colors of Zion* one of the few scholarly works to consider the “fissures” of these three groups collectively, as well as the “more cooperative efforts” of the leaders of each group (6). Bornstein contends the former “too often crowd out the latter,” and seeks to recuperate the “network of lost connections” (6). On the other hand, there is a bevy of scholarship dealing with the connections and disconnections of blacks and Jews, such as Eric J. Sundquist’s influential *Strangers in a Land*, which explores the parallels that have united the groups but also the deep divides that have separated them.

With his creation of the golem, Michael is strongly influenced by fictional works that were popular during his time: Jack London's *Call of the Wild* as well as Boris Karloff's figure in *Frankenstein*, to which he compares the golem. But his biggest inspiration is Captain Marvel, a "hero with a gold-trimmed cape who could fly through the air" (27). It is explained that when Michael "first heard stories of the Golem from Rabbi Hirsch, he imagined a figure from comic books. Made of pen lines and brush marks" (305). Michael's golem reflects his initial impressions, and the diverse assembly that goes into his creative process echoes the formation of Captain Marvel by the Wizard Shazam, whose name is an acronym for the names of "Ancient gods and heroes" from sundry cultures — "Solomon, Hercules, Atlas, Zeus, Achilles, and Mercury," all "mighty symbols of strength, stamina, power, courage, and speed" (4). Much like how in the golem myth the creature is brought to life when the Rabbi recites the magical words, in the myth of Captain Marvel "no matter how sinister his enemies were, no matter how monstrous their weapons, all he [the Wizard] needed to fight them was to shout the magic word. *Shazam!*" (3). The process of Captain Marvel's creation, along with the character's resulting power, thus draws on the powerful figures from various languages, cultures, and myths, although none have supremacy. As Michael's creation of the golem diverges from the original version of creation, his incorporation of the myriad ingredients, echoing Captain Marvel's genesis, suggests how he as well as Hamill are partly cut off from Jewish tradition, but at the same time this gap inspires Hamill to reimagine the creation of the golem to be more inclusive.

The inclusiveness of Captain Marvel resonates with the inclusiveness of Yiddish, an ingredient Michael uses to bring the golem to life. Rabbi Hirsch describes Yiddish, as

“The language of the people. Not the rabbis. The ordinary people” (63). The focus on vernacular language echoes that of Ariel’s instrument, a “mongrel violin of folk origins that looked as though it had been rescued from a band of musical gypsies, which it probably had” (Rosenbaum 17). These descriptions illustrate the properties of Yiddish, which Janet Hadda describes as a “fusion language” (15). Hadda posits that because Yiddish was “fluid and natural,” its speakers could “interact with the surrounding milieu to meet linguistic needs” (15). Hadda relates, “fusion does not worry about purity or political correctness,” and instead is “about communicating, about getting one’s point across” as it allows for “new elements [to] enter the fusion” (15). Yiddish words and their meanings were decided by the interactions of the speakers unlike the religious texts written in Hebrew. Historically, Yiddish was crucial for Jews who sought to enter new national and cultural environs without abandoning their heritages.⁹² Michael’s incorporation of Yiddish into his method thereby exchanges the formula in which the “secret name” is the key ingredient for one in which diverse ingredients are brought together in a dialect or “fusion.”

The relationship between the conventional formula for creating the golem and a more inclusive, revised formula is echoed when Michael

reviewed all the goddamn rules of English grammar and stopped himself when his mind wandered into the more adventurous terrain of Yiddish. In some weird way, trying to learn Yiddish made him understand English better. Grammar was like the frame of a building, he thought, the structure, what you had to build before you put in the floors or the walls or the roof. Maybe it was boring, but it was necessary. It was like playing baseball. The sportswriters kept talking about how Robinson knew the fundamentals. The basics. The rules. They really meant he’d learned how to play baseball the right way. Not like it was a goddamned hobby.

⁹² Michael prefers Yiddish over Latin, which if he “did master,” still “couldn’t speak it with anyone” (77). This preference attests to Michael’s valuing of communication and connection but also, ironically, suggests the impossibility of communication given that Yiddish is no longer a primary language.

For Robinson baseball wasn't stamp collecting or model airplanes or something. It was his life. (246)

The dichotomy between English, which Hirsch wishes to acquire, and Yiddish highlights how the golem's creation, perhaps in response to Hamill's impression of being cut off from Jewish tradition, is reimagined through Yiddish to be more inclusive.

Michael's references to grammar and "the fundamentals" of baseball also suggest the value of diversity in baseball. Hamill's novel thus calls to mind James Sturm's *The Golem's Mighty Swing*, which, as I show in chapter two, highlights the various skills that enable success in the sport. While I claim that Sturm's story argues for a more inclusive definition of masculinity, Hamill's novel more explicitly connects the benefits of racial inclusiveness in baseball with those in golem-making. By using baseball Hamill revises the grammar of creation to be accessible and adaptable to the many but, in keeping with the golem myth, still attentive to the unbridgeable differences separating people. In chapter two, I also compare Sturm's graphic novel with Mark Helprin's story "Perfection" to show how the inclusion of skills like patience, passivity, and intellect redefines success. In the context of Rosenbaum's novel, redefining success suggests that even though Ariel and Oliver are prevented from connecting with the past, they can connect with an alternative version of the past through postmemory and working through. While these methods are not perfect, they do permit the still living Levins to "move forward" with their lives, because, as Golem Primo Levi preaches, "That's what humanity requires, even in times when humanity fails" (113).

Rosenbaum's and Hamill's reimagined versions of creation may negotiate some of the obstacles to connecting with the past, while at the same time the stories suggest that for creation to be more inclusive and responsive to the particular needs of their

creators they also must mark the limitations of representing and connecting with different people across time, space, and cultures. Rosenbaum's novel attests to this idea when declaring, "you can't bring people back from the dead that kind of dream can only exist in the dreams of the Golems of Gotham" (175). This statement reflects the ambiguity of whether the golems ever really come to life in the novel, or are no more than constructs of the story Oliver finally writes to work through his pain.⁹³ "The *Shoah*," nevertheless, "would always remain a revolting enigma, no more comprehensible than the madness and hatred from which it sprang" (284-5). Moreover, "golems, even the Gotham variety, have no reason to stray too far from their medieval *raison d'être*," so at the end of the story Ariel's golems run amok and bring "Kristallnacht to the Big Apple" (283). The golems respond when they begin to suspect the lessons they tried to impart concerning the responsibility to remember the Holocaust has fallen on deaf ears. However, the golems do succeed in helping Oliver and Ariel, the second and third generation Levins, to at least understand the "enigma" of their own lives in which the "madness" remains present but no longer debilitates.

At the end of *Snow in August*, the golem rescues Michael and his friends, but the story offers no closure. Rather, in the final scene, the golem blows the shofar with "one long, terrifying note" that "seemed to rip a hole in the heat-stricken night" (308). The note produces the titular snow and resurrects all of the dead Jews. The ending therefore seems consistent with the historical revisionism criticized by Laurence Langer when he refers to the "role of language," which

illustrates how easy it is to change the impact of disastrous events simply by renaming it. When we speak of the survivor instead of the victim and of

⁹³ It should not be forgotten that the book's opening lines pose "A warning to all readers: Please take the labeling of this book as a novel seriously. It is indeed a work of fiction" (7).

martyrdom instead of murder, regard being gassed as a pattern for dying with dignity, or evoke the redemptive rather grievous power of memory, we draw on an arsenal of words that urges us to build verbal fences between the atrocities of the camps and ghettos and what we are mentally willing—or able—to face. (6)⁹⁴

Hamill's novel may fall into such trappings by rewriting the narrative of death and destruction into a story of heroism and resurrection by Michael, the non-Jewish protagonist. However, Michael's ostensible heroics might also be read in light of Rabbi Hirsch's comment that "The problem is simple. The Golem is made of mud, yes. He is very large, yes. Very strong, yes. He can't speak and he have to obey every order from Rabbi Loew. Be he also have is own thinking, does his own plans. Worse, worse—he have the feelings of a human being" (119). Because the shofar as the instrument that resurrects the victims is completely in the golem's control—it is explained the Rabbi "tried to play tunes on it. But he couldn't do it" (307)—and because resurrection is solely the product of the golem, these results resist human comprehension. Accordingly, while on one level the novel may conflate differences between peoples, there remain and persist those differences which cannot be subsumed.⁹⁵ It could be said that rather than renaming the survivors as the resurrected, Hamill, much like Rosenbaum with his golem-ghosts, suggests the unspeakable nature of atrocities and the experience of victimization but also the paradoxical imperative to speak.

⁹⁴ In Rosenbaum's story, the golems, for instance, argue the phrase "Never Again," as Jean Améry decries, "All the banners and songs in the world can't prevent a good pogrom. Has anyone learned anything from history? The Jews are destined for another Holocaust. The slogan Never Again is not a gas mask; the words will choke inside the lungs of the victims whether they say it or not" (116).

⁹⁵ Gershom Scholem associates "The Blowing of the shofar on New Year's Day" with the "Harmony between rigid powers of judgment and the flowing powers of mercy, "as well as the "Defense against, or mastery over, the 'powers of the other side'" (130). However, Jeremy Montagu contends that the "latter concept verges in some eyes toward the heretical, for it opens a door toward dualism, something that is anathema in Judaism." Nonetheless, the blowing of the shofar by Michael's golem attests to both the alterity and "power" of the other, and that Michael can only partially comprehend the golem.

Perhaps the secret to understanding the golem is to listen to its silence. Indeed, against the incessant compulsion to speak about and represent events like the Holocaust and 9/11, Rosenbaum has urged “we should learn to sit in the sadness, and listen to the silence” to hear the “voices of ghosts, the silent screeches of spiritual outrage, the restlessness of lives prematurely taken by the most unnatural of causes” (“Art” 136). Could it be more likely the novels echo Gershom Scholem’s view that “the golem is not mute by nature, but only because the souls of the righteous are no longer pure” (193)? Regardless of how they might be heard, the golems in all of the stories discussed in this project may respond in various ways to the series of questions by Reuven in Wiesel’s golem novel: “Miracle? What is life if not a miracle? Two beings unite and enrich the world: isn’t that a miracle? Or is it a miracle less spectacular than the one performed by the Maharal? I would like to hear the golem’s opinion” (91). Perhaps the answer lies in the golem’s very muteness, and only through sufficient silence and listening can difference be articulated and heard.

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