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Hillel J. Kieval

PURSUING THE GOLEM OF PRAGUE: JEWISH CULTURE AND THE INVENTION OF A TRADITION

A text:

> Rava said: If the righteous wished, they could create a world, as it is written [Isaiah 59:2]: "it is your iniquities that have separated you from your God" (i.e., made a distinction between you and God). Rava created a man and sent him to Rabbi Zera. Rabbi Zera spoke to him but he [the man] did not answer. Then he [Rabbi Zera] said to him: You are from the companions (i.e., a creature created by the rabbis). Return to your dust. Rabbi Hanina and Rabbi Oshaia spent every Sabbath eve studying the Book of Creation (*Sefer Yezirah*); a third-grown calf was created for them, and they ate it.
>
> —*Babylonian Talmud,* Sanhedrin 65B

An observation:

Prague's oldest existing synagogue, the 13th-century *Altneuschul* (Staronová Synagoga) practices an idiosyncratic—and apparently unique—liturgy during Friday evening services. Psalms 92 (The psalm for the Sabbath day) and 93 are said in their entirety and then *repeated* before the cantor issues the formal call to prayer (*Barekhu*).

A text:

> During the reign of Rudolph II there lived among the Jews of Prague a man named Bezalel Löw, who, because of his tall stature and great learning, was called "der hohe" [the Great] Rabbi Löw. This rabbi was well versed in all of the arts and sciences, especially in the Kabbalah. By means of this art he could bring to life figures formed out of clay or carved from wood, who, like real men, would perform whatever task was asked of them. Such homemade servants are very valuable: they do not eat; they do not drink; and they do not require any wages. They work untiringly; one can scold them, and they do not answer back.
>
> Rabbi Löw had fashioned for himself one such servant out of clay, placed in his mouth the Name (a magic formula), and thereby brought him to life. This artificial servant performed all of the menial tasks in the house throughout the week: chopping wood, carrying water, etc. On the Sabbath, however, he was required to rest; therefore, before

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> the day of rest had begun, his master removed from his mouth the Name and made him dead. Once, however, the rabbi forgot to do this, and calamity ensued. The magical servant became enraged, tore down houses, threw rocks all around, pulled up trees, and carried on horribly in the streets. People hurried to the rabbi to tell him of the situation. But the difficulty was great; the Sabbath was already at hand, and all labor—whether to create or to destroy—was strictly forbidden. How, then, to undo the magic? The rabbi's dilemma with his Golem was like that of the sorcerer's apprentice and his broom in Goethe's poems. Fortunately, the Sabbath had not yet been consecrated in the *Altneu* synagogue, and since this is the oldest and most honorable synagogue in Prague, everything is set according to it. There was still time to remove the Name from the crazy youth. The master hurried, tore the magic formula from the mouth of the Golem, and the lump of clay dropped down and fell in a heap. Alarmed by this event, the rabbi did not wish to make such a dangerous servant again. Even today pieces of the Golem are to be seen in the attic of the Altneu synagogue.
>
> —*Sippurim: Prager Sammlung Jüdischer Legenden* (1847).[1]

The oft-cited passage from the talmudic tractate Sanhedrin, many scholars have argued, constitutes the literary core of the Golem legend in Jewish culture, the tale of the artificial being created from earth and clay and brought to life through the miraculous combination of letters.[2] The anecdote concerning Rava and his colleagues is embedded within a larger discussion, which sets forth permissible versus nonpermissible forms of magic. It is apparent from the tone of the story, as well as from the more explicit statements that follow, that the Talmud views the activities of the rabbis in question as perfectly acceptable. Righteousness, one might infer, involves more than moral perfection. Ultimately, it constitutes both a striving after and an imitation of God, which for the truly righteous has no limits. The rabbis have extended the sentiment in Isaiah—that human sinfulness erects a barrier between God and his creatures—to suggest the obverse: that in the absence of sin, individuals can in fact become Godlike, even to the extent of creating life. Apparently, however, even the most righteous would-be creators of life suffered a major limitation to their art. Though their creatures could apparently understand the spoken word, they were denied the power of speech. Thus when Rabbi Zera could not get Rava's creature to respond to him, he immediately suspected that it was in fact an artificial creation of his colleagues and ordered it to "return to its dust."

The Golem motif has undergone a long and meandering evolution from antiquity to our own times, when the tale seems to speak of cybernetics and artificial intelligence though retaining strong elements of doom that hark back to Faust and Frankenstein.[3] What we know as the

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Book of Creation (*Sefer Yezirah*)—one of Judaism's earliest mystical texts, dating anywhere from the 3rd to the 6th century C.E.—may or may not be the work referred to in Sanhedrin 65b. In seeking to understand the secrets of creation, the text proposes "thirty-two paths of wisdom," consisting of combinations of the ten basic numerals and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.[4] At least one modern scholar argues that the *Sefer Yezirah* is not merely a speculative work but rather has as an underlying goal the actual creation of artificial life.[5] This conclusion may remain a controversial one for some time. It is eminently clear, however, that a number of medieval Jews who read the work understood it in this practical light. The most prominent example of this trend is the 12th- and 13th-century rabbi Eleazar of Worms, one of the exemplars of German-Jewish pietism. Eleazar's commentary of *Sefer Yezirah* went so far as to enumerate instructions for the actual creation of a Golem. The kabbalistic writings of Abraham Abulafia of Spain and the so-called *Pseudo-Saadya*—a 13th-century text of French-Jewish origin—similarly testify to the interest of medieval Jewish mystics in the "practical" arts of creation.[6]

Among early-modern Jews, tales of the creation of life by pious individuals seem to have been most common in Poland, where, beginning in the 17th century, an important new motif was added. Now the creature of the rabbis was understood to be not only a servant who performs all sorts of physical labor for his master but also a source of *danger*. One of the earliest literary depictions of this theme comes from a non-Jewish source, Christoph Arnold, who reports on the practice of Golem-building among Polish Jews in a letter written in 1674:

> After saying certain prayers and holding certain fast days, they make the figure of a man from clay, and when they have said the *shem hamephorash* [the explicit—and unmentionable—name of God] over it, the image comes to life. And although the image itself cannot speak, it understands what is said to it and commanded; among the Polish Jews it does all kinds of housework, but is not allowed to leave the house. On the forehead of the image, they write: *emeth*, that is, truth. But a figure of this kind grows each day; though very small at first, it ends by becoming larger than all those in the house. In order to take away his strength, which ultimately becomes a threat to all those in the house, they quickly erase the first letter *aleph* from the word *emeth* on his forehead, so that there remains only the word *meth*, that is, dead. When this is done the Golem collapses and dissolves into the clay or mud that he was [. . .] They say that a *baal shem* [literally, master of the Name (of God)] in Poland, by the name of Rabbi Elias, made a Golem who became so large that the rabbi could no longer reach his forehead to erase the letter *e*. He thought up a trick, namely that the Golem, being his servant, should remove his boots, supposing that when the Golem bent over, he would erase the letters. And so it happened, but

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> when the Golem became mud again, his whole weight fell on the rabbi, who was sitting on the bench, and crushed him.[7]

That Arnold's report is based either on the first- or second-hand testimony of Polish Jews is supported by the individual details of the account as well as its reverberations in the Hebrew literature of the period.[8] The Rabbi Elias in question is Elijah of Chelm (d. 1583), an important talmudic scholar, kabbalist, and wonderworker, who allegedly possessed secret knowledge of the "Holy Names" of God. It is not surprising that Jews should have attributed to popular healers (*baᶜalei shem*) the ability to create life, since both healing and the act of creation, according to the mystical tradition, involved the purposeful manipulation of words and letters. Zevi Hirsch Ashkenazi, a descendant of Elijah of Chelm, told a similar story to his son Jacob Emden (1697–1776), the leading German rabbi of the 18th century. Yet this tale, recorded by Emden in his autobiography and elsewhere, omits the wordplay that had occupied a central position in the accounts of Christian Hebraists (e.g., *emeth* and *meth*) and also allows a less drastic fate to befall his ancestor Rabbi Elijah. In Emden's version, the Golem does not crush and kill his unfortunate creator but only renders him cut and bruised.[9]

Sometime between the 17th and the 19th centuries—precisely when is not clear—the Golem tradition among European Jews appears to have taken a decisive turn, attaching itself to the life and career of Prague's most famous Jew after Franz Kafka, Rabbi Judah Löw ben Bezalel (ca. 1520–1609). Known in Western literature as "The Great (*der Hohe*) Rabbi Löw," and in traditional Jewish culture by the acronym *Maharal*, Judah Löw looms as a leading figure in the institutional history, intellectual life, and popular culture of Central European Jewry. His books *Tiferet Yisrael* (The Glory of Israel), *Be'er ha-Golah* (The Well of Exile), and *Nezah Yisrael* (The Eternity of Israel)—as well as his major commentary on the book of Exodus, *Gevurot Ha-Shem* (The Might of the Lord)—contain remarkable contemplations on Israel's place among the nations of the world, the nature of nationality and national distinctiveness, the dilemma of exile, and the promise of redemption. In his *Netivot ᶜOlam* (Paths of the World) one finds not only a treatise on ethics but also an elaborate statement of pedagogical theory, which rejected conventional methods of Talmudic study in favor of a graduated approach emphasizing the "plain" meaning of text and according separate and distinct status to the three pillars of Jewish learning: Bible, Mishnah, and Talmud.[10]

Born in Poznan, though possibly educated and certainly married in Prague, the Maharal served as Chief Rabbi of Moravia for twenty years before moving to the Bohemian capital to become Rosh Yeshivah in

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1573. He would leave Prague on at least two occasions, once in 1584—returning four years later—and again in 1592, both times to assume rabbinical posts in Poznan (Greater Poland) and both following political disappointments in Prague. The Chief Rabbinate of Prague eluded him until 1597, when, at the advanced age of seventy-seven, he assumed the position that he had cherished for so long, occupying it until his death twelve years later.[11]

Judah Löw's activity in Prague fell during the reigns of the Habsburg emperors Maximilian II (1564–1576) and Rudolph II (1576–1612), a period which often is referred to as the "Golden Age" of Czech Jewry. During this time imperial policy demonstrated remarkable tolerance toward Jews and Protestants, Jewish cultural life flourished, and the Jewish population—particularly in Prague—grew significantly.[12] The Maharal presided over one of Europe's great talmudic academies; pioneered important reforms in Jewish education; and produced a large literary oeuvre that bestowed pride of place to Judaism's homiletical tradition (*aggadah* or narrative). At the same time, there is no evidence to suggest that he ever engaged in activities associated with the creation of a Golem. While he does appear to have had an interest in the speculative side of Jewish mysticism, Judah Löw is not known for having been a devotee of the so-called practical *kabbalah*; and, unlike Elijah of Chelm, Judah Löw was not a *baᶜal shem*.[13]

Nevertheless, virtually every literary evocation of the Golem legend since the first half of the 19th century has incorporated two new elements: Judah Löw is understood to be the Golem's creator and Prague's Jewish Town is portrayed as the locus of events. To be precise, it is the Prague of Rudolph II that is recalled, the capital city of one of Europe's most eccentric, cosmopolitan, and tolerant monarchs; a patron of the arts and the occult sciences, a supporter of the astronomers Johannes Kepler and Tycho de Brahe, and a suspected Protestant sympathizer.[14] When Rudolph became emperor in 1576 he moved the imperial court from Vienna to Prague, which soon, in the words of Frances Yates, "became a center for alchemical, astrological, magico-scientific studies of all kinds. [. . .] Prague became a Mecca for those interested in esoteric and scientific studies from all over Europe." It was, again in Yates's words, "a melting pot of ideas, mysteriously exciting in its potentiality for new developments."[15]

It is possible that the modern version of the Golem tale settled on Prague as the locus of events because of the general knowledge that it was in Prague during the age of Rudolph that occult science and magic, humanistic pursuits, and textual study appear to have coexisted in a creative mix the likes of which were rarely seen—even in Renaissance Europe. To posit this hypothesis, however, is to answer very little. The Golem tale, after all, is one of many tales built around the life and per-

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sonality of Judah Löw. Rudolph may represent little more than the rabbi's alter ego; he may simply be a Gentile king in a story created by and for Jews. One still would like to know where this version of the legend originated. Did it constitute a piece of the "local knowledge" of Prague Jews, generated in Bohemia and recounted as a form of self-understanding? Or was it shared simultaneously by a number of different local cultures? Did both Jewish and Gentile communities "know" and transmit—hence remember—the tale?

The only "hard" piece of evidence we have linking the Maharal to the intellectual universe of Rudolph's court is a brief entry in a Hebrew chronicle written by the Maharal's contemporary and fellow resident of Prague, David Gans, in 1592.[16] A student of both the Cracow luminary Moses Isserles and Judah Löw, Gans had taken the unusual step for a Jew of his era of devoting himself mainly to the "secular" sciences: mathematics, astronomy, geography, and history. Around the year 1600 he made the acquaintance of two of Europe's leading astronomers—the Dane Tycho Brahe and the German Johannes Kepler—both of whom were living in Prague at the time and enjoying the patronage of the imperial court. Gans managed to visit the two in their "observation rooms" on at least three occasions, and he wrote about the encounters in his own work on astronomy, *Nehmad ve-Naᶜim* (Delightful and Pleasant).[17] His chronicle of world history, *Zemah David* (The Offspring of David) was completed in the aftermath of a century of cataclysmic events that included the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the Protestant Reformation, and the wars of religion in Central Europe; the book ended with a summary of the year 1592 and with profiles of some of Prague's luminaries. It is in this context that Gans wrote the following:

> Our lord the emperor [. . .] Rudolph, may his glory be exalted, in the full measure of his graciousness and correctness sent for and called upon our master Rabbi Löw ben Bezalel and received him with a welcome and merry expression, and spoke to him face to face [literally, *peh el peh*, mouth to mouth] as one would to a friend. The nature and quality of their words are mysterious, sealed, and hidden [*setumim, hatumim, ve-neᶜelmim*]. This took place here in the holy community of Prague on Sunday, the third of Adar, 352 [1592].[18]

In view of the fact that the encounter in question involved a member of Gans's own community and purportedly took place not only in his own lifetime but in the months preceding the completion of his work, I am led to conclude that Judah Löw and Rudolph II probably did meet. The content of their conversation can clearly never be retrieved. Judah Löw may have preferred to keep the details confidential, or he may have been enjoined by the imperial court to do so. It is also con-

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ceivable that Gans wished to intimate with his choice of words—"mysterious, sealed, and hidden"—a topic of discussion relating to mysticism and the occult sciences, whether Jewish or Gentile. Any conclusions are necessarily speculative. But there is no evidence to suggest that Gans's account of the royal meeting encouraged in the short run a local tradition tying the Maharal to the practical kabbalistic arts.

Precisely when a body of legend and popular wisdom developed around the figure of the Maharal remains largely an enigma, but the degree of indecisiveness depends to a large extent on the methods used to attack the problem. If one proceeds as a literary historian (following the lead of Gershom Scholem, Moshe Idel, Sigrid Mayer et al.) what one looks for are paper trails—formal written stories linking the Maharal to the creation of a Golem. On this point the record seems clear enough: nothing appears during the Maharal's lifetime; nor are stories found in the 17th or early 18th centuries, when tales of Golem-making were circulating among both Jews and non-Jews, mainly in connection with Elijah of Chelm.

When Moses Meir Perles (1666–1739), a descendant of the Maharal, produced the first biography-cum-genealogy of his illustrious predecessor, *Megilat Yuhasin*, in 1727, the theme of Golem-making was likewise absent—although Perles did include other traditions associated with the life of the Maharal.[19] The first written source that gives voice to a Maharal Golem legend does not appear until 1841, about which more will be said later. All of this leads the literary historian to conclude that the story of the Golem of Prague is a quite modern creation. It could not have existed before 1730 (or Perles would have known about it), yet one can be fairly certain that it enjoyed popular currency in Prague before 1840. Thus Gershom Scholem writes that the Golem legend "was transferred from R. Elijah of Chelm to R. Löw at a very late date, apparently during the second half of the eighteenth century."[20]

The rough coincidence of timing and geography has led Vladimír Sadek to speculate that it was Polish Hasidism that generated the modern connection of the Golem legend to the Maharal and to Prague.[21] He rightly observes that the Beshtian Hasidim and their pietistic predecessors venerated the Maharal and saw him as a spiritual precursor. Ze'ev Gries relates, moreover, that some of the same publishing houses that were responsible for the diffusion of Hasidic books in the late-18th and early 19th century also reissued the works of Judah Löw. The Koznitzer Rebbe, R. Israel ben Shabbetai, is a case in point. An enthusiastic publisher of works on *halakha* and midrash and a great admirer of the Maharal—whose works had been out of print for generations—R. Israel reprinted many of these accompanied by his own commentaries.[22]

It is one thing, though, to acknowledge an elective affinity between Polish Hasidism and the Maharal and quite another to establish a role

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for Hasidism in the Golem saga. One major obstacle to making such an argument is the fact that Prague's Jewish community (as opposed to that of Moravia, for example) appears to have been largely cut off from and immune to Hasidic influence until the First World War. Although pre-emancipatory Czech Jewry enjoyed close ties to a number of Polish-Jewish centers, none of these was in an area dominated by Hasidism. The first documented appearance of Hasidim in Bohemia occurs after 1914, when refugees from Galicia—among them the entourage of the Belzer Rebbe—stream into the country.[23] More problematic still is the relationship of Hasidism to the theme of Golem-making. Moshe Idel calls our attention to the "obvious absence of the golem legend" in the formative years of Polish Hasidism. "Hasidic literature," Idel writes, "richer in legends than all the Jewish mystical literature, ignored this peculiar type of legend." Tales of Golem-making may have been excluded from Hasidism's early repertoire, he suggests, because of the assumption that lies at the core of Hasidic thought that spiritual perfection is attainable—not through miracle or magic—but through the mystical performance of prayer and the *mizvot.* When R. Menahem Mendel of Kotsk was told about the wondrous powers of a wonder-worker, he is said to have responded, "Can he also make a Hasid?"[24]

An alternative to the literary-historical approach can be found in ethnography and the study of folklore. What the ethnographer wishes to know is not when literary texts were produced, but what a culture "remembers" and recounts, especially through oral transmissions. But how to get at these acts? Communal and family traditions can often be inscribed in decorative art, tombstone carvings, communal record books, family Bibles, and the like; if one cannot always work backward from these sources to the original expressions of beliefs or ideas, one nevertheless can see in them evidence for the presence of a given motif in the general culture of the community. One "window of opportunity" for ethnographic observation was opened up in the 1720s when the Prague Jewish community embarked on a renovation of the Maharal's tombstone and, more or less simultaneously, a rabbinical descendant of Judah Löw—Isaiah Katz, who served as rabbi of Ungarisch Brod (Uherský Brod) in Moravia—instructed the secretary of the Prague Jewish community, Moses Meir Perles, to write the family chronicles.[25] As noted earlier, Perles' work *Megilat Yuhasin,* makes no mention of a Golem tradition; and, although legends involving the Maharal's grave may already have been in circulation at the time, the decorative accompaniments to the new tomb do not allude to a Golem theme.

I should also mention two other folkloristic possibilities that have yet to yield much fruit. One was brought up by Vladimír Sadek in the context of his argument in favor of a Hasidic origin to the Maharal-Golem tale. Sadek observes that Hasidim accord the gravesite of the Ma-

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haral the same treatment that they would give the final resting place of any *zaddik*, making pilgrimages to it and placing on it prayers and petitions.[26] Anyone who has visited the old Jewish cemetery in Prague knows that this is true. But it is no less obvious that thousands of non-Hasidim—both Jewish and Christian—also visit Judah Löw's grave every year and engage in comparable behavior. The problem is that we do not know when this practice began or who started it. It is possible that the folklorists are right in looking to the early 18th century, sensing that the renovation itself was either an indication of a kind of "Maharal cult" or an act of "invented tradition." But it may also be the case that the Maharal's grave did not attract pilgrims until the early 20th century, when Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe reminded Prague Jewry of its own cultural history by seeking out the graves of numerous rabbis, all of whom were part of the living memory of Polish orthodoxy—if no longer of Czech Jewry.

To date neither enthnography nor literary history has succeeded fully in explaining the convergence of the Golem legend with Prague and the Maharal. Admittedly, Scholem and Idel have established the Polish tradition associated with Rabbi Elijah of Chelm as the most likely immediate predecessor of the Prague venue. The folklorists are probably correct in guessing that some type of new or renewed veneration of the Maharal took root in Prague around the 1720s or 1730s. This was during a period of rapid growth and development of the Jewish community: the Jewish Town made up nearly half the population of Prague's Staré Město (Altstadt), and about 28 percent of the city's five districts combined, during the first decades of the eighteenth century.[27] It was also a time in which David Oppenheim (1664–1736) consolidated unprecedented political and religious authority, occupying—at various points and in combination—the positions of Rosh Yeshivah, Chief Rabbi of Prague, and Chief Rabbi of Bohemia. The rabbinical establishment in Prague during the second, third, and fourth decades of the 18th century appears to have been deeply implicated in kabbalistic studies. Frederic Thieberger claims that Oppenheim himself was a kabbalist, but one can point to other figures as well: Naftali Kohen, a great-grandson of the Maharal and former Chief Rabbi in Frankfurt am Main, who moved to Prague after 1711; Jonathan Eibeschütz (1690–1764), a charismatic preacher; and Rosh Yeshivah, who was known to have dealt in amulets and who, later in life, stood accused of being a secret follower of the "false Messiah," Shabbetai Zevi.[28]

But there are crucial connections that have yet to be drawn. It may well be that the rabbinic elites in Prague in the 1720s and 1730s—in particular the students and faculty of the city's *yeshivot*—fostered a magical-kabbalistic reinterpretation of the life of the Maharal. If this was indeed

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the case, then it is to the traffic between Poland and Prague in students and teachers that one needs to look for the transmission of the early-modern Golem tale to the Bohemian capital. Continued human and intellectual commerce after 1740 might explain the internalization of Maharal traditions within Polish Jewry—especially Hasidism—which one finds by the 19th century. A venue of the 1720s or 1730s would also imply that the elite circles in Prague, in producing a Maharal cult, were actually engaged in a process of historical projection, in which the mystical pursuits and cultural fashions of the present were attributed to an earlier, heroic age and to an older historical figure.

And what does one make of the custom maintained by the *Altneushcul* to repeat the 92nd Psalm on Friday evening? The skeptical impulse—probably correct—would lead one to view the practice as relatively recent (i.e., post-16th century), the justification for which was sought in the evolving cult of the Maharal. It is possible that the repetition originated from practical, perhaps even *halakhic*, considerations. Here I am drawn to the claim made by the ethnographer and biblical scholar J. J. Schudt in his compendium *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten* (1714–18), purportedly on the basis of Jewish testimony, that Prague's *Altneuschul* possessed an organ.[29] If this claim is true, and assuming that it was generally agreed that the *halakha* did not permit the playing of an organ on the Sabbath, the practice in the *Altneuschul* may have been to allow musical accompaniment for the introductory Psalms on Friday evening (95–99 and 29) but not once the Sabbath had formally begun. Psalm 92, which is introduced as "A Song for the Sabbath Day," might well have been viewed as a liturgical demarcation between the sacred and the profane—sung once to the accompaniment of the organ and once without, as the prayer which marked the start of the Sabbath in the synagogue.[30]

The crucial point seems to be that, while the organ eventually was removed from the Altneuschul—possibly during the rabbinate of Ezekiel Landau (1713–1793)—the custom of repeating Psalm 92 remained. Landau, who was born and raised in Opatów (Poland), and who assumed the Chief Rabbinate of Prague in 1754, may have played a dual role in the reinvention of the Golem tradition: insisting on the removal of the synagogue organ and reinforcing the connection between Polish and Bohemian rabbinic culture. By the time ethnographers set out in the 1830s and 1840s, to collect the stories that Prague Jews told about themselves, the community had "mythologized" the practice, locating its justification in a heroic narrative, a legend associated with the venerable rabbi of the Prague Renaissance.

I readily admit that the limb onto which I have just climbed is unsteady and that more research is needed before feelings of vertigo can reasonably be eliminated. A proper research agenda might take the fol-

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lowing tacks: a reexamination of Jewish communal records in Prague in the 18th century, particularly as they relate to Yeshivah life and the rabbinate; a rereading of the writings of Oppenheim, Eibeschütz, and Landau; and a new effort to get at the popular culture of both Jewish and non-Jewish Bohemians. The opening up of libraries and archives in East Central Europe in the last few years should be helpful, to a certain extent. But much of what is called for involves a new reading of old materials with an eye to a new set of questions.

What we do know is this: the first literary records of the Golem of Prague come to us by way of 19th-century ethnography and folklore, relatively new fields of inquiry in the 1830s, inspired by a mixture of Enlightenment criticism, Herderian anthropology, and budding Romantic nationalism. Jakob Grimm, of the famous brothers who were among the major practitioners of these arts in Germany in the early part of the century, published a version of the Polish legend in the journal *Zeitung für Einsiedler* in 1808. He was, however, apparently unaware of any association of the Golem theme with the city of Prague.[31] The first individual to transmit in written form a tale told by Prague Jews concerning the Maharal and a golem of his creation was the non-Jewish journalist and folklorist Franz Klutschak (1814–1886). He published his story in 1841 in *Panorama des Universums*,[32] a Prague monthly devoted to the investigation of world cultures.

Omnivorous in its interests, *Panorama* offered cultural/anthropological pieces on Europe and Austria (separte rubrics), Asia, Africa, America, and Oceania, as well as examples of "narratives, legends, and folktales" from different parts of the world. In 1838 Klutschak had published a set of short pieces on the "Old Jewish Cemetery of Prague and Its Legends," the opening story of which also dealt with the Maharal, though not as the creator of a golem.[33] His story "Der Golam [*sic*] des Rabbi Löw," which appeared three years later, formed one of four tales that Klutschak offered under the heading, "Legends, Fables, and Stories from Bohemia. Partly newly told, partly retold, by F.K."[34]

A Jewish physician by the name of Leopold Weisel (1804–1873), who grew up and lived most of his life near the town of Domažlice in southwestern Bohemia, worked at the same time as a kind of partner in arms to Klutschak. Weisel's career is a testimony to the fact that the self-conscious recovery of oral traditions is a decidedly *modern* act, in which secular intellectuals in the throes of social and cultural change seek to save something of the traditional society that is fast slipping away forever. He acquired his medical education in Prague—probably from about 1824 to 1830—during which time he lived in the Old Jewish Town and supported himself by working as a private tutor for a number of Jewish families. Sensing that he stood at a historical turning point,

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Weisel took it upon himself to capture the rich folk traditions of the ghetto, apparently by interviewing older residents and recording their stories.[35]

Weisel occupied himself in the 1830s and 1840s with the collection and dissemination of the folk wisdom of Jewish Prague, publishing his earliest efforts alongside those of Klutschak in *Panorama des Universums.* In 1838 his "Pinchasgasse: Eine jüdische Volkssage" appeared, a tale about a poor peddler who lived in Prague "over two hundred years ago," who traced the streets of the city with a pack over his shoulder by day and "studied the law" by a dim lamp in his dirty room at night.[36] The story was reprinted in 1847 together with four other tales collected by Weisel, as "Sagen der Prager Juden," in the immensely popular collection *Sippurim: Eine Sammlung jüdischer Volkssagen* published by Wolf Pascheles.[37] Among the five stories retold here by Weisel was his own version of the golem legend, a minor classic of brief fiction and the benchmark for subsequent retellings until the eve of the First World War.

These two modern renditions of the golem tradition were published six years apart, yet they build upon rather different narratives. Interestingly, Klutschak's is the longer and more elaborate of the two, written with an eye for descriptive detail in lyrical German prose.[38] By contrast, Weisel's rendering is sparse and unembellished. The Klutschak tale proceeds as a prose piece, annotated with ethnographic and scholarly observations and punctuated with "insider" information and terminology.[39] Thus the designation "der Hohe Rabbi Löw" alternates in the text with the more homey (and Yiddish) "Rabbi Liwa"; the *Altneuschul,* the narrator tells us—"as is well known"—was built by the Angels immediately after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Though the story is clearly narrated in a distinct voice, it is equally apparent that the storyteller has had his informants within the Prague Jewish community. The tale is offered as an example of authentic Prague-Jewish folk tradition.

The story is also remarkable for the completeness with which it accounts for circumstances and motivations in the golem narrative. Klutschak offers a compelling explanation, for example, for the Faustian element of power run amok, which occupies a central position in all modern versions of the Prague account. With one foot in the practical kabbalah and the other in popular psychology, he writes, "fortunately, the Golem was not aware of his magical powers," and tells us Rabbi Löw was able to devise ways to keep his creature under control.

> He prepared for each of the seven days of the week a talisman, which held the strength of the Golem in check and directed its will only toward good; and when the Rabbi went to the synagogue in the evening [lit., in the evening at the start of the day], he would remove the old

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shem (talisman) from the mouth of the Golem and exchange it with a new one.[40]

Similarly, Klutschak's narrative accounts for Rabbi Löw's absence from the synagogue on that critical Friday evening, the reason for the rabbi's ordering first the stopping and then the repetition of Psalm 92, and the fact that the Sabbath had not yet officially begun. Relying once again on one layer of Jewish folk tradition to explain another, Klutschak has the cantor urging an early start to the Friday evening service so that the souls in purgatory might cool themselves off in the brooks and streams whose enjoyment was prohibited to Jews on the Sabbath day.[41] Attending to a sick and dying daughter, Rabbi Löw had decided not to pray with the community that evening but was brought running to the synagogue when the cries of people watching the Golem start to tear apart the building reminded the rabbi of his failure to provide the Golem with a new talisman. The reason for its violence lay in the simple fact of consciousness: the creature was becoming aware of his own power.

By the time the Maharal arrives at the *Altneuschul*, the Golem is tearing at its walls; the doors to the Holy Ark (which, Klutschak knows—and makes certain that his readers know that he knows—rested in the eastern wall of *Altneuschul*) have fallen off; and the candelabra has fallen to the ground, so that all is darkness, "as though the end of the world were approaching." At this point, practicality reigns. The Maharal orders the prayers halted so that he can put the proper talisman into the mouth of the Golem. Once peace is restored and the candles rekindled (which can only be done on a weekday), the Jews "laud the wisdom of Rabbi Löw, who has saved them from destruction, and pray more ardently than ever the first [*sic*] Psalm and the Sabbath prayers; [they] send a prayer to Jehovah with such fervor for the recovery of the great Rabbi's daughter, that Jehovah calls upon the Angel of Death ["malach Hamawod" (sic)], whom He has already sent to the Rabbi's house, to return."[42]

Leopold Weisel's "Der Golem," though spare and impoverished compared to Klutschak's tale, is the better known of the two and appears to have served as the basis for subsequent borrowings. For all its brevity, the author does provide a few bits of extraneous information that afford the reader a small window into his self-conceived ethnographic mission. When he writes in a brief introduction to "Sagen der Prager Juden" that "countless tales are attached to the old synagogues and the narrow streets; and nearly every tombstone in the large, old cemetery offers up material to one tale or another," he betrays his own indebtedness to the Romantic movement. At the same time, Weisel assures the reader that he transcribed the stories as he heard them "from

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the mouth of the old," thus attesting to his reliability as a transcriber of folk traditions.[43]

Weisel introduces his story with a tantalizing aside that relates directly to my inquiries in this essay: he excuses the brevity of the story that is to follow with the observation that this "popular tale" [*Volkssage*] has already been used by various writers. "It seems to me superfluous," he writes, "to rework such a well-known story. I shall present it briefly if only so that one not think that I did not know it."[44] Weisel clearly means to indicate that *this particular* Golem story enjoyed wide circulation in his day, both as a piece of literature and as a tale told by the Jews of Prague. He hardly deemed it worthy of reproducing because it was already widely acknowledged as belonging in the folkoristic treasury of Jewish Prague. Weisel's statements in this regard make me more confident in assigning a date for the provenance of the Prague tale that is a good deal earlier than most literary historians have allowed up to now.

The efforts of Weisel and Klutschak to retrieve—and ultimately recast—Jewish Prague's folk traditions into a literary language echoed beyond the confines of the Jewish community. The writer Václav Bolemír Nebeský (1818–1882), a Romantic poet in the Byronist mold, published a Czech version of Prague Jewish tales for the literary journal *Kvety* in 1844.[45] Nebeský had formed close ties to Jewish university students in both Prague and Vienna and became convinced of the desirability of recruiting Jews to the cause of Czech nationalism. His collection of Jewish legends in the Czech language appeared in the same year in which he joined forces with Siegfried Kapper (1821–1879) and David Kuh (1818–1879)—both Prague Jewish writers—to launch a newspaper campaign in both the Czech and German press designed to create a Czech-Jewish cultural alliance.[46] The effort to "capture" Jews for the cause of Czech culture and politics achieved only a moderate success before the 1880s and 1890s. Nevertheless, the various literary codifications of Czech folklore that occurred in the 19th century, including Josef Svátek's *Pražksvé pověsti a legendy* and Alois Jirásek's *Staré pověsti české*, reserved an important place for the Jewish stories that the writers-cum-ethnographers of the 1830s and 1840s had collected so assiduously.[47]

What united these various endeavors was the desire to uncover and disseminate the "cultural memory" of the Czech nation, to put forward a "usable past" that could be employed in the construction of a collective identity. A cultural program of this type inevitably combined anthropological investigation and creative embellishment, with equal importance ascribed to the oral traditions of the older generation and to the literary imagination. In adopting Weisel's "Legends" for their own rewritings of Czech folk culture, the modern authors of the Czech nation were, in effect, claiming "Jewish Prague" as part of their own in-

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heritance. Why did they do this? Did non-Jewish Czechs have their own "memory" of Judah Löw and Prague's "Golden Age"? Did they "remember" the Golem tradition in the same way that the Jews of Prague did or differently? Did this adoption of Jewish lore as something that was simultaneously Jewish and Czech indicate the existence of a significant area of shared culture? Perhaps in appropriating part of Prague's Jewish past the Czech nationalist writers were deepening their claim to Bohemia itself, thereby strengthening their challenge of German cultural, economic, and political domination. When seen as part of the process of creating a "usable past," the "discovery" of the Maharal and his Golem among the oral tales of the Czechs themselves added to the antiquity and legitimacy of the Czech national position. Both the Jews and the Czechs were "there" before the Germans; they shared the same wise men, the same legends, and the same monsters.

The recovery of myth and legend in the 19th century provides evidence of a remarkable fact: that oral traditions can in a very real sense follow literary traditions—even invented ones. The stories of the modern Czech masters were avidly read—their renderings of the Jewish past "remembered"—and over the ensuing decades both assimilating Jews and educated Gentiles literally recounted the same legends. Thus when the Czech sculptor Ladislav Šaloun was commissioned to erect statues outside the newly constructed Town Hall in Prague's Staré Město, or Altstadt, in 1912, he produced two figures, both drawn from the folklore of the city. One was a knight—the so-called Iron Knight—of Czech lore. And the other was the Maharal, Rabbi Judah Löw, depicted in a frankly modernist (and unlikely) pose, flanked by his granddaughter (unclothed). The granddaughter is handing Judah Löw a flower in allusion to a well-known Czech—and Jewish—tale concerning the master's ultimate demise at a very advanced age; death, whose designs the Maharal had been able to thwart for so long, hides in the fragrance of the rose.[48]

A final example of the role of literature in the production of popular wisdom: the story that *everyone* knows about the Maharal and the Golem (reproduced in film and in plays and even in contemporary Czech anthologies) is the newest of them all. An invention, indeed a literary forgery, of the early 20th century, it was penned by a Polish rabbi named Yudel Rosenberg (who emigrated to Montreal in 1913!). In Rosenberg's version, the Golem is created in order to defend the Jewish community against the antisemitism of the outside world, and in particular the notorious "blood libel," which had gained renewed currency in the decades preceding the First World War.[49] The Golem does his job well, saving the Jews of Prague from the certain catastrophe that would have resulted from a false accusation of ritual murder. But the purpose of the new story was not to instill hope and confidence in its readers. It

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was a cautionary tale of a type quite different from the original legend. At least as far back as the 17th-century Polish rendition, the source of danger had always been understood to reside within—within the confines of community; in the very process of the creation of artificial life. Throughout the 20th century, the tale has been remembered as a distortion, as if it had always been concerned with the danger posed by the outside world. Much has been lost, I think, in the translation; much can also be inferred with regard to the changing nature of the Jewish-Gentile relationship in East Central Europe.

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NOTES

1. All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

2. On the theme of the Golem in the history of Judaism, see Gershom Scholem, "The Idea of the Golem," in his *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), pp. 158–204; Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, 1990); idem, "The Golem in Jewish Magic and Mysticism," in Emily D. Bilski (ed.), *Golem! Danger, Deliverance, and Art* (New York, 1988), pp. 15–35; and Byron L. Sherwin, *The Golem Legend: Origins and Implications* (Lanham, Md., 1985).

3. On the importation of the Golem motif to general European culture, see Sigrid Mayer, *Golem: Die literarische Rezeption eines Stoffes* (Bern and Frankfurt, a.M., 1975); Arnold L. Goldsmith, *The Golem Remembered, 1909–1980: Variations of a Jewish Legend* (Detroit, 1981); Beate Rosenfeld, *Die Golemsage und ihre Verwertung in der deutschen Literatur* (Breslau, 1934); and Emily Bilski, "The Art of the Golem," in Bilski (ed.), *Golem!*, pp. 44–111.

4. On the *Sefer Yezirah*, see Scholem, "The Idea of the Golem," passim, and esp. pp. 167–173.

5. See Idel, *Golem*, pp. 9–21.

6. Scholem, "Idea of the Golem," pp. 171–193; Idel, "Golem in Jewish Magic and Mysticism," pp. 20–30; and Idel, *Golem*, pp. 56–61, 81–86, 96–104.

7. Christoph Arnold to J. Christoph Wagenseil, 1674. Letter appended to Arnold's *Sota hoc est Liber Mischnicus de uxore adulterii suspecta*, pp. 198–199. Translated in Scholem, "Idea of the Golem," pp. 200–201; reproduced here with minor revisions.

8. Moshe Idel has found what appears to be an earlier reference to the creation of a Golem by R. Elijah of Chelm in the manuscript testimony of a Polish kabbalist contained in MS. Oxford 1309. The Polish kabbalist, writing perhaps between the 1630s and 1650s, relates the following:

> I have heard, in a certain and explicit way, from several respectable persons that one man, [living] close to our time, in the holy community of Chelm, whose name is R. Eliyahu, the master of the name, who made

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> a creature out of matter [*Golem*] and form [*zurah*], and it performed hard work for him, for a long period, and the name of *emet* was hanging upon his neck, until he finally removed, for a certain reason, the name from his neck and it turned to dust. (Quoted in Idel, *Golem*, p. 208.)

9. Jacob Emden, *Megillath Sefer* (Warsaw, 1896), p. 4; his *Responsa*, II, No. 82; and his *Mitpahat Sefarim* (Altona, 1769), p. 45a. See also Scholem, "Idea of the Golem," pp. 199–201; and Mayer, *Golem*, pp. 25–30.

10. On the life, career, and educational philosophy of Judah Löw, see: Frederic Thieberger, *The Great Rabbi Loew of Prague: His Life and Work and the Legend of the Golem* (London, 1955); A. F. Kleinberger, *Ha-mahshava ha-pedagogit shel ha-maharal mi-Prag* [The Pedagogical Thought of the Maharal of Prague] (Jerusalem, 1962); Vladimír Sadek, "Rabbi Loew—sa vie, héritage pédagogique et sa légende," *Judaica Bohemiae*, Vol. 15 (1970), pp. 27–41; and Byron Sherwin, *Mystical Theology and Social Dissent: The Life and Works of Judah Loew of Prague* (London, 1982).

11. Sadek, "Rabbi Loew," p. 27; cf. David Gans, *Sefer Zemah David* (Prague, 1592; reprinted Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 145–46.

12. For surveys of Bohemian Jewish history during the 16th and 17th centuries, see: Hillel J. Kieval, "The Lands Between: The Jews of Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia to 1918," in Natalia Berger (ed.), *Where Cultures Meet: The Story of the Jews of Czechoslovakia* (Tel Aviv, 1990), pp. 27–40; idem, "Autonomy and Interdependence: The Historical Legacy of Czech Jewry," in David Altshuler (ed.), *The Precious Legacy: Judaic Treasures from the Czechoslovak State Collections* (New York, 1983), pp. 59–70; Otto Muneles (ed.), *The Prague Ghetto in the Renaissance Period* (Prague, 1965); and Anna Drábek, "Die Juden in den böhmischen Ländern zur Zeit des Landesfürstlichen Absolutismus," in *Die Juden in den böhmischen Ländern* (Munich, 1983), pp. 123–143.

During the reigns of Maximilian II and Rudolph II, expulsion orders of the past were permanently rescinded, major new privileges extended, and the Jewish population of the city climbed from as little as a few dozen to over 3,000 inhabitants—the first important build-up of Jewish population west of Poland since the 13th century.

13. Cf. Thieberger, *The Great Rabbi Loew*, pp. 8–44; and Sherwin, *Mystical Theology*, passim.

14. On the life and policies of Rudolph II, see R. J. W. Evans, *Rudolf II and His World: A Study in Intellectual History, 1576–1612* (Oxford, 1973); *idem, The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Oxford, 1979); and Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London, 1972).

15. Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p. 17.

16. A second, purported contemporaneous account, said to have been written by Judah Löw's son-in-law Rabbi Isaac ben Samson Ha-Kohen, discovered in the latter's "Venitian Bible," and published in 1872 in the Hebrew periodical *Ha-Maggid*, is—I am convinced—a modern forgery. I hope to publish a historical note on the subject in the near future.

17. On Gans's scientific interests, see George Alter, *Two Renaissance Astronomers: David Gans, Joseph Delmedigo* (Prague, 1958). On Gans's activity as a his-

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torian, see Mordechai Breuer, *Mavo* (introduction) to *Sefer Zemah David le-rabi David Gans* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. i–xxxiii.

18. *Sefer Zemah David* [1983 ed.], p. 145.

19. Meir Perles, *Megilat Yuhasin* (Warsaw, 1864); German trans. by S. H. Lieben, "Megillath Juchassin Mehral miprag," in *Jahrbuch der Jüdisch-Literarischen Gesellschaft*, Vol 20 (1929), pp. 315–336.

20. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1972), Vol 7, p. 755; also Scholem, "Idea of the Golem," in his *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965, 1996), pp. 202–203. Here he dates the transferral of the legend from Poland to Bohemia "toward the middle of the eighteenth century."

21. Vladimír Sadek, "Stories of the Golem and Their Relation to the Work of Rabbi Löw of Prague," *Judaica Bohemiae*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1987), p. 86; also idem, "Rabbi Loew," p. 36, where he likens the popular pilgrimages to the gravesite of the Maharal to those undertaken by Hasidim to the graves of their Zaddikim.

22. Ze'ev Gries, *Sefer, sofer, ve-sippur be-reshit ha-hasidut* (Tel Aviv, 1992), p. 56.

23. On the presence of Galician refugees in Prague, see Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870–1918* (New York and Oxford, 1988), pp. 174–178.

24. Idel, "Golem in Jewish Magic and Mysticism," p. 35.

25. On the possible significance of these two events, see Sigrid Mayer, *Golem: Die literarische Rezeption*, pp. 33–34; and Goldsmith, *Golem Remembered*, pp. 30–31.

26. Sadek, "Rabbi Loew," p. 36.

27. Anna Drábek, "Die Juden in den böhmischen Ländern zur Zeit des landesfürstlichen Absolutismus," in *Die Juden in den böhmischen Ländern* (Munich, 1983), pp. 127–28.

28. Thieberger, *The Great Rabbi Loew*, pp. 77–79; see also the entry by Gershom Scholem on *Eibeschütz* in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Vol. 6, pp. 1074–1076.

29. "Es ist auch recht was merckwürdiges, und wohl sonst nirgends in der Welt anzutreffen, daß die Juden zu Prag in der Alt-Neuen Synagog, wie sie dieselbige nennen, eine Orgel haben, die sie aber zum Gottes-Dienst weiter nicht brauchen, als nur, wann sie Freytags Abends das Bewillkommungs-Lied des *Schabbes* singen, und darbey ein Jud diese Orgel schalget [...]." From Johann Jacob Schudt, *Jüdische Merckwürdigkeiten* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1714–1718), Vol. 1, Bk. 4, Chap. 14, p. 218.

See also Vol. 2, Bk. 6, Ch. 34, pp. 284–85: "Jedoch gar viele galubhaftige Juden, die lang in Böhmen gewesen, haben mich für gewiß versichert, daß zu Prag in der Alt-Neuen *Synagoge* eine Orgel seye, die man aber weiter nicht brauche, als zu dem Gesang dieses Liedes (zu Bewillkommung des instehenden *Sabbaths*) in der Neuen *Synagoge* aber, wie auch an Theils andern Orten habe man ze denen Stimmen der Sänger auch allerhand *musicalishe Instrumenten*."

Schudt explains that "Kabbóles Schabbes" means "die Empfangung oder Bewillkommung des Sabbaths" (p. 284). It is unclear from this description, however, whether the "Bewillkommungslied" refers to the *Kabbalat Shabbat* service in general or specifically to the liturgical poem "Lekha Dodi."

30. I have never seen this explanation offered for the *Altneuschul* practice. It has, however, been suggested to me by Alexandr Putík that if the *Altneuschul* did possess an organ, it was not used on the Sabbath, and that the instrument itself

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was probably removed from the synagogue during the tenure of Ezekiel Landau.

31. Grimm, in *Zeitung für Einsiedler* (1808); reprinted in his *Kleinere Schriften*, Vol. 4 (Berlin, 1869), as well as in Rosenfeld, *Die Golemsage*, p. 41.

32. The full title of the journal was *Das Panorama des Universums zur erheitenden Belehrung für Jedermann und alle Länder* (Prague, 1834–1848). Klutschak was later to become editor-in-chief and then publisher of the Prague German newspaper *Bohemia*. (See Heribert Sturm [ed.], *Biographisches Lexikon zur Geschichte der böhmischen Länder*, Vol. 2 (Munich, 1984), p. 186; and *Österreichisches biographisches Lexikon 1815–1950*, Vol. 3 [Graz-Cologne, 1965], p. 426.)

33. *Das Panorama des Universums*, Vol. 5 (1838), pp. 292–95. (Knihovna Národní Muzea, Prague.)

34. *Das Panorama des Universums*, Vol. 8 (1841), pp. 75ff. Of this collection of four tables, "Der Golam des Rabbi Löw" is the only one to deal with a specifically Jewish theme.

35. See Jana Doleželová, "Questions of Folklore in the Legends of the Old Jewish Town Compiled by Leopold Weisel (1804–1870 [*sic*])," *Judaica Bohemiae*, Vol. 12 (1976), pp. 37–50; also S. Winninger, *Große jüdische National-Biographie* (Czernowitz, 1925–1936), Vol. 4, p. 610.

36. "Die Pinchasgasse: Eine jüdische Volkssage." Von L. W—1. *Das Panorama des Universums*, Vol. 5 (Prague, 1838), pp. 328–332. (Knihovna Národní Muzea, Prague.)

37. The original title of the 1847 collection was *Gallerie der Spiurim [*sic*], eine Sammlung jüdischer Sagen, Märchen und Geschichten als ein Beitrag für Völkerkunde.* It incorporated legends, tales, and biographical sketches from biblical, rabbinic, and popular sources, and drew on the literary efforts of a number of writers other than Weisel, including Siegfried Kapper (1821–1879) and Salomon Kohn (1825–1904). The collection was reissued unchanged in 1851 (following the 1848 Revolution) and then in numerous editions to the end of the nineteenth century—three between 1853 and 1864 alone. A German edition in Hebrew type appeared in 1860. A popular version was published by Jakob B. Brandeis, Pascheles's son-in-law and successor, in 1887, which itself ran through three editions in 20 years (1909). (See Peter Demetz, "Nachwort" to *Geschichten aus dem alten Prag* [Frankfurt a.M., 1994], pp. 361–376; and Otto Muneles, *Bibliographical Survey of Jewish Prague* [Prague, 1952], passim.)

A word of caution regarding the widely-diffused 1921 edition (*Sippurim: Prager Sammlung jüdischer Legenden.* In *Neuer Auswahl und Bearbeitung* (Vienna, 1921): Wholesale changes have been made to the 19th-century editions: titles have been altered; stories have been rearranged and abridged; new wording has been substituted; and, in some instances, incorrect authorship attributed.

38. See Appendix.

39. Parenthetic remarks inform the reader that the Hebrew *shem* is to be understood as "talisman"; *golam* as "servant"; *godolah* as "adult," and so forth. A footnote explains to the reader the practice in which Jewish women light candles on the eve of the Sabbath. Characteristically, the explanation is neither *halakhic* nor textual, but folkloristic, based on a popular midrash concerning the consumption of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden.

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40. Klutschak, "Der Golam des Rabbi Löw," *Panorama des Universums*, Vol. 8 (1841), p. 77.

41. Klutschak explains this point with a footnote:

> According to the beliefs of the Rabbis, the souls in purgatory also observe the Sabbath; as soon as the celebration of the Sabbath begins in the synagogue, they leave the place of their suffering and flee to the nearest water in which they bathe and cool off until the Sabbath ends. For this reason the Jews are not allowed to drink or draw from brooks and streams on the Sabbath, so as not to disturb the souls during their refreshment. ("Der Golam," p. 77.)

42. Ibid., p. 78. As to the misidentification of the Psalm, I can only surmise a reason. It is possible that on this occasion Klutschak's informants failed him. It is also possible, though less likely, that the practice in the *Altneuschul* was to *begin* the Friday evening prayers with Psalm 92, omitting the previous six.

43. *Sippurim*, pp. 50–51. All quotations are from the fourth edition, Prague, 1870 (*Sippurim, eine Sammlung jüdischer Volkssagen, Erzählungen, Mythen, Chroniken, Denkwürdigkeiten und Biographien berühmter Juden aller Jahrhunderte, insbesondere des Mittelalters*, hrsg. von Wolf Pascheles. Erste Sammlung, vierte Auflage. Prague, 1870).

44. "Diese Volkssage ist oft schon von verschiedenen Schriftstellern benützt worden—und es scheint überflüssig, eine so bekannte Sage nochmals zu bearbeiten; damit man aber nicht glaube, ich hätte sie gar nicht gekannt, will ich sie hier nur in der Kürze anführen." (L. Weisel, in *Sippurim*, p. 51.)

45. "Pověsti židovské," *Kvety*, 6 August 1844.

46. See Hillel J. Kieval, "The Social Vision of Bohemian Jews: Intellectuals and Community in the 1840s," in Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 257–267.

47. Josef Svátek, *Prazské pověsti a legendy* (Prague 1875); Alois Jirásek, *Staré pověsti ceské* (Prague, 1893).

48. The Maharal was either eighty-nine or ninety-seven at the time of his death, depending upon what one accepts as his date of birth: 1512 or 1520.

49. Yudel Rosenberg, *Sefer Nifla'ot Maharal* (St. Petersburg, 1909). See Ira Robinson, "Literary Forgery and Hasidic Judaism: The Case of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg," *Judaism*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1991), pp. 61–78; and Eli Yassif, "Yudel (Yehudah) Rosenberg: Sofer ᶜAmami," in Yehudah Yudel Rosenberg, *Ha-golem mi-Prag u-maᶜasim nifla'im* (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 7–72.

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APPENDIX.
FRANZ KLUTSCHAK'S RENDITION OF THE GOLEM FOLKTALE

(Panorama des Universums, vol. 8 [1841])

DER GOLAM DES RABBI LÖW[1]

Groß war der Weisheit des hohen Rabbi Löw in Prag. Im Talmud war er bewandert, wie wenige Rabbiner der Welt vor und nach ihm, und Astronomie und die Künste der Kabbala betrieb und verstand er, daß auf weit und breit in der Judenschaft wie unter den Christen sein Name genannt wurde, und selbst der Kaiser Rudolph der Zweite sich herabließ und den gelehrten Rabbi Liwa in seinem schlichten Hause in der Judenstadt besuchte. Des hohen Rabbi Löw Name wird noch jetzt von den Kindern Abrahams mit Ehrfurcht und Bewunderung genannt, und wenn die Rabbiner an seinem Hause in der breiten Gasse, auf welchem noch heute ein Löwe eingemeiselt zu sehen ist, vorübergehen, da wünschen sie sich im Geiste des hohen Liwa Gelehrsamkeit und Ruhm, und erzählen den Bochern von seinen Wundern.

Gar viele Wunder werden von ihm berichtet, und in der Altneuschule, dem düstern ehrwürdigen Gebäude, dessen Wände keines Menschen Hand vom Jahrhunderte alten Staube zu reinigen wagen darf, bewahrt man noch den Golam des hohen Löwen. Der Rabbi hatte mittelst seines kabbalistischen Wissens ein menschenartiges Wesen aus Lehm gebildet, ihm Leben eingehaucht und es zum Golam (Diener) der Altneuschul bestimmt, welche bekanntlich die Engel gleich nach Zerstörung des Tempels in Jerusalem erbaut hatten. Aber selbst die Weiseste hat Stunden der Schwäche und Rabbi Löw hatte, als er dem Golem den belebendem Odem einhauchte, ein Gebet herzusagen vergessen, und dadurch erlangte der Golam eine Macht, die selbst die Zaubergewalt des Rabbi überstieg. Glücklicherweise war sich der Golam seiner magischen Kräfte nicht bewußt und der hohe Löw erhielt dadurch Muße, sein Vergehen zu erkennen, und auf Mittel zu sinnen, wie es wieder gut zu machen. Er ververtigte für jeden der sieben Tagen der Woche einen Talisman, der die Kräfte des Golam in Schranken, und seinen Sinn blos auf das Gute gerichtet hielt, und wenn der Rabbi am Abend beim Beginne des Tages in die Synagoge kam, nahm, er den alten Sem (Talisman) aus dem Munde des Golam und vertauschte ihn mit einem neuen.

Der Rabbi hatte eine Tochter, Esther, die er sehr liebte, und der er jeden Sabbath Abend, wenn er aus der Synagoge kam, die Hände auf's Haupt legte und sie aus vollem Herzen mit dem vorgeschriebenen Spruche segnete: "Gott erfreue Dich, wie Sarah, Rebekka, Rachel und Lea." Esther trat eben in die Jahre, wo sie "Godolah" (volljährig) wurde, da ward sie krank. Rabbi Löw nahm zu seinen geheimen wissenschaften Zuflucht, um Esther zu heilen, aber auch

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hier fand er keine Hilfe, und Esther gesundete nicht, sondern ward immer kränker und kränker. So verfloß Tag auf Tag und Rabbi Löw nahm sich kaum Zeit, in der Synagoge zu heiligen Gebete zu verrichten. Der Freitag nahte seinem Ende, und Esther war noch kränker als zuvor. Da kam der Chassan (Vorsänger) aus der Synagoge und sprach: "Rabbi, wolltest Du heute den Sabbath nicht früher beginnen, denn es ist ein sehr heißer Tag und die Seelen im Fegefeuer bedürfen der Kühlung."[2] Der Rabbi warf einen traurigen blick auf das Bett seiner Tochter, und erwiederte, die Gemeinde solle nur heute ohne ihn den Sabbath beginnen, und der Chassan ging, und Rabbi Löw ließ die Lichter[3] anzunden, und betete daheim neben dem Bette seiner Tochter das Kabala [*sic*] Schabbat, und die kranke Esther flüsterte es leise mit. Noch waren sie aber nicht bis zum zehnten Verse gekommen, da stürtze der Chassan athemlos und ganz bleich vor Schrecken wieder herein und vermochte vor Grausen kaum aufzuschreien: "Rabbi! Der Golam!"

Bei diesem Schreckensrufe erinnerte sich der Rabbi, daß er heute vergessen, dem Golam einen neuen Talisman in dem Mund zu thun, und daß dieser vielleicht zum Bewußtsein seiner Kraft gelangt sey. Es war nicht ein Augenblick zu verlieren, denn kannte der Golam wirklich seince Macht, so war das ärgste zu befürchten, und er konnte die ganze Stadt verderben. Der Rabbi trat daher zum Bette der kranken, legte ihr segnend die Hände auf's Haupt, empfahl sie dem Schutze des Allerhöchsten, nahm einen neuen Talisman und eilte mit diesem in die Altneusynagoge. Als er in das düstere Innere derselben trat, beteten eben die erschrockenen Juden den ersten Psalm, und riefen die Verse desselben um so eifriger und lauter, je mehr Unheil und Spuk der Golam bald hinter ihrem Rücken, bald vor ihnen trieb. Eben als der Meister eintrat, rüttelte der Golam an den Mauern des uralten Gebäudes, daß die Altneusynagoge in ihrem tiefsten Grundfesten erbebte, und die Lade Aron Hakadosch [*sic*], die an der Mauer gegen Morgen stand, umfiel, und die Leuchter niederstürtzten, und die Lichter erloschen, und die Finsterniß herrschte, als nahe der Tag des Weltendes. Als dies der Rabbi Löw ersah, rief er den Psalmenbetenden mit mächtiger Stimme zu: "Haltet inne!" Und sie hielten inne, und gebrochen war dadurch des Golams Macht, denn so lange der erste Psalm nicht zu Ende gebetet ist, hat der Sabbath eigentlich noch nicht begonnen und der Freitagstalisman des Golam kam wieder in Kraft. Der Golem sah plötzlich seine Macht gehemmt und der Rabbi trat mit dem neuen Talisman auf ihn zu, nahm ihm den alten aus dem Munde und that ihm den neuen hinein, und der Golam war dadurch wieder in den gehorsamsten Diener verwandelt, und vermochte kein Unheil weiter zu üben.

Und als nun die Ruhe wieder hergestellt und die Lichter wieder angezündet waren, da priesen die Juden laut die Weisheit des Rabbi Löw, die sie gerettet hat vor dem Verderben, und beteten inbrünstiger als je den ersten Psalm und die Gebete des Sabbaths, und sandten mit solcer Gluth ein Gebet um Genesung der Tochter des hohen Rabbis zu Jehovah daß Jehovah gerührt den Malach Hamawod [*sic*] (den Würgengel), den er bereits in das Haus des Rabbis gesandt hatte, zurückrief, und der Rabbi, als er seine Wohnung kam, seine Tochter Esther gesund fand.

Das Andenken an diesen Sabbath wird aber in der Altneusynagoge noch immer gefeiert, und so oft am Beginne des Sabbaths der erste Psalm ge-

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sprochen wird, brechen die Betenten plötzlich ab, und beginnen erst nach einer viertelstündigen Pause von neuem den Psalm: "Wohl dem, der nicht wandelt im Rathe der Gottlosen, und nicht tritt auf den Weg der Sûnder, noch sitzet, wo die Spötter sitzen."

Und der Golam wird noch heute mit mehren anderen Reliquien berühmter Rabbi's aufbewahrt unter dem Dachstuhle der Altneusynagoge.

NOTES

1. Mehre andre Sagen von Rabbi Löw findet man in meinem Aufsatze: "Der Judenfriedhof und seine Sagen," in *Panorama des Universums* 1838, p. 292, welcher Aufsatz aus dieser Zeitschrift auch in die *Zeitung des Judentums* übergegangen war.

2. Dem Rabbinerglauben zufolge feiern auch die Seelen im Fegefeuer den Sabbath, und verlassen, sobald die Sabbath-feier in der Synagoge begonnen, den Ort ihrer Qualen, und fliegen dem nächsten Wasser zu, in welchem sie sich so lange baden und abkählen, bis der Sabbath zu Ende ist. Darum sollen auch die Juden am Sabbath aus keinem Bache trinken oder schöpfen, damit den Seelen nichts [nicht?] von ihrer Kühlung genommen werde.

3. Die Lichter beim Beginne des Sabbaths zünden die Weiber an, zur Sühne für die Sünde des ersten Weibes, welches durch den Biß in den verbotenen Apfel der Sonne einen Theil ihres Glanzes geraubt hat.

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