


4-2016

Molded from Clay: The Portrayal of Jews through the Golem in Yudel Rosenberg's *The Golem* and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague and Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*

Reynolds Nelson Hahamovitch
College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [German Literature Commons](#), and the [Yiddish Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hahamovitch, Reynolds Nelson, "Molded from Clay: The Portrayal of Jews through the Golem in Yudel Rosenberg's *The Golem* and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague and Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*" (2016). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. Paper 886.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses/886>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

Molded from Clay: The Portrayal of Jews through the Golem in Yudel Rosenberg's *The Golem*
and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague and Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*

Reynolds Hahamovitch

Honors Advisor: Robert Leventhal

Molded from Clay: The Portrayal of Jews through the Golem in Yudel Rosenberg's *The Golem*
and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague and Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*

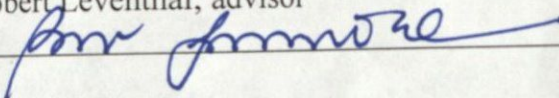
A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by

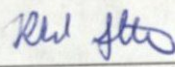
Reynolds Nelson Hahamovitch

Accepted for Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

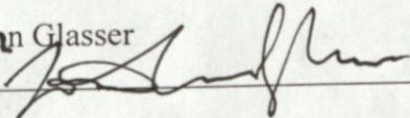
Robert Leventhal, advisor



Ronald Schechter



Jonathon Glasser



Williamsburg, VA
April, 29th 2016

Where is the soul to be breathed into me?
Why don't you open up my eyes and see?
Where is the tongue, where are the teeth, where is
The blood that is to be poured into me?
What am I to become now? A blind man?
A crippled man, who's deaf and holds his tongue?
And maybe everything together? Tell me!
The Night is turning pale and fading now.
The day is dawning, dim and dark and dismal.
Keep me in your abyss one moment more,
One moment more of what I've been till now,
A pile of lifeless, desiccated clay.

- H. Leivick, *The Golem*

So says the spirit of the golem, a man made of clay, to his creator, Rabbi Loew, in the 1921 Yiddish play by H. Leivick. Here, in the opening scene, Loew stands on the bank of the Moldau River in Prague in the dead of night. He has formed the shape of a man from the river clay and begun a ritual to give it life. The spirit he summons to possess the body speaks out across the water with the haunting lines above, asking what form the golem will take.

Der Golem, Leivick's most famous play, retells the ancient legend of the golem. It centers on the High Rabbi of Prague, Judah Loew ben Bezalel, who creates a golem in Prague

around the end of the 16th century. The golem is huge, statue-like, and in most versions mute.¹ It is made as a servant for the Jewish ghetto of Prague, but, in many versions, goes on a rampage and destroys part of the ghetto. Eventually, Rabbi Loew removes the life from his creation, either because the golem has gone mad or because it is no longer needed, and stows its body in the attic of the Alt-Neu Synagogue.

The story of the golem is perhaps the most famous Jewish folk-tale. It has an ancient history, stretching from the Bible and the Talmud,² through the writings of medieval Jewish

¹ Leivick's golem has the rare ability to speak.

² The golem creation begins as a ritual practice by ancient Jewish mystics. The practice stemmed from the first appearance of the word "golem" or *galmi* (גלמי), translated as "undeveloped substance" or "unformed body" in the Book of Psalms 139 (15-16):

My being was not concealed from thee, when I was made
In secret, when I was (so to say) embroidered in the lowest
Parts of the earth. My undeveloped substance did thy eyes see;
And in thy book were all of them written down—the days
Which have been formed, while yet not one of them was here. (Baer 1)

Most interpret these lines to be Adam praising God for creating him from the "golem" (Baer 1), the soulless primordial substance that God forms into man (Bilski 10). Jewish mysticism, often termed Kabbala, is largely based in the power of the Hebrew language and the holiness of the Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. Jewish mystics search for intertextual meaning between Hebrew characters, words, holy texts, and reality. They were fascinated by the word 'golem' in Psalms, because it appears to be the origin of mankind; it is the body of man without the divinity of the soul. For them, studying the "unformed substance" of man was much like examining the clay before it is formed by the potter, knowledge of the material illuminates the art—*galmi* is a key to understanding the power of God. Inspired by this passage in Psalms, Jewish mystics designed rituals to find the *galmi*. The first record of this, which became the prime codex for mystics of the golem ever after, is inscribed in tractate Sanhedrin 65b of the Talmud:

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." 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. (Kieval, *Languages of Community* 95, brackets original)

Here Rava emulates God by creating a man. Rava sends the man to Rabbi Zera, but the man is unable to speak. Zera, seeing that the mute man is imperfect, orders it to perish, to return to dust. Rava's attempt is a righteous one, many scholars argue, as it is an attempt to emulate the holiness of God (Kieval *Languages of Community* 96). However, as we see in the case of Rava, even the most pure of men cannot create a perfect man. Rava's divinity cannot match God's, thus the created man is unable to speak. This is not a small flaw. The inability to speak reflects Jewish mystics' obsession with words and language. Language is given to man to separate him from the beasts. Through words man is powerful and approaches the divinity of God. *Ha-medaber*, "the one who speaks" was used synonymously with "human being" in medieval philosophical Hebrew (Sherwin 7). Unable to speak, Rava's man is

mystics in Spain, Italy, and France, into the accounts of Christian Hebraists of the Renaissance and Enlightenment in Germany, and eventually residing in the folktales of both Jews and gentiles in Central-Eastern Europe.³ Since the beginning of the 20th century its popularity has increased rapidly in literature and pop culture through novels, films, poems, short stories, plays, comic books, and frequent appearances in video games. Focusing on its nature as an artificial anthropoid, many scholars have examined the golem's immense influence on icons as significant as Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein's Monster*, Karel Capek's *Robot*, and Siegel and Shuster's *Superman*.⁴ Others have emphasized the golem's role as an icon of uncontrollable technology, using it as a heuristic device to discuss artificial intelligence,⁵ bioengineering⁶, and the atom bomb.⁷ Some have even applied the symbol of the golem as a weapon to discuss *sabras* and the modern state of Israel.⁸ The golem's image has gone far beyond its legend.

The golem has evolved tremendously over more than two thousand years. Little has stayed the same in that time as innumerable writers have formed and reformed the golem's body. In their attempt to understand this immense history, Alfred Thomas and Elizabeth Baer have examined the golem as a palimpsest.⁹ A palimpsest is a manuscript which can be erased and

nothing more than the *galmi* animated. Without words he cannot possess a soul. This text would become the primary inspiration for Jewish mystics who desired to create a golem until around the 12th century when the ritual of golem creation became popular among Kabbalists in Europe.

³ A timeline of golem narratives is in the Appendix.

⁴ First seen respectively in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818); Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.* (1920); and Jerry Siegel and Simon Shuster's *Action Comics #1* (1938). See: Jane P. Davidson, "Golem – Frankenstein – Golem of Your Own" (1995); Norma Contrada, "Golem and Robot: A Search for Connections" (1995); and Robert G. Weiner, "Marvel Comics and the Golem Legend" (2011).

⁵ See: Harry Collins and Trevor Pinch, "The Golem: What Everyone Should Know About Science" (1993) and Norbert Wiener *God & Golem, Inc.: A Comment on Certain Points When Cybernetics Impinges on Religion* (1964)

⁶ See Byron L. Sherwin, "Golems in the Biotech Century" (2007)

⁷ See Michael Collins Piper, *The Golem: A World Held Hostage, Israel's Nuclear Hell Bomb and the Road to Global Armageddon* (2007)

⁸ See Danusha Goska, "Golem as Gentile, Golem as Sabra: An Analysis of the Manipulation of Stereotypes of Self and Other in Literary Treatments of a Legendary Jewish Figure" (1997).

⁹ See: Thomas, "inscription and effacement serves as an effective metaphor for the status of the legend as a palimpsest: every time a new version is written, the previous version is partially effaced and partially preserved" (45); Baer, "*palimpsest*: texts layered upon texts through intertextual gestures that reveal and valorize various

reused. In ancient times, when material to write on was expensive and scarce, scribes used palimpsests made from animal skins, papyrus, or wax-coated tablets. By scraping or washing off the text they could continually reuse the same material. Thomas and Baer have argued that the golem has functioned like a palimpsest as writers have taken the myth and rewritten it for their own purposes, erasing and rewriting what and where the golem was, and what it was supposed to do and represent. The metaphor of the palimpsest fits the legend well, for the golem is perpetually being reborn, both in its constant retelling as it is passed between authors, and within the legend itself as the rabbi again and again creates the golem anew.

The legend of the golem as it is known today—in which a rabbi creates the golem to be a servant in the ghetto—likely began in the 17th century. At that time the golem was a myth propagated by anti-Semitic polemicists who used it as an accusation that Jews were committing heinous acts of sorcery through the creation of golems with the aim of harming Christians. The writings of those anti-Semitic polemicists were adopted and rewritten about a century and half later by folklorists like Jakob Grimm in the beginnings of the European ethnographic movement.¹⁰ From there the golem legend was rapidly popularized through ethnography in the

emphases at various times. This image of golem texts superimposed upon one another brings with it the notion that no one text is the “true” text and that all golem legends continue to exist and to serve as both sources and intertexts” (22); Ager sees the golem through a similar framework, but does not use the term palimpsest, “[the golem] operates as a vehicle of memory and on the intertextual level as a cultural product” (5); Dekel and Gurley also do not use the term palimpsest but have an analogous reading of the golem, “Like the piece of clay from which he is created, the literary Golem can be shaped and molded to resemble any form, from the spectral figures in Annette von Droste-Hülshoff’s poetry to Leopold Kompert’s nostalgic project and finally to Yudel Rosenberg’s great protector of the Jewish people at the turn of the twentieth century” (244).

¹⁰ Note that at this point the golem legend had not yet been associated with Rabbi Loew or Prague. The Grimm version published in *Zeitung für Einsiedler* (Journal for Hermits), a journal edited by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, in 1808 reads:

The Polish Jews, after speaking certain prayers and observing fast days, made the figure of a man out of clay or loam, and when they speak the miracle-working *Schemhamphoras* over it, the figure comes alive. It is true that he cannot speak, but he understands reasonably well what anyone says to him and commands him to do. They call him Golem and use him as a servant to do all sorts of housework, but he may never leave the house alone. On his forehead is written *Aemaeth* (Truth; God). However, he increases in size daily and easily becomes larger and stronger than all his housemates, regardless of how small he was at first. Therefore, fearing him, they rub out the first letter, so that nothing remains but *Maeth* (he is dead),

19th century, at first mostly among non-Jewish writers, but eventually by Jewish writers as well.¹¹ It is in this period that the golem legend came to Prague, was associated with the famous Rabbi Loew, and gained the reputation—to some—as a destroyer of the ghetto. Here modern scholars see the golem’s function as a palimpsest really come to fruition. The legend split in the 19th century as Jewish and gentile writers passed the golem back and forth, erasing and rewriting what others had written into the myth. Many non-Jewish folklorists portrayed the golem in anti-Semitic fashion, turning it into a monster, and the most sinister of all, a Jewish monster. It became an incarnation of all Christian fears of Jews: Jewish degeneracy (sexual voraciousness, immorality, and hysteria) without the inherent weaknesses (disease, frailty, impotence) thought to usually render Jews benign. The golem’s body was shaped to become an exaggerated facsimile for the worst stereotype of the Jew. Many Jewish writers told a similar story, but towards the end of the 19th century they began to remake the golem into a folk-hero, an image of renewed Jewish strength and heritage in the form of a man-made messiah. Thus, the golem can indeed be read as a palimpsest that is erased and rewritten. At the beginning of the twentieth

whereupon he collapses and is dissolved again into clay. But once, out of carelessness, someone allowed his Golem to become so tall that he could no longer reach his forehead. Then, out of fear, the master ordered the servant to take off his boots, thinking that he would bend down and that then the master could reach his forehead. This is what happened, and the first letter was successfully erased, but the whole load of clay fell on the Jew and crushed him. (Dekel and Gurley 242-243)

Dekel and Gurley claim that Grimm’s version is the first “literary” golem text, predated only by “references by Christian Hebraists and various halakhic discussions (such as, for instance, whether a Golem can be counted in a *minyan*) (250).

¹¹ Most notably non-Jewish journalist and folklorist Franz Klutschak, “Das Golam [sic] des Rabbi Löw,” (1841) published in *Panorama des Universums* in Prague, and Jewish writer Leopold Weisel’s “Der Golem” (1847) published in *Gallerie der Sipruim* in Prague. Weisel’s was very successful and was republished numerous times in the following six decades. It was likely the most successful in grounding the legend firmly in Prague. Before that the golem had been most closely associated with the Polish city of Chelm, though there are records of the legend from other European cities as well (Dekel and Gurley 244-246).

century the messages most recently written in the clay alternated between good and evil, regeneration and corruption, salvation and destruction.¹²

Building on that assertion, this study examines the golem as a palimpsest in the pivotal period before it reached popularity on an international level: in the literature of Central Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. This period is critical because it was the cusp of many massive changes for the Jewish people. It saw the mass emigration of millions of Jews from Eastern Europe into Central Europe, and from Europe to the Americas and elsewhere. It was a time of modernization and assimilation, growing Zionism, resurgent anti-Semitic violence, and the sudden popularity of anti-Semitic pseudoscience—all trends which are reflected in the golem's changing myth. It was a critical moment for the golem legend as well. The first novels about the golem were written in this period, followed shortly by the first plays, films, and even an opera. The authors in this period gave the legend international fame and changed it irrevocably. Yet, more than ever they could not agree on what shape the golem would take.

In the lines quoted above from Leivick's play, written in 1921 at the tail end of the golem's first burst into popular fiction, the spirit asks from across the waters what the golem is made of. Is it simply an amalgamation of a man's parts? Does combining a tongue (the voice) with blood (the life) and a soul (the essence) produce a man? The spirit thinks not. It predicts it will be made into a cripple, a blind man, a mute—something less than fully human. It does not want to be born.

¹² Note that most scholars of the golem, whether or not they see the creature as a palimpsest, discuss the legend along the lines of a Christian-Jewish dichotomy. While overall this is an important feature of the golem's history, we should not be led into thinking that it is a strict boundary. Not all Christian writers had anti-Semitic retellings of the golem, and many Jewish writers portrayed the golem in the same way anti-Semitic writers did, as a destroyer.

Leivick, born in Belarus in 1888, was sent to a Siberian prison camp in 1906 for his activism in the Jewish Labor Bund.¹³ In 1913 he managed to escape to America where he moved to New York and began to write *Der Goylem* not long after. Leivick looked back to his home across much larger waters than the Moldau, the Atlantic, and saw the golem for what it had become in the past twenty years. Leivick's golem was neither a long-awaited savior nor a stand-in for the evil Jew, but rather an abomination of both images. The golem's body had been contorted by creators who sought to use the golem for their own ends. *Der Goylem* reflects this by constructing the golem as a messiah and then forcing it to crumble tragically, destroying the ghetto as it had in so many earlier tales. In the quoted passage above, Leivick, speaking through his proxy the spirit, seems to ask what his predecessors had done with the legend to warp the golem's body so.

Like the spirit speaking across the waters, this study asks what those writers, the ones writing immediately before Leivick, formed from the clay. If the golem is an artificial man, on those image was it molded? How did the different images they molded the golem to conflict? How did the creators form it? Why?

There are a number of texts that could be included in this study, but I will limit my analysis to two: Jewish author Yudel Rosenberg's *The Golem and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal* (1909) and non-Jewish author Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem* (1915). Major golem texts from this period that I have not chosen to discuss include Arthur Holitscher's 1908 play *Der Golem*, Johannes Hess's 1914 play *Der Rabbiner von Prag (Reb Loeb)*, Chayim Bloch's 1917 novel *Der Prager Golem*, Paul Wegener's 1920 silent film *Der Golem*, and H. Leivick's 1921

¹³ The General Jewish Labor Bund in Lithuania, Poland and Russia was a secular Jewish socialist organization founded in Vilnius, Lithuania in 1897.

Yiddish play *Der Golem*, the last of which I have used to introduce this paper, but will not focus on.

My focus in both novels is on the portrayal of Jews – how the image of the Jew is constructed and the conflicts within that construction. This is because the portrayal of Jews, positive and negative, was the most significant inscription on the golem-legend-palimpsest in this critical period of the myth. Rosenberg and Meyrink's novels are most devoted to this theme of the golem texts in this period, and so I choose to focus on them. As anti-Semitism grew in the wake of nationalism around the turn of the century, Jews had their image redefined by non-Jews and by themselves. Both Jewish and non-Jewish writers realized the potential of the golem as an easily malleable icon for the Jew. They reshaped its image to match the image of the Jew that they saw, or that they wanted to see. Thus, this study seeks to understand the golem as a battleground, one fought by authors over how Jews were represented and over intrinsically what it meant to be Jewish.

The Golem and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal, a 1909 novel by Polish Hasidic Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, is the first subject of this analysis. This work was the first novel written about the golem and the first to portray the golem as a protector. Rosenberg uses the golem to combat anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic portrayal of Jews. His novel, written in Hebrew and Yiddish, was not directed towards anti-Semites, but towards Jews, to instruct them on how to fight anti-Semitism. This is primarily an attempt to reform the image of Jewish men, from the old stereotypically weak Jew to a new powerful Jew. This transformation is no doubt inspired in part by the then popular "Muscle Jew," an ideologeme coined by Max Nordau in 1898 that envisioned a new generation of Jews that was athletic, healthy, and virile. Rosenberg's use of this image is nuanced, however, and allows for this new muscular Jew, represented by the golem,

alongside the traditional Jewish male, represented by Rabbi Loew, a unison that was heterodox to Nordau's vision. The discussion of these alternate forms of Jewish masculinity will lead us to Rosenberg's related notions on Jewish sexuality and assimilation, which we will find our intensely bound to his reimagining of the portrayal of Jews.

Next this essay will turn to Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*, first published in novel form in 1915. Meyrink had first published it serially beginning in 1913. In total opposition to Rosenberg's novel, *Der Golem* is extremely anti-Semitic—a twisting, hallucinogenic vision of the Jewish ghetto composed of overt and conflicting Jewish stereotypes. We will examine *Der Golem* as an investigation by Meyrink into the changing conception of Jewishness at the beginning of the 20th century. I read Meyrink as splitting Jewishness into two connected, but separate qualities of the Jew: the image of the Jew and the essence of the Jew. The protagonist of *Der Golem*, Pernath, has to contend with his own Jewishness by both understanding the nature of the image of Jews and of the Jewish essence as he perceives them to be. Central to this conflict is the golem, which in Meyrink's novel is a wandering ghost, a shadow of the powerful legend, described as a condensation of the pent-up suffering of the Jewish ghetto given form. It briefly bonds with Pernath late in the novel, allowing him to realize his own Jewishness and to contend with the conflicting Jewish images within him.

Rosenberg's *The Golem and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague*

Hebrew and Yiddish literature grew rapidly in Europe starting in the 19th century. Writers like Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916), Mendele Mocher Sforim (1836-1917), and I. L. Peretz (1852-1915) were quickly establishing Yiddish as a literary language, more or less coinciding with a resurgence in Hebrew literature among writers like Abraham Dob Bar Lebensohn (1789-1878), Isaac Erter (1792-1851), Yosef Haim Brenner (1881-1921), and Hayim Nahman Bialik (1873-1934).

A lesser known author in both Hebrew and Yiddish literature was the Polish Hasidic Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg (1859-1935). Born in Skarashev, a small town in Poland, he moved frequently serving as a rabbi in Tarlow, Lublin, Warsaw, Lodz, and, after his emigration to Canada in 1913, Toronto, and Montreal (Robinson 64). Rosenberg was considered a prodigy of Talmudic scholarship by the age of 16 and went on to become a prominent scholar and translator of the Hasidic movement. He wrote extensively on the Talmud, Halakha, and Kabbala, and was the student of several well-known rabbis and zaddiks.¹⁴ His scholarly publications are extensive and eclectic, including numerous biblical commentaries, translations of the works of Maimonides and other famous scholars, a handbook of Hasidic healing methods, essays on the use of electricity on the Sabbath, and an ambitious translation of the Zohar¹⁵ from Aramaic, among many other works (Robinson 65). He began writing fiction alongside his scholarly publications midway through his career, likely as way to supplement his income (Robinson 69).

¹⁴ Zaddik is a title for a man who is wise, righteous, and lives a saintly way of life. It is often used to refer to the spiritual leaders of Hasidic communities.

¹⁵ The "Book of Splendor," a foundational work of the Kabbalah.

Rosenberg's *Nifla'ot Maharal im ha-Golem*, "The Golem and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal" (1909) – hereafter referred to as *Nifla'ot* – is an often mentioned text in scholarship on the golem, but one rarely examined at length.¹⁶ Despite the lack of attention given to him by scholarship, Rosenberg made significant changes to the golem legend. His novel was the first written on the golem, the first to give it a name ("Joseph", or the Yiddish diminutive "Yossele"), and the first to make it a protector of the Jewish community.

Nifla'ot tells of the Great Rabbi Loew of Prague and his golem, Joseph. Loew builds the golem specifically to stop the threat to the Jewish community from the blood libel and the anti-Semitic violence the blood libel causes.¹⁷ However, Loew uses the golem for much more. Accusations of all kinds are made against the Prague Jews, many perpetrated by the evil Christian priest Tadeush. Loew and the golem thwart these accusations, while also resolving other issues like helping good young couples elope, or preventing the sexual corruption of Jewish girls by Christian men. Loew acts as sleuth to solve every conflict in a Sherlock Holmes-esque style, using the golem as his powerful hand to catch criminals, save Jews, remove planted evidence, and plant counter-evidence of his own. The golem is important in these endeavors, but is ultimately only Loew's agent. It does not have free will. Loew, not the golem, is the center of every story and the guiding folk-hero for the Jewish community—the golem is his sidekick. The Rabbi is a resolutely Orthodox, patriarchal figure empowered by a keen intelligence, direct connection with God, and vast knowledge of the Kabbalah. In their many adventures, in which Loew and the golem never fail, the last of the blood libels are prevented (seemingly forever

¹⁶ *Nifla'ot* was first published in Hebrew and Yiddish. All my quotations are from the recent translation of the Yiddish text by Joachim Neugroschel (2006).

¹⁷ The blood libel was the accusation that Jews murdered Christians, usually children or young women, to use their blood for religious rituals. Walter Laqueur estimates that there have been roughly 150 recorded cases of blood libel, mostly in the Middle Ages, and that almost all led to the killing of Jews, usually by a mob (Laqueur 56).

after), and the instigator of them, Tadeush, is exiled from Prague. Loew, seeing the need for the golem satisfied, stows his creation in the attic of the Alt-Neu Synagogue.

The format of the book is an intersection of many styles. It is made up of 19 chapters, including a preface by Rosenberg, and is in most respects a novel. However, almost every chapter is a self-contained story. There are several recurring characters other than the Rabbi Loew and the golem, and several stories have connected plots, but for the most part each one can be read individually. They have their own names, like “Joseph the Golem Goes Fishing at New Year’s” or the “Wondrous Tale of the Healer’s Daughter.” In this way *Nifla’ot* is much like an ethnographic folklore collection, the prior home of the golem in the late 19th century.¹⁸ *Nifla’ot*’s stories are told as *the* Jewish legends of Prague, specifically regarding one of Prague’s most famous Jews, Rabbi Loew.¹⁹

Another difficulty in categorizing *Nifla’ot* is the fact that Rosenberg claims the book to be truth. According to his introduction, *Nifla’ot* is not his own words, but the factual account of Rabbi Lowe’s deeds written by his son in law, Rabbi Isaac Katz (“a true priest, blessed be the memory of that righteous man”) left in the “Royal Library of Mainz” (Rosenberg 2). Any cursory search will reveal, however, that there has never been a Royal Library of Mainz and the novel itself shows many obvious signs of being written by Rosenberg himself (*Kievel Languages* 111). This “borrowing” from the Royal Library of Mainz was a conceit that Rosenberg used several times in both his literary and academic career (Robinson 67-68). Although Rosenberg

¹⁸ Gelbin notes this as well: “It is evident that in the rather factual style and choice of stock characters Rosenberg emulates the supposedly authentic style of legend writing generated by the Grimms, which provides a model for many folktale collections to date. The literary quality of Rosenberg’s text emerges in the authentic choice of style and its implicit reference to a host of high and low culture literary models.” (91)

¹⁹ In this sense *Nifla’ot* is written much like a work of Hasidic hagiography, an early form of Jewish ethnography in which the stories and miracles of famous Hasidic leaders were anthologized. As a Hasidic scholar, this was a tradition Rosenberg was well versed in. Ira Robinson reads *Nifla’ot* as Rosenberg’s attempt to modernize traditional and dated forms of Jewish storytelling by presenting them in modern literary styles (Robinson 65-66).

may have been one of the more severe offenders, similar practices were not unusual among Hasidic writers at the time (Robinson 77). Hasidic literature often placed a high value on the holiness of Jewish religious leaders and their words. Borrowing the names of famous leaders was a way to coopt their fame and authority (Robinson 61-62). By calling the stories in *Nifla'ot* factual accounts by Rabbi Isaac Katz and by using such a notable figure as Rabbi Loew, Rosenberg sought to magnify the importance and reception of his own work, and to provide validity to the narrative and to its implications.

The primary goal of *Nifla'ot*, like the folklore collections and hagiography it emulates, was to endorse a traditional view of Ashkenazi heritage. Rosenberg wrote the novel at a time when nations were racing to create unique ethnic narratives for their nationalist agendas. The borrowing of Isaac and Loew's legitimacy and the adaptation of the already famous myth of the Golem was an attempt to provide *Nifla'ot* authenticity, and thus provide authenticity to Rosenberg's traditional representation of Ashkenazi culture in the novel. This tactic seems to have worked as the novel was quite successful after its publication and even more so after it was stolen and rewritten in German by Chayim Bloch in 1917. The novel surged in popularity again after the Bloch version was translated to English in 1925.

Nifla'ot is best remembered as definitively turning the golem into a protector of the Jews. Rosenberg's golem is made specifically to protect against the blood libel, the accusation against Jews of ritual murder or sacrifice: "You have to know that we created you so that you would protect the Jews from harm," (Rosenberg 14) says Loew to the golem when it is created. The blood libel is this harm, and it had been a very real one throughout much of European Jewish history. In most cases, the blood libel was the accusation that Jews were ritually sacrificing

Christians. The victims were usually children or virgin women murdered to use their blood to make Passover matzos or to reenact the crucifixion.

However, there were no blood libels in Prague during Rabbi Loew's time (Kieval 112). Loew lived in a period of relatively good relations between Jews and Bohemian Christians, the so-called "The Golden Age of Prague Jewry." The blood libel was in fact a significant issue of Rosenberg's time, not Loew's. It had resurfaced, along with other medieval accusations against Jews, in the rising anti-Semitism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Robinson 69). The most recent accusation of blood libel was in 1899 and 1900, less than a decade before *Nifla'ot* was published, in a trial known as the Hilsner Affair, which began in Eastern Bohemia.²⁰ Rosenberg would have undoubtedly known of this infamous legal trial because of his own close proximity in Poland, and perhaps was more acutely attentive to it because of its close proximity to Prague, an important cultural center for the Ashkenazim and for the golem legend. The Hilsner Affair began when Leopold Hilsner, a Jewish vagrant, was accused of murdering Anežka Hružová, a 19-year-old Catholic girl, and then later another Catholic girl, Marie Klímová. The girl's bodies had been drained of blood, leading the prosecutors and the press to accuse Hilsner additionally of ritual murder. This caused anti-Jewish riots across Bohemia and Moravia. After first convicting Hilsner, the case was appealed by later-president of Czechoslovakia, Tomáš G. Masaryk. Hilsner was convicted again and sentenced to death, but by that time the case had become a raging debate across the empire. Emperor Franz Josef commuted Hilsner's sentence to life imprisonment in 1900 and in 1918 Emperor Charles I gave him a full pardon.

²⁰ Others around this time include the blood libel made against fifteen Jews in Tiszaeszlár in 1882, and the blood libel made against Adopl Lew in Prussia in 1900.

The Hilsner Affair and similar famous anti-Semitic conflicts around the turn of the century,²¹ like the Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906), made the growing anti-Semitism in European society eminently clear. As a blood libel, the Hilsner affair was further terrifying because it evidenced the resurgence of a maddened, medieval mode of anti-Semitism that, in theory, was incompatible with the supposedly enlightened society of the modern day. Thus, the reason for Rosenberg's focus on the blood libel is easy to see, as is his choice to retell the golem legend. In order to fight an anti-Semitic movement that was pulling medieval accusations like the blood libel from the past, so too did Rosenberg have to dig up ancient history—or what he perceived to be ancient—the famous legend of the golem.

The focus on the blood libel is immediately clear in *Nifla'ot*. Rosenberg's Rabbi Loew comes to Prague in 1572 at a time when “the blood libel was making life very difficult for the Jews, and much innocent Jewish blood had already been shed because of that foul accusation. Rabbi Leyb²² proclaimed he would struggle with all his might against the blood libel and rid the Jews forever of that dreadful lie” (Rosenberg 6). Though many stories in *Nifla'ot* are not directly related to the blood libel, every separate conflict is presented as symptomatic of larger conflict between the Jewish and gentile community, which reaches its peak in instances of the blood libel. The blood libel is the primary threat in the novel that Loew fights. The creation of the golem is his main method to stop it, as is demonstrated by the subtitle of *Nifla'ot* in its original

²¹ Taking a similar reading of *Nifla'ot* here, Spiro mentions some other significant events: “the popular distribution of the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion (1903-1906), the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, and the Kiev pogrom in October 1905. If the modern era had ushered in hopes for emancipation, these events threatened to make a mockery of those hopes. Aside from the rise in anti-Semitic rhetoric in the media following the publication of the Protocols, during the Kishinev pogrom, over a span of forty-eight hours, forty-nine Jews were murdered, women were raped, and dozens of homes, businesses, and synagogues were looted. In the even more terrifying Kiev pogrom, one hundred Jews were killed and three hundred injured, followed by an even bloodier wave of violence; over the next six months no less than one hundred and sixty other towns and villages were attacked in riots, with an estimate of over three thousand Jews murdered and many thousands wounded.” (Spiro 3)

²² Another spelling of Loew.

publication, “All the signs and wonders that the great and wise Maharal of Prague effected with the aid of the Golem, which he created to battle against the blood libel” (Kieval 112). However, the creation of the golem is not Loew’s only method to fight the blood libel. He first tries unsuccessfully to defeat the blood libel through traditional means. His first action in Prague, before he creates the golem, is to hold a debate between himself and 300 Catholic priests on the validity of the blood libel. In “The Disputation”, as it is called, the priests produce such a volume of questions on Judaism that “they filled an entire history book,” (Rosenberg 7). The narrator explains that the major controversies centered on five questions:

1. Is it true that Jews need Christian blood for Passover?
2. Are the Jews guilty of the murder of “Christ”?
3. Does Jewish law require Jews to hate Christians because it regards Christianity as idol worship?
4. Why do Jews hate a person who converts from Judaism and why do they strive to wipe him off the face of the earth?
5. Why do Jews consider themselves greater than other nations because of their Torah?
After all, other nations can be even prouder of being honest and decent, since they haven’t been urged to be so with a great and difficult Torah. (Rosenberg 7)

Loew responds to each of these questions in turn with a logical and evidenced answer that satisfies all but the evil priest Tadeush. Rosenberg, here, reenacts some of the major debates held in contemporary anti-Semitic discourse. Though he presents both the accusation of the evil of Jews and the response to it in entirely religious terms—unlike the contemporary discourse that had largely moved away from religious justifications in favor of pseudo-scientific evidence for

Jewish degeneracy—Rosenberg nonetheless presents the same basic argument: Jews are evil by nature; and the same response, that they are in fact only misunderstood.

Loew's response to the first question is that "Jews regard blood as an unclean thing. Jews are strictly commanded to avoid blood... for the Torah calls blood an abomination" (Rosenberg 7). Though the response is logical, it is strangely a very orthodox response to what is essentially an accusation of zealotry. The accusation is two-fold: both that Jews murder Christians for their blood and that Jews are bound by their religion, unable to go against its laws. The blood libel rests on the belief that Jews are religious fanatics, willing to do anything to satisfy their bizarre heathen laws. We can read ritual murder by Jews as a dramatization of the ancient rite of Jewish animal sacrifice, long since abandoned by the Jewish faith. Rather than argue that ritual sacrifice is no longer practiced by Jews, Loew cites the Jewish commandment to avoid blood. This refutes the accusation of Jewish barbarity, but by accepting and reinforcing the accusation that Jews were hyper-religious. The abstention from blood is a real law²³ and thus does provide Loew with a solid argument, but it furthers the notion that Jewish are a strictly religious people—they do not murder children for blood because of the immorality of the act, but because their religion forbids them from the act for sanitary reasons.

The broadness of questions 2-5 and their lack of direct relevance to the blood libel demonstrates the greater complexity of the Christian-Jewish relationship that surrounded the blood libel. It was a complex issue that had roots in many layers of society. For the sake of brevity, I limit further analysis to the second question, whether the Jews are guilty of murdering

²³ Leviticus 7: 26-27: "And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people," and Leviticus 17:13-14, "Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

Christ. In response to this Loew claims that the Jews guilty of killing Christ were only those in league with the evil King Herod and the Roman government, while most Jews “particularly the Pharisees and the Essenes” (Rosenberg 7) refused to pass judgment on Christ. Here, Rosenberg alludes to a common claim that Ashkenazi Jews were innocent of Christ’s murder because they were descended from distinct groups in Roman Israel unconnected to Christ. Both the accusation and response assume a genealogical component to guilt. The accusation is one that dates back to the beginnings of Christianity, but returns in modern times, demonstrating the widespread effort to configure Jews as a race, one capable of inheriting sin. The Jewish response to the accusation of the murder of Christ denies the guilt while accepting the genetic potential for it. Loew’s argument is not that the Jews are innocent of Christ’s murder, but that the Ashkenazi are descended from different Jews. Rosenberg’s response skirts the genetic sin by sidestepping it, claiming a slightly different racial origin, but nonetheless perpetuating the portrayal of Jews as a distinct race, one capable of inheriting abstract qualities like sin. His effort to change Portrayal of Jews here removes the quality of guilt, but maintains and enforces the designation of as a separate race.

What Loew, the priests, and Rosenberg seem to realize is that an accusation like the blood libel is a convoluted one linked to many issues regarding Jews. The rapidity with which Christians blame Jewish communities for murder was due to the mistrust and the (supposed) void between those communities. That mistrust by Christians, Rosenberg asserts, is based largely on how Jews portray themselves as superior and distance themselves from Christians. The acknowledgement of this standpoint, regardless of whether or not the issues any of these questions were ever postulated in a Disputation or ever had any relevance to a blood libel, is nonetheless a non-traditional one by Rosenberg. He is attempting to understand and correct the

ways in which Christians see Jews and what elements of Judaism have given credence to that image.

Rosenberg is aware, then, that anti-Semitic conflict like the blood libel is primarily an issue of how Jews are portrayed. Thus, the priest's subsequent questions in the Disputation and Loew's responses to them have nothing to do with the blood libel, but are instead about issues of the Jewish image as seen from the Christian eye. Are Jews guilty? Do Jews hate Christians? Do Jews hate converts? Do Jews think they are better than Christians?

Loew wins the Disputation, but ultimately this does nothing to stop the blood libel, as the nefarious Tadeush is still determined to instigate one against the Jewish community. Logic alone is not enough to stop it. Thus, Loew's defense against the blood libel has to be multifaceted. Demonstrating this in broad strokes, we can see that Loew fights the blood libel in three ways himself. His argument in the Disputation reflects his effort to fight rationally and academically, through logos. He uses pathos, as well, by consistently appealing to the religious morality of the Christian community, and by making the Jewish community pray during times of conflict. He uses ethos by asking Christians to sympathize with the suffering of the Jewish community. These multifaceted responses to anti-Semitism show some of the key ways Rosenberg has constructed Loew to be a role model for contemporary Jews.

Loew's use of logos, pathos, and ethos reflect Rosenberg's belief that all are necessary to combat the political and social strife of contemporary European Jews. However, Rosenberg also asserts that those methods are not enough. Ethos, the emotional appeal by Jews to Christians had proven useless in the renewed pogroms and expulsions of modern day. Pathos was equally ineffective as Europeans were becoming more secular and coming to see Jews as separate by race, not only separate by religion. Logos, best represented in contemporary discourse through

the defense of the Jewish community by Jewish scholars, also had little effect. Though all these methods are still necessary, there is another force needed to stop the blood libel: force, represented in the overwhelming strength of the golem.

In *Nifla'ot*, Rosenberg uses the immense strength of the golem to represent a new, powerful Jewish body. This image was aligned with the then popular figure of the “Muscle Jew,” coined by Zionist and social critic Max Nordau in a speech given in 1898, an image of a “new type of Jew—corporeally strong, sexually potent, and morally fit” (Presner 269).²⁴ Nordau’s Muscle Jew was part of a growing European politics of the body in the fin-de-siècle, largely originating in Germany, which stressed the importance of a powerful, healthy male body to provide a strong backbone for the nationalist cause. These new concept of the body arose as a reaction to the supposed degeneracy of the human body in modern urban life, the belief in which was widespread at this time. To combat the physical and moral degeneracy of man, the body politic stressed masculinity, martial strength, a bond between a healthy body and healthy mind, and the physical superiority of particular races. Anti-Semitic discourse considered Jews flawed in every aspect of this body politic. They were thought to be effeminate, to make poor soldiers, to have sickly bodies and unsound minds, and they were considered racially inferior in every possible physical manner.

Nordau’s Muscle Jew was a response to those anti-Semitic claims. It was an image popular in Zionist discourse “which called upon sport... as one of the central means of shaping

²⁴ Jason Ager has the same reading: Consistent with the strivings for Jewish sovereignty paramount in the Zionist movement, the figure of the “muscle-Jew,” proposed by ardent Zionist Max Nordau around the turn of the 20th century, is a direct response to negative stereotypes of Jewish masculinity and the Jewish body in this historical period. Hyper-masculine notions of the Golem, among other traditional Jewish figures of strength like Samson or the Maccabees, undoubtedly lurk behind this renaissance of Jewish corporeality, since the Golem’s strength and physical prowess are at the heart of traditional telling of the legend. This focus on unflinching physicality spurs turn of the century messianic interpretations of the legend, as seen in Rosenberg’s version, since this movement of “Muskel-Judentum” sought to create Jews capable of protecting the community through focus on physical prowess.” (22-23)

the new Jewish body. Nordau's desire was not merely for an improvement in the physical wellbeing of the Jew, but rather an acknowledgement of the older German tradition which saw an inherent relationship between the healthy political mind and the healthy body...." (Gilman 53) Nordau flatly refused the accusation that modern Jews were degenerate (Presner 281), but simultaneously recognized the claim by calling for a new Muscle Jew that could compete with the new European ideal body. This Muscle Jew, in Nordau's mind, was not a novel invention, but a return to the strength of the ancient biblical Jews. Nordau's idealism, popularized largely by his extensive lectures to Zionist organizations, became a central element of early Zionism. Through lectures to the Bar Kochba Association²⁵ in Prague and other organizations, the Muscle Jew was popularized among later famous Jewish authors in Max Brod's "Prague Circle,"²⁶ such as Franz Kafka, and among many other prominent Jewish writers and artists in the same period.

Rosenberg's ultimate response to anti-Semitism was to reform the image of the Jew to match the Muscle Jew, an attempt to change the way Jews perceived their own image. This new, powerful Jewish image of the self would be better fit to combat modern anti-Semitism.

Rosenberg recognized that anti-Semitic strife like the blood libel originated in the problematic way many gentiles saw Jews and in the disempowered way Jews may have seen themselves. Rosenberg set out to create the "New Jew." Looking the more recent history of Ashkenazi Jews in Europe rather than biblical Jews as Nordau did, Rosenberg emulated the old stories he knew well and formed this new body from the river clay. What rose was the powerful golem reborn.

²⁵ A Zionist student organization in Bohemia and Moravia founded in 1893 and active until World War I.

²⁶ An unofficial group of liberal German-language Jewish authors in Prague that centered around the writer Max Brod (1884-1968). Rosenberg did not live in Prague and was not a member of this group. Gustav Meyrink, however, though not Jewish, is often mentioned along authors of the Prague Circle as he was friends with Brod and knew Kafka.

Rosenberg's golem is a new generation of Jew crafted by the older generation, Rabbi Loew, with the purpose of saving the Jewish community. The golem is athletic and powerful in a way that Jews had never been before. That old image had to be revitalized and reshaped into a powerful and athletic form in order for Jews to survive and finally overcome their historic oppression. Though Rosenberg uses the figure of the Muscle Jew through the golem, he does not endorse the removal of the figure of the traditional Jew. Rather than replace the traditional image of the Jewish male with the Muscle Jew, Rosenberg presents them both as positive ideals of Jewish masculinity working in unison to stop anti-Semitism. Loew emblemizes the traditional Jewish representation of masculinity that originates in the biblical patriarchs (Solomon, David, Moses, Abraham, etc.) and was mirrored by famous medieval and early modern Jewish figures, the famous rabbis, scholars, and gaons²⁷ of Ashkenazi Jews. This traditional figure is generally elderly, patriarchal, wise, a scholar, and in most cases also a rabbi. It was an image based on intelligence, piety, and religious scholarship rather than on athleticism, strength, and youthful virility. Rosenberg's representation of this archetype through Loew adheres closely to how it had developed in Jewish ethnography and Hasidic hagiography. As Ruth Murphy describes this archetype in ethnographic tradition,

[he is] typically a (male) rabbi or biblical figure. He is endowed with an extraordinary intellectual spiritual prowess that is matched only by his humility. Built as a composite based on genuine figures in Jewish history, the hero is at once a legendary figure, a mythical creature and fairytale icon. He serves as a symbol and affirmation of Jewish

²⁷ A master of Talmudic scholarship.

beliefs and traditions, both modeling and inspiring the proscribed Jewish thought and behavior. (113)

This representation of Jewish masculinity overlapped with the long held anti-Semitic stereotype of male Jews as wizened, impotent, superstitious, and intelligent but hysteric old men. That anti-Semitic was an image that Nordau and other Zionists sought to eliminate and replace with the new, virile Muscle Jew.

Rosenberg makes the Muscle Jew subservient to the traditional Jew through the golem's relationship to Loew. The golem does the grunt work, acting as enforcer, bodyguard, arsonist, and kidnapper, while Loew handles the intellectual challenges of solving crimes, dealing with the Christian authorities, and ruling the Jewish community. The golem performs Loew's muscle work without question and reveres the rabbi above all else. The acts and 'miracles' that the golem performs are orchestrated by Rabbi Loew—the golem is simply his agent to carry them out; without Loew the golem is useless. Thus, Rosenberg implies that the new generation of Jewish masculinity, the Muscle Jew, is necessary to stop anti-Semitic oppression, but is reliant on the traditional form of Jewish masculinity represented by Rabbi Loew.

Through the duo of Loew and the golem, Rosenberg attempts to restructure the portrayal of Jews in a similar way that Nordau did, but nuances this change in image by showing that the traditional and new forms of Jewish masculinity are distinct but contingent on one another in the modern era. As neither Loew nor the golem is capable of stopping the blood libel individually, Rosenberg suggests that a unison between both types of masculinity is necessary to stop anti-Semitic oppression.

Rosenberg's division of Jewish masculinity reflects the contemporary argument held in Jewish social and scientific discourse over the Muscle Jew. M. Jastrowitz, in a 1908 article in *Jewish Gymnastics News*, argued against Nordau's Muscle Jew, claiming that an overemphasis on exercise would not cure the Jewish propensity for neurological disease, as Nordau claimed, but hurt the Jew's greatest asset, his mind (Gilman 54). Rosenberg consolidates both arguments by separating Jewish masculinity into two halves along generational lines. He assigns older Jews, like Loew, the role of the orthodox, intellectual, community leader, while giving younger Jews the role of Muscle Jew, like the golem, the athletic, powerful new Jew who could protect the community through force if needed. Rosenberg dismisses the debate of whether the figure of the Muscle Jew hurts the superior Jewish mind by assigning it to a phase of male Jewish development: exercise and strength are duties of young (and obedient) men; leadership, diplomacy, and scholarship are the responsibilities of their fathers.

Rosenberg's image of the Muscle Jew also contradicts Nordau's in that it embraces a heritage in Medieval Ashkenazi mysticism rather than a heritage rooted solely in biblical literature and history. Nordau saw the Muscle Jew as a necessary future in both physical bodies and in art, in that it was a figure that would correct both the degeneracy of the physical body and what Nordau deemed to be degenerate art. Mysticism and superstition, considered by Nordau to be distinct from religion and biblical myths, were elements of this degenerate art (Presner 279). *Nifla'ot* is laden with biblical imagery and allusion, but Rosenberg makes no delineation between this and medieval mysticism. Both are present and valorized. To Rosenberg (and to the Hasidic movement in general) mysticism, like the golem legend, was considered equally authentic.

Rosenberg's recreation of the golem as a new form of Jewish masculinity and his insistence on the unison of this with traditional Jewish masculinity have major implications on

Nifla'ot's representations of Jewish sexuality. In Rosenberg's time anti-Semitic discourse was intensifying the image of the Jew as a sexual deviant, a degeneracy that was increasingly based on the supposed racial difference of the Jews. Anti-Semites considered Jewish women to be the most sultry, seductive, and diseased of prostitutes. Jewish men were correspondingly portrayed as seducers, rapists, and child molesters—perpetually preying on innocent Christian women.

This stereotype of the sexually deviant Jew is one of the myths Rosenberg despises most. In *Nifla'ot* it is wicked Christian priests who are sexual aggressors or implied sexual aggressors; Loew and the golem must protect the sexual purity of the Prague Jewish community from them above all else. This occurs in several of *Nifla'ot*'s tales, but it surfaces most acutely in “The Wondrous Tale That Was Widely Known as the Sorrows of the Daughter” (25-36). In this tale, one of the longest of the book, Tadeush attempts to convert the daughter of a Jewish wine merchant, who is left nameless. After convincing her to undergo a baptism he locks her in a church where no one will find her. He then arranges for her to marry the son of a duke. The couple meet and fall in love, but Loew sends the golem and steals the girl back before the marriage or baptism can happen. Loew then hides the girl in Amsterdam where she lives with relatives under a different name. The lackey in charge of guarding the girl in the church, fearing Tadeush's wrath, burns the room where she was kept and fakes her death. Hearing of his fiancée's death, the duke's son vows to only marry a Jewish girl. He leaves Prague, converts to Judaism, and enters a Yeshiva under a false identity. Years later he is considered a student prodigy and is arranged to marry an orphaned woman in Amsterdam. This woman turns out to be the same daughter of the Jewish wine merchant. The couple realize each other's identities, marry, return to Prague, and happily live out the rest of their days.

This story opposes anti-Semitic portrayals of Jewish sexuality in the immediate sense of turning it into something in need of protection rather than a force of corruption, not unexpectedly. It further combats anti-Semitism by citing Christians, and indeed a priest, as a threat to Jewish sexuality and in particular female Jewish sexuality. This is evidenced in Tadeush's attempted conversion of the merchant's daughter, described as overtly sexual:

The priest cast an evil eye upon the daughter; he wanted to get her to his home and talk her into converting to Christianity. He had already ruined a number of Jewish girls in this way. But this time there was no way of getting to her. She was a decent girl with pious parents and a fine lineage. She never even went for a stroll. (Rosenberg 26)

This "ruining" of Jewish girls blurs the line between the girl's religious infidelity and her sexual infidelity. The priest convinces the wine merchant's daughter to sample some wine, which Rosenberg describes as a "pagan liquor forbidden to Jews" (Rosenberg 27). Through the corrupting power of alcohol,

Her character changed. She entered into a long conversation with the priest and felt more and more drawn to him. And when she left his house to go back home, she shook hands of her own accord and very amicably said good-bye to him, giving the priest the opportunity of asking her to visit him more often.... She began secretly corresponding with the priest and would sometimes visit him alone late at night, until one night she didn't even come home to sleep. (Rosenberg 27)

The girl's time in Tadeush's clutches is metaphorically described as a sexual affair and simultaneously a religious infidelity, thus, it is both her religion and the purity of her sexuality at stake.

Rosenberg alters the image of the Jew as a sexual degenerate in this story. He does not fully deny the charge that Jews were sexually degenerate (the merchant's daughter does succumb to the Priest's seduction), rather he reverses the source of that degeneracy on to Christians (the priest, Tadeush, is the sexual aggressor), simultaneously shifting blame to Jewish women and away from Jewish men. Indeed, it is Jewish masculinity that must save the day when Jewish femininity is in danger. Loew and the golem step in to save this girl's sexual purity, sensing that a risk to her sexuality is a risk to the Jewish community as a whole. Loew and the golem's 'rescuing' of the girl demonstrates the necessity of male Jewish control over female Jewish sexuality, endorsing conservative sexuality in a way one would expect from an orthodox Hasidic rabbi like Rosenberg.

However, this controlling figure of masculinity is again divided between Loew and the golem. Through the golem, Rosenberg suggests that it is the job of the new Jewish man to protect the Jewish woman's fragile sexuality through strength and virility. It is the job of Rabbi Loew, on the other hand, to be the patriarchal, traditional Jewish male who dictates what safe sexuality for Jewish women is and to determine when breaches in that law have been made. We can see a justification for the traditional Jewish male's control over the community's sexuality through religious authority. In "The Tale of the Torah That Fell to the Ground on Yom Kippur" Loew becomes aware that one of the men of his congregation is committing adultery when the Torah is dropped on the ground during the evening prayers. Similarly, in "This is the Wonderful and Miraculous Tale of What Rabbi Leyb Did for the Two Beryls Whose Children Were

Exchanged by a Midwife” (43) Rabbi Loew keeps dropping his wineglass when pronouncing his blessing for a marriage. After a thorough investigation by Loew and the Golem it is revealed that the intended are actually brother and sister and the marriage is annulled. Thus, both Jewish women and Jewish men are beholden to the laws of the traditional older Jewish man who is both the religious authority and sexual authority for the entire Jewish community.

An important characteristic of Rosenberg’s portrayal of the traditional Jewish male, embodied in Rabbi Loew, is that he is an entirely unassimilated figure. Even if at times Loew’s methods are unusual, he is throughout the novel an orthodox, conservative rabbi—the unchanging center of the Jewish community that emblemizes Judaism itself. But what of the golem and the new Jew? Must he be as staunchly unassimilated as Rabbi Loew? To answer this we must examine Rosenberg’s attitude in *Nifla’ot* towards assimilation and towards Christian-Jewish relations as a whole.

In *Nifla’ot* problems arise when Jews and Christians mix, as in the case when a Christian butcher tries to incite a blood libel against his Jewish employer in “Rabbi Leyb’s First Miracle with the Golem” (Rosenberg 17), or when Christian workers in a Jewish-owned tannery try to incite a blood libel in “The Last Blood Libel in Prague in Rabbi Leyb’s Lifetime” (Rosenberg 63). Intermarriage is an issue as well, as seen earlier in “The Sorrows of a Daughter,” only overcome when the Christian son of the Duke converted to Judaism.

The setting of the ghetto is important to the topic of assimilation as well, as the ghetto was historically the site where Jews had lived separately from Christian society. As discussed earlier, Rosenberg uses *Nifla’ot* to renew a traditional Jewish cultural heritage in modern day. The resurrection of the famous golem and Rabbi Loew, perceived by Rosenberg as relics of traditional Jewish culture, was a way to do that, as was the ghetto. Rosenberg identified the

ghetto, and in particular the famous Prague ghetto, as another source of Jewish heritage. *Nifla'ot* romanticizes Jewish life within the ghetto as a time when orthodox patriarchy still held full control over the Jewish community, and was respected by Christians as well as Jews.²⁸ It aligns with the so-called “Golden Age of Prague Jewry,” most closely associated with the tolerant reigns of Emperor Maximilian (1564-1576) and Emperor Rudolf II (1576-1612), when the real Loew was High Rabbi of Prague.

However, this anti-assimilationist stance does not totally exclude Christian involvement in the Jewish community. There are good Christians in *Nifla'ot* integral to the Jewish community and there are bad Jews who are corrupting it. To Rosenberg, assimilation is most problematic not when there is cross-over between the Christian and Jewish communities, but when Jews abandon Judaism. This is best demonstrated in “The Wondrous Tale of the Healer’s Daughter” (Rosenberg 19), which begins:

There lived in Prague a Jewish healer named Moritsy. And even though he had strayed far from Judaism, he nevertheless considered himself a Jew. The healer had a daughter, fifteen years old, who became rather licentious and allowed herself to be talked into converting to Christianity. During Passover Week she ran away from home and took refuge with Tadeush, the infamous priest, who was known far and wide as an anti-Semite. (Rosenberg 19).

²⁸ Repeatedly throughout *Nifla'ot* it is mentioned that Loew is held in high regard by Christians, including many priests, judges, and Emperor Rudolf.

Like in “The Sorrows of a Daughter,” this Jewish girl’s religious infidelity is associated with her sexual infidelity. Additionally, however, as her father is a lapsed Jew, her susceptibility to conversion is associated with her partially assimilated background. Tadeush not only converts her, but convinces her to give false testimony against the Jewish community in order to incite a blood libel. Evidently to Rosenberg, straying from Judaism leads to conversion, which is identical to betraying the Jewish community entirely.

Before the girl’s conversion, a Christian woman who worked in the ghetto had gotten into a fight with her Jewish employer and left the city. Tadeush urges his convert to testify that this woman had been murdered and her blood taken to be used for Passover matzos.²⁹ Through some deception, however, Loew is able to stall the trial in time for the golem to retrieve the Christian woman from the countryside and bring her to the court. The accusation is proven to be a lie, Tadeush is rebuked, and the convert thrown in prison for bearing false witness.

Rosenberg does not set the Jewish and Christian community against each other in this near case of blood libel. The guilt here is placed only on Tadeush and the girl (and implicitly her father whose straying from Judaism caused all this). The Christian community does not want a blood libel at all. The cardinal who took the girl’s testimony did not believe it,³⁰ many in the court laugh at Tadeush’s claims (Rosenberg 23), the judge kisses Rabbi Loew on the forehead when the accusation is proven false,³¹ and in the end the entire “city of Prague ‘rejoiced and was glad’” (Rosenberg 25).

²⁹ “She claimed that she had witnessed Jews putting blood in the unleavened bread for Passover, that the blood had come from the Christian women who used to light the stoves for Jews on the Sabbath, and that the men behind it were Rabbi Leyb and his two assistants” (Rosenberg 20).

³⁰ “The things the healer’s daughter said made the rounds of the city lightning fast, and the cardinal had to take down her testimony, even though at heart he cared little for her denunciation. But he could not hush it up because of Father Tadeush. He promptly sent word to Rabbi Leyb about the matter so that he might hit upon some way of proving the truth.” (Rosenberg 20)

³¹ “The presiding judge kissed Rabbi Leyb on the forehead and thanked him for his energetic labor and great wisdom, which had prevented the judges from falsely convicting pure souls” (Rosenberg 25).

In *Nifla'ot* the Jewish and Christian communities of Prague seem to have an oddly good relationship outside of a few devout anti-Semites like Tadeush and a few corruptible Jewish girls like the one in this story. What Rosenberg seems to suggest is that Jewish-Christian relations are at their best when communities understand each other well, as was true with the cardinal and judge who were not swayed by Tadeush's lies or earlier in the Disputation when Rabbi Loew demonstrated an extensive knowledge of Christian theology, but do not intermingle. Hardship comes when Christians are in the ghetto, when Jews are outside of the ghetto, and when pure Jewish sexuality is breached.

Thus, Rosenberg's stance on assimilation appears moderately conservative, open to mutual understanding between Jews and gentiles but not to intermixing and assimilation. However, this does not tell us specifically about the golem and the New Jew in context of assimilation. This is because the golem is not a perfect metaphor for a new generation of Jews. The legend demands that Rabbi Loew put the golem down and stow his body in the Alt-Neu Synagogue. The golem has no future, children, or choice to assimilate, so it cannot inform us to Rosenberg's future for the new Jew.

Recognizing that ultimately the golem is a flawed metaphor for the new Jew we must conjecture Rosenberg's message based on what information we have. Remembering that to Rosenberg straying from the Jewish community is tantamount to conversion, we can look to Loew's unyielding denunciation of converts during the Disputation: "A born Jew, who tears himself loose from his roots... brings shame upon his brethren, which is why he is hated by Jews and regarded as despicable. And any intelligent man will understand that such hatred is a natural thing, like all natural things" (Rosenberg 10). Loew's "natural" hatred of a convert tells us that,

whatever form the new Jew takes, Rosenberg would not condone one that in any way abandoned Judaism.

Rosenberg, in the face of anti-Semitic violence flaring up in Central Eastern Europe at the turn of the century, reformed the golem to represent renewed Jewish strength. In doing so, Rosenberg recognized two things. First, as Rabbi Lowe realizes during the Disputation, violent anti-Semitic outbreaks may be triggered by allegations like the blood libel, but they were more broadly caused by the negative way Jews were portrayed – as both sinister and weak. Second, Rosenberg recognized that the famous golem could be used to portray the Jew. The golem had long been an icon of Jewishness, a cultural memory among Jews and a monstrous signifier of the Jew among anti-Semites. To revive it for his purposes, Rosenberg had to remove the golem's negative associations as a destroyer and as a monster, and reshape it into a new powerful Jewish body.

These changes, however, came with Rosenberg's conservative baggage. The golem, this new Jew, was forced to stand behind Rabbi Loew, the traditional Jewish patriarch and the real hero of *Nifla'ot*. This constraint reflected Rosenberg's inability to fully endorse the modern Jewish discourse he had bound his creation to, the Muscle Jew. That discourse rebuilt the image of the Jewish man at the cost of eliminating the traditional image of the Jewish man, a price that an orthodox Hasidic Rabbi like Rosenberg may have felt threatened by. The same reservation gives *Nifla'ot* its conservative ideas on sexuality and assimilation. Rosenberg saw that Jews needed to change in the modern era, but for him this could not come at the loss of tradition.

There is little substantial information on *Nifla'ot*'s publication or reception and without this it is difficult to conjecture how well it resonated with audiences. The novel's conservative tone may have put off unorthodox readers. Certainly readers were fascinated with the golem as

the new protector of the ghetto, as this function became a defining theme of the legend in many versions since *Nifla'ot*.

Returning to the idea of the golem as a palimpsest, we can see that Rosenberg inscribed the legend with a new archetype of Jewish masculinity. He made the immense, mighty body of the golem into a metaphor for what young Jews had to become in the modern era. It was a change in body, but also a change in image – a new way for Jews to portray themselves. In writing *Nifla'ot*, Rosenberg took what he defined “Jewishness” to be and divided it into separate images. This new Jewish image did not replace the traditional image of the Jew in *Nifla'ot* represented by Rosenberg, but rather was presented with it, allowing for the two images to coexist together. Evidently, he did not feel the need to justify that either image was Jewish. Loew was the paragon of Jewishness, and, thus, his creation, the golem, was Jewish too. Rosenberg saw no issue in the unity of these contrasting images of new Jew and traditional Jew. In Meyrink’s *Der Golem*, our next subject of analysis, such a unity is impossible. His novel is constructed entirely from archetypes of the Jew, in many cases anti-Semitic stereotypes, which are completely oppositional to each other. The conflict between these images stems from the highly problematic way Meyrink, or at least his protagonist, defines “Jewishness.”

Meyrink's *Der Golem*

The subject of Meyrink's *Der Golem*, like Rosenberg's *Nifla'ot*, is the image of the Jew in the modern era.³² The novel divides the image of the Jew and sets those images against each other. This conflict between these images is rooted in the intangible elements of what Meyrink defines as Jewishness, and to which I will refer to as the "Jewish essence." The protagonist of *Der Golem*, Pernath, discovers he is a Jew. He must then come to grips with what he deems Jewishness. Pernath does this by both coming to understand the contrasting images of Jews in *Der Golem* and contending with the powerful, but intangible Jewish essence.

After introducing the novel, I will summarize the scholarly discourse around the novel with regard to its anti-Semitic content and frame my own analysis in the context of that debate. I will then discuss at greater length the relationship Meyrink builds between the Jewish image and the Jewish essence in *Der Golem*. Then, my analysis will follow Pernath and his bond with the golem, and in process frame how Pernath is a Jew. From there I will discuss the major characters of the novel as archetypes of the Jewish image and Pernath's interaction with them. That will lead us to a discussion of Jewish sexuality and assimilation, as it did with Rosenberg. I will then discuss how Pernath finally comes to terms with his Jewishness and discuss the implications of that resolution.

³² The novel was first released in serial form in the periodical *Die Weissen Blätter* in 1913 and later published as a novel in 1915 (Gelbin 100). The book was very successful, selling between 200,000 and 250,000 copies almost instantly (Bleiler xi). Like *Nifla'ot*, Meyrink's *The Golem* is difficult to categorize. Due to the fact that Meyrink was born in Vienna, his work is often classified as Austrian literature (Ager 1), but others place it within the tradition of German supernaturalist writers, among writers like Hanns Heinz Ewers (1871-1943), Karl Hans Strobl (1877-1946), and Hermann Hesse (1877-1962). Still others place Meyrink within the German-language literary movement in Prague, where he lived much of his life, alongside authors like Franz Kafka and others within Max Brod's so-called "Prague Circle." Scholars have had equal difficulty fitting the novel in any one genre. It contains elements of satire, supernaturalism, detective fiction, horror, and erotica. It is a work of high modernist style—chaotic, dream-like, fragmented, with a frame-tale narrative that often dives into further frames, and a highly unreliable narrator.

The novel begins as an unnamed narrator slips in and out of sleep after reading about the life of the Buddha. He dreams that he is a man named Athanasius Pernath, a lapidary who lived in the Prague ghetto around the beginning of the 20th century, 33 years before the time line of the unnamed narrator.³³ The unnamed narrator's brief moments of wakefulness quickly slip away and Pernath becomes the sole narrator of the novel. Pernath lives in a haunted, grotesque Jewish ghetto that exhibits every anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews to the extreme. He is visited in his home by a mysterious man who gives him a book of the Kabbala, *Ibbur* – “The Impregnation of Souls.” The man is silent and featureless, vanishing as soon as Pernath becomes absorbed in the book. Pernath reads the book and slips into a confusing dream state with visions of Kabbalist rituals, ancient gods, and hermaphroditic spirits. “Impregnated” by the text, Pernath beings a long phantasmagoric journey through the ghetto and the hidden world of the Kabbala, dotted with increasingly rare moments of lucidity and sanity. He becomes entangled in a web of intersecting plots and characters, filled with crime, adultery, hysteria, and Kabbalistic symbolism. Through Pernath's discordant dreams walks the golem, which in this novel is a ghost that awakens every 33 years to haunt the ghetto.

Despite the title *Der Golem*, Loew's man of clay features very little in it. The novel's perspective is Pernath's, and there is little in the way of an overarching plot. Rather than following a coherent storyline, the novel follows Pernath as he drifts between the many separate stories of the ghetto. The novel never lingers on one plot long, and rarely resolves them. Pernath becomes most entangled with the Czech student Charousek's scheme to take revenge on his father, Aaron Wassertrum, the novel's closest approximation of an antagonist. Through Zwakh

³³ *Der Golem* mentions several times in the novel that the “Stone Bridge,” also known as the Charles Bridge which connects the palace district of Prague to the Old City, has just collapsed. The Charles Bridge collapsed on in September of 1890, suggesting that the unnamed narrator lives in the year 1923.

and Charousek, Pernath also learns the stories of the ghetto, nearly all tales of Jewish criminals. These stories do not really seem to end, rather, they take place over and over through different characters within the ghetto. Like Meyrink's golem, these stories rise again as ghosts, rebounding in the twisting streets as the stories are retold again and again among the ghetto's inhabitants.³⁴ Late in the novel, Wassertrum plants evidence from a recent murder in Pernath's apartment, which leads to Pernath's arrest and incarceration. He returns to the ghetto after being released several months later and finds it has been destroyed during an urban renewal program. Pernath wanders the ruins of the ghetto until he finds the tenement where the golem is rumored to live in a secret room that has no door. It catches fire and Pernath falls from the building, but the narrative cuts off before we discover if he lives. The perspective then returns to the anonymous narrator from the start of the novel who goes to the former Prague ghetto and searches for the man named Pernath whose life he just experienced. He questions the old men of the former ghetto on Pernath and his history, hearing many conflicting rumors. Eventually the narrator finds Pernath, but only sees him at a distance. He has married Miriam, the beautiful and intelligent Jewess and daughter of the wise Kabbalist Hillel.

None of *Der Golem's* many tales reach a conclusion by the novel's end: the anonymous narrator's story is unfinished; we do not know how Pernath survived or what happened to him afterward; the murder Pernath is accused of goes unsolved; Wassertrum and Charousek are both dead, but rather than ending their feud, they seem to continue it in death.³⁵ The golem's 33-year cycle, too, gives no indication of ceasing. The ghetto has disappeared, but the stories that were

³⁴ The best example of this is a story Zwakh tells about a man who tried to get into the secret room of the golem (which will be explained shortly) by shimmying down a rope and climbing in the window. The rope breaks and the man dies (Meyrink 58). This motif will repeat many times. Later, Zwakh will tell a story about the murderer Babinski who escaped his execution because the rope used to hang him breaks. Near the end of the novel, Pernath will escape a burning building by climbing down a rope which breaks.

³⁵ "When Wassertrum finally dies of another cause, Charousek commits suicide to pursue his father even in the afterlife" (Gelbin 103).

bound to it seem to be immortal. Thus, *Der Golem*, a novel loosely constructed from wandering tales, ends without any sense of a traditional ending. In doing so, the novel reveals itself not to be about any one story, but about the act of storytelling itself. When a character retells one of the many tales of the Prague ghetto Meyrink stresses how that story is remembered, how it is told, and, most importantly, how it is experienced by the listener, Pernath.³⁶ These stories do not contain complex characters, rather stock images: the wizened Jewish scholar, conniving ghetto junk dealer, or grotesque yet seductive Jewess. Many scholars have noted the superficiality in these images,³⁷ which in many cases are overt anti-Semitic stereotypes, and see it as an intentional tactic by Meyrink.³⁸

It is the novel's anti-Semitism that scholars have debated most fervently. Critics falls roughly into two categories. One group argues that the novel's anti-Semitism is not that of Meyrink himself, but that of the novel's characters. Cathy Gelbin expresses this view by arguing that, though "the Jew in Meyrink is synonymous with a degenerate and catastrophic modernity" (100), *Der Golem's* narrator "emerges as a suspicious figure whose narrative machinations we must question, [thus] we must then also revisit the Jewish images we have seen through his eyes. Could it be that we must not read these simply at face value but also as deliberate reflections of the non-Jewish discourse on the Jew?" (Gelbin 110). Gelbin's analysis distances Meyrink from

³⁶ For instance, Zwakh tells Pernath the story of "The Regiment," a criminal organization in the ghetto. Before the story is even related to us, we are told Pernath's reaction to it: "I missed the old puppeteer's introduction to his story, I just felt as if I were slowly bleeding to death. I felt myself growing colder and colder, more and more rigid... I suddenly found myself right in the middle of the story; I felt somehow alienated from it, as if it were a lifeless piece from a school anthology." (Meyrink 72)

³⁷ Baer describes the novel as filled with "prominent and distasteful stereotypes of Jews" (44). Qasim writes that "there are no individual characters, but rather types with extreme patterns of behavior, no matter whether they are criminals or mystics" (141). Referencing Qasim's statement, Gelbin adds that the "types" are clearly taken from contemporary anti-Semitic discourse (Gelbin 101).

³⁸ For instance, Gelbin argues that "Wassertrum's mythological monstrosity is an image that, in its disturbing excess, does not merely reiterate its anti-Semitic inscription but also stages and exposes its artificiality." (Gelbin 111)

the anti-Semitism of the novel, framing anti-Semitism as another subject for Meyrink, the satirist, to critique.³⁹

Other scholars find this reading problematic. Elizabeth Baer argues that, though the novel may not present its anti-Semitic images as genuine, it also makes no attempt to criticize or subvert them: “In his depiction of characters in anti-Semitic terms, Meyrink has failed to critique or interrogate these age-old stereotypes.... [If] one shrinks back from labeling the novel itself anti-Semitic, we must at least acknowledge that this is a disrespectful intertextual appropriation” (Baer 49). Baer’s argument here is convincing. The overt anti-Semitic stereotypes of *Der Golem* may be filtered through the unreliable perspective of Pernath, and they may be intentionally used by Meyrink as evidence, but the novel makes no attempt to undermine these stereotypes. Pernath is certainly an untrustworthy narrator when it comes to relating the plot, and the “expert” knowledge of the ghetto he often imparts in his narration seems equally questionable, but his portrayal of the ghetto’s inhabitants does not. We may not be intended to accept the highly anti-Semitic statements of Pernath,⁴⁰ but the stereotypical characters he describes are not presented as inaccurate depictions of Jews. Baer’s argument has its limitations as well. It leads scholars to a largely reductive analysis of anti-Semitic portrayal of Jews in *Der Golem*, viewing its various characters simply as anti-Semitic stereotypes without in-depth examination of how those stereotypes are nuanced, how they conflict, and how they are certainly not presented as equal.

³⁹ Bleiler, in his introduction to *Der Golem*, claims similar: “How was Aaron Wassertrum to be taken? Or how Rosina? Are these to be read as anti-Semitism in Meyrink?... It is quite conceivable that these questions should be raised. Yet the answer is obvious and clear: no. Meyrink portrayed saints as well as villains, and he said no more about the Ghetto than has been said about ghettos of all sorts by generations of sociologists. (Bleiler xvii)

⁴⁰ For instance: “I understood the innermost nature of the mysterious creatures that live around me: they drift through life with no will of their own, animated by an invisible, magnetic current, just like the bridal bouquet floating past in the filthy water of the gutter. I felt as if the houses were staring down at me with malicious expressions full of nameless spite: the doors were black, gaping mouths in which the tongues had rotted away, throats which might at any moment give out a piercing cry, so piercing and full of hate that it would strike fear to the very roots of our soul.” (Meyrink 51)

Setting this argument aside for now, we can assert that the novel does at least display anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jew. Rather than discuss whether Meyrink was anti-Semitic, we will first attempt to understand how anti-Semitism functions in the novel. I will return to this debate at the end of this section.

Der Golem is at its heart an investigation of “Jewishness.” The protagonist, Pernath is a non-Jewish man living in the ghetto who discovers around the start of the novel that he has lost his memory and is, in fact, a Jew. Quite vehemently anti-Semitic at the start of the novel, Pernath must contend with this new Jewish identity, which, as an anti-Semite, he believes must totally redefine his character. He does this by dividing Jewishness into two overlapping, but distinct domains: the Jewish image and the Jewish essence. The Jewish image, as I define it for the purposes of this discussion, is the way Meyrink has depicted a Jewish character in the novel. As we will see, these images align with overt stereotypes of the Jew popular in contemporary anti-Semitic discourse. The entire personality of Jewish characters in the novel is bound to their image – they are what they appear to be. There are a limited number of images that Jews can have, and they appear to be inherited genetically. The images of the child match the images of the parent. This poses a problem for Pernath who does not know his ancestry. He discovers, however, that the Jewish image can be changed. Jews who assimilate alter their image to be non-Jewish. This is no solution though, as inevitably the denial of their “true” Jewish self causes them to be corrupted by their Jewish essence, which proves to be immutable. Pernath is only capable of seeing the Jews of the ghetto as static, one-dimensional caricatures that are either devout, mystical, and good, or grotesque, corrupted, and evil. Thus, to become a Jew, Pernath believes he must become one of these images. He desires to be the good image, but struggles to resist the corruptive evil side of Jewishness, and yet also feels drawn to that darker side. The

Jewish essence is an intangible and indescribable element that Pernath believes all Jews share. As we will see, Jewish characters are described as having intangible and largely undefinable elements to their being that make them Jewish. Because the Jewish essence is a characteristic in common to all Jews, Pernath feels he must discover it within himself. Pernath uses the golem to bond with the Jewish essence. As I will explain, the golem is a ghost in the ghetto that has absorbed all of the spiritual and emotional power of Jews in the ghetto. It thus becomes an embodiment of their Jewish essence. Pernath has a special relationship to the golem that causes him to bond to it in several scenes. Through these interactions, Pernath discovers his own Jewish essence.

Pernath himself is a transient and rootless character. His personality contorts to match the stereotypical images he encounters. Like the golem legend itself, this transient and malleable nature allows Pernath to function as a palimpsest. As scholars have argued, the golem legend functions like a palimpsest,⁴¹ one that, in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, oscillates between an anti-Semitic image of destroyer and a Jewish image of savior. In the same sense, Pernath is a palimpsest for what he perceives Jewishness to be. He observes differing modes of the Jewish image and the Jewish essence and inscribes them on to himself. It is in Pernath's fragile mind and body that the battle over the portrayal of Jews takes place.

⁴¹ See Thomas, *Prague Palimpsest*: "inscription and effacement serves as an effective metaphor for the status of the legend as a palimpsest: every time a new version is written, the previous version is partially effaced and partially preserved" (45); Baer, "*palimpsest*: texts layered upon texts through intertextual gestures that reveal and valorize various emphases at various times. This image of golem texts superimposed upon one another brings with it the notion that no one text is the "true" text and that all golem legends continue to exist and to serve as both sources and intertexts" (22); Ager sees the golem through a similar framework, but does not use the term palimpsest, "[the golem] operates as a vehicle of memory and on the intertextual level as a cultural product" (5); Dekel and Gurley also do not use the term palimpsest but have an analogous reading of the golem, "Like the piece of clay from which he is created, the literary Golem can be shaped and molded to resemble any form, from the spectral figures in Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's poetry to Leopold Kompert's nostalgic project and finally to Yudel Rosenberg's great protector of the Jewish people at the turn of the twentieth century" (244).

Pernath is able to function this way because he was mystically “impregnated” by the book *Ibbur*, “The Impregnation of Souls.” This force causes Pernath to contort to match images (people, dolls, hallucinations, etc.), the “souls” he comes in contact with, both in reality and through stories. We see this immediately when Pernath is given the *Ibbur*:

The book was speaking to me, just as dreams can speak, only more clearly and much more distinctly. It was like a question that touched me to the heart. Words streamed out from an invisible mouth, took on life and came towards me.... Strings of people in fancy dress danced past, laughing, ignoring me. Only a pierrot turned and gave me a thoughtful look, then came back to plant himself in front of me and look me in the face as if it were mirror. There was an eerie force in the bizarre faces he pulled and the movements of his arms, now hesitant, now lightning fast, that filled me with an irresistible urge to imitate him, to wink as he did, to shrug my shoulders and turn down the corners of my mouth.
(Meyrink 36-37)

The book, another “tale” in a sense, induces a vision that Pernath cannot help but imitate. After he awakens from the vision he realizes hours have gone by and he cannot remember the man who gave him the book. In an attempt to remember the mysterious man, Pernath imitates him, copying the way he entered the room: “I was trying to imitate the gait and expression of the unknown man when I could not even remember them... My skin, my muscles, my body suddenly remembered, without revealing the secret to my brain. They made movements that I had not willed, had not intended. As if my limbs no longer belonged to me!” (Meyrink 38) *Ibbur* makes Pernath function like a marionette puppet, matching the movements of the man. Pernath

does not do this voluntarily; though he began emulating the man in this scene, the mysterious kabbalistic force of *Ibbur* takes over totally. Pernath feels that even his face seems to change: “I was wearing an alien face, clean-shaven, with prominent cheek-bones; I was looking at my room out of slanting eyes” (Meyrink 39). Pernath is terrified, but he gains something from the experience. By mirroring the man he learns more about him, realizing that it walked with a “strange, faltering gait” (Meyrink 38). “Yes, yes, yes! That was the way *he* walked!” Pernath realizes, “I knew quite clearly: that is the way he is” (Meyrink 38-39). This scene begins what will become a major theme of *Der Golem*: Pernath mirrors an image, and by warping to match it, learns something about that image, in this instance the “way he is.” This man, Pernath will soon discover, was the golem. Not the clay golem from legend, but the ghost of that creature. It is featureless, vanishing, and impossible to remember. Meyrink’s golem seems to represent the unknowable, yet Pernath overcomes this and learns “the way he is.”

It becomes increasingly evident that “the way the golem is” is Jewish. Though Pernath has yet to realize this connection, we can see elements of the golem’s Jewishness here. The “alien face” and “slanting eyes” evoke a common stereotype that Jews were Asiatic or Eastern. Gelbin notes the same thing when Zwakh describes the golem as having “a yellow complexion and mongoloid features” (Meyrink 58, Gelbin 40).⁴² Similarly, the golem’s “faltering gait” reflects the anti-Semitic myth that Jews were incapable of walking correctly.⁴³ Thus, the golem is not quite featureless, as Meyrink often describes him, but appears to be inscribed with features of the Jew.

⁴² This is shown as well in the illustrations for *Der Golem* by Hugo Steiner-Prag, which depict the golem with “a distinctly Orientalist mien. The slanting eyes... unmistakably Eastern, the nose and shape of the head rather apelike in most illustrations” (Gelbin 40).

⁴³ See Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body*, 39.

Over drinks one night Pernath tells his friends Zwakh, Vrieslander, and Prokop about the mysterious man who gave him *Ibbur*, to which Zwakh responds that it must have been the golem. The four sit in Pernath's apartment and drink, Vrieslander carves a marionette puppet, and Zwakh tells the story of the golem. Meyrink's golem is unlike any before it. It was once the familiar clay figure of the golem from Rosenberg's *Nifla'ot* and from earlier folktales, but has long since disintegrated into dust. What Pernath encounters is the spirit that inhabited its body—the golem's ghost.⁴⁴ Pernath knows the traditional story of the golem, one nearly identical to early ethnographic narratives (Rabbi Loew creates the golem as a servant in the ghetto), but Zwakh continues this tale:

Roughly every thirty-three years something happens in these streets which is not especially exciting in itself and yet which creates a sense of horror for which there is no justification nor any satisfactory explanation: at those intervals a completely unknown person, smooth-faced, with a yellow complexion and mongoloid features, dressed in faded, old-fashioned cloths and with a regular but oddly stumbling gait, as if he were going to fall down on his face at any moment, is seen going through the Ghetto from the direction of Altschulgasse until... the figure suddenly vanishes. (Meyrink 58)

⁴⁴ Here, Meyrink deviates from earlier authors like Rosenberg. Rather than retelling the legend of the golem, Meyrink uses it as a backdrop within his novel—referencing the myth as an artifact of Jewish cultural history. In this sense, Meyrink's golem is not a reimagining, but a resurrection. As Zwakh tells us: “[Hillel] believes the unknown figure that haunts the district must be the phantasm that the rabbi in the Middle Ages had first to create in his mind, before he could clothe it in physical form. It reappears at regular intervals, when the stars are in the same conjunction under which it was created, tormented by its urge to take on physical existence.” (Meyrink 61) It is a ghost seemingly bound to the cultural memory of Jews, as the legend of the golem is in reality. We see this again through Zwakh, “there is something abroad in the Jewish quarter, something connected with it that never dies. My ancestors have lived here for many generations and I think I can say there is no one who has more evidence, ancestral and personal, of the periodic appearance of the Golem than I have.” (Meyrink 57)

This spirit is what the golem has become. By being “not especially exciting in itself” and yet also creating “a sense of horror” the golem is both familiar and alarming – precisely meeting Freud’s definition of *unheimlich*, the uncanny.⁴⁵ Indeed, Meyrink’s golem is a textbook uncanny monster in many ways. It appears as a totally featureless man, or with features that escape memory. Those who pass the golem on the street describe its appearance as paralyzing. They often feel briefly possessed by it, or, more strangely, seem to possess it – seeing themselves reflected within the golem’s blank form. Zwakh recounts the story of one woman who met the golem on the street:

[...] she was firmly convinced that it could have been her own soul which had left her body for a moment and confronted her for a brief second with the features of an alien creature. In spite of the terrible dread with which she was seized, she said she was never in the slightest doubt that the other could only be part of her inmost self (Meyrink 61).

We see here that Meyrink’s golem is a model uncanny creature: as a reoccurring phenomenon the golem evokes *déjà vu*; by mirroring those it meets it is a *Doppelgänger*; also not quite living, the golem has the eeriness of an *automaton*. When the Jewish woman meets the golem, she sees her own soul, a Jewish soul.

Meyrink’s golem is tied to the ghetto intrinsically, “a kind of mirage in the shape of some being characteristic of the [Ghetto]” (Meyrink 59), says Zwakh. The ghetto of *Der Golem* is exactly as contemporary anti-Semitic discourse imagined it, a den of immorality and crazed

⁴⁵ “The ‘uncanny’ is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud 1-2).

depravity. Described as a “spiritual growth” of the ghetto, the golem absorbs the mental instability of the community over time and overloads every 33 years.⁴⁶ Zwakh postulates this mechanism: “Just as on sultry days the static electricity builds up to unbearable tension until it discharges itself in lighting, could it not be that the steady build-up of those never-changing thoughts that poison the air in the Ghetto lead to a sudden, spasmodic discharge?” (Meyrink 59). Thus, Meyrink’s golem is a product of the Jewish community’s collective depravity and hysteria. Its reoccurrence is associated with waves of murder and crime,⁴⁷ and it is described with the stereotypical traits of the Jew: the “stumbling gait,” the “featureless” form, and the strange, old-fashioned cloths of Orthodox Jews. The golem appears to be the Jewish essence incarnate: a spiritual condensation of all the flaws, oddities, and uncanny traits of the Jew that wanders the streets of the ghetto.

Gelbin reads Meyrink’s golem somewhat differently. To her, the golem’s perceived featurelessness “exemplifies the Jewish ghetto type with its lack of essence,” a common contemporary anti-Semitic stereotype of the Jew (Gelbin 101). I argue precisely the opposite. The golem is the embodiment of what Pernath believes makes Jews different from gentiles: hysteria, crime, disease, and deformity – traits endemic to Jews in anti-Semitic discourse at the beginning of the 20th century, possessed by the mystical energy of Jews. As Zwakh describes it, the golem is “a phantom that in expression, gait and behavior, in every last detail, would reveal the symbol of the soul of the masses, if only we were able to interpret the secret language of forms” (Meyrink 59). This bodiless “phantom” embodies the Jewish essence, the “expression,

⁴⁶ Zwakh describes the golem as “a spiritual epidemic [that] spreads like lightning through the Ghetto, attacking the souls of the living,” and “a spiritual growth without any inherent consciousness, a structure that develops like a crystal out of formless chaos according to a constant law” (Meyrink 59).

⁴⁷ “Crime did stalk these streets, day and night, like a disembodied spirit in search of a physical form through which to manifest itself” (Meyrink 51).

gait and behavior,” that reveals the uncanny Jewish soul.⁴⁸ We can see further evidence for this through Pernath’s summary of the golem legend:

[The] ghostly legend wakes to new life in the hidden recesses of my mind, the legend of the Golem, that man-made being that long ago a rabbi versed in the lore of the Cabbala formed from elemental matter and invested with mindless, automatic life by placing a magic formula behind its teeth. And just as the Golem returned to inert clay immediately the arcane formula was removed from its mouth, so, I imagine, must all these people fall lifeless to the ground the very second a minuscule something is erased in their brains – in some the glimmer of an idea, a trivial ambition, a pointless habit perhaps, in others merely a dull expectation of something vague and indefinite. (Meyrink 42-43)

This quote demonstrates Pernath’s belief that the golem possesses an intangible quality which defines it, here the “magic formula behind its teeth” that made it live originally when Rabbi Loew created it. In the same breath, Pernath draws the conclusion that it is this same essence embodied in the golem that all Jews possess, an aimless drive to exist without which they would collapse lifeless. Again, it is no one particular quality, nor a tangible quality, but a “glimmer of an idea, a trivial ambition, a pointless habit” within Jews - the Jewish essence.

As Zwakh’s story of the golem continues, Pernath grows more and more paralyzed.

Thinking Pernath asleep, though he can actually still hear, Zwakh reveals to the others that

⁴⁸ I do not want to overstate my disagreement with Gelbin. Here I take issue less with her overall interpretation, which I believe for the most part works in tandem with mine, and more with her terminology, which I find to be lacking in consistency. For instance, though I quote her claim that the golem exemplifies the Jew’s lack of essence, earlier on in *The Golem Returns* she makes the opposite claim about the golem legend overall in a statement that near exactly matches my own argument: “Resembling the discourse on the assimilated Jew, the golem’s difference lies in its essence rather than clearly demarcated physical features” (4)

Pernath is an amnesiac who had been committed to an insane asylum and then left in Zwakh's care, and has no memories of his past before coming to the ghetto. Zwakh repeats the words of Pernath's doctor: "we've managed to wall up his illness..., just as you might build a wall round the site of some tragedy, because of the unhappy memories associated with it" (Meyrink 65). Still paralyzed, this comes as a shocking revelation to Pernath, "suddenly there was a terrible explanation for it all: I had been mad and they had used hypnosis to treat me, they had closed off the 'room' that gave access to those chambers of my brain, rendering me homeless in the midst of the life around me" (Meyrink 65). Before this Pernath had separated himself from the ghetto, passing judgments on its inhabitants and deeming himself above them, but now that separation is shattered. Without any knowledge of life before the ghetto, what does Pernath have but the ghetto? Is he not just another one of its corrupted, deviant inhabitants?

Suddenly obsessed with discovering his origins, Pernath sees "a gigantic, secret link between the legendary chamber without an entrance in which the unknown being was said to live, and my ominous dream" (Meyrink 65-66). Pernath realizes that the "locked room" of his memories and the secret room of the golem are one and the same. If he can find the golem, he can discover his past. In this way the golem functions as a vehicle of cultural memory. As Thomas Ager argues, "Modern revitalizing portrayals of the Golem as protector reclaim this symbol and figure as a piece of cultural memory capable of [re]socializing members into the community and chronicling certain traumas of the community itself" (32). Because the golem is an entity formed from the collected essence of the Jewish community, Pernath's bond with it will allow him to reconnect with the community and understand it. This reconnection with the Jewish community through the golem's Jewish essence, however, is only part of what Pernath needs to

reconcile with his inner Jewishness. As we will see, he also needs the Jewish image, which the golem does not possess.

Pernath realizes the connection between his “locked room” and the golem’s secret room just as Vrieslander finishes the doll. Pernath gazes into the doll’s eyes and is hypnotized by it. As Vrieslander makes his last cuts “the wooden features suddenly took on a frightening life of their own. I recognized the yellow face of the stranger who had brought me the book” (Meyrink 66). The doll takes on the image of the golem. Pernath feels himself drawn into the puppet and possesses it, seeing the room from its eyes. Vrieslander throws the doll out of the window and Pernath faints, having once again bonded with the golem, this time slowly over the course of the scene. As Zwakh told the story of the golem, its image was literally shaped beneath their noses – the story itself seems powerful enough to produce the golem. As the golem was constructed by Zwakh’s story, Pernath was simultaneously deconstructed. When Zwakh revealed Pernath’s amnesia he removed the story Pernath thought he knew of himself, replacing it with the golem’s legend. As this happened, Pernath’s body seemed to dissolve as he slipped deeper into paralysis while the golem’s body was formed, suggesting an inverse relationship between him and the golem. When the golem appears Pernath is erased and must take on the golem’s form.

Thus, the golem does not seem to be the key to uncovering Pernath’s past, rather an incarnation of Jewishness that contorts Pernath’s body to match the Jewishness of its form. Perhaps, however, these mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. Does Pernath contort to match the golem, or does the golem reveal the Jewishness already within Pernath? The golem is the incarnation of Jewishness, and the golem’s secret room and Pernath’s locked room are the same. Therefore, when Pernath opens his inner room, will he discover that he is, in fact, a Jew?

Meyrink never reveals explicitly whether Pernath is Jewish, but the text suggests that he is. The connection between the golem's room and Pernath's mental room is one critical piece of evidence. Pernath's existential musings also suggest his Jewishness:

[I realized] that the sequence of events in one's life is a road leading to a dead end... It is the [same] narrow, hidden tracks that lead back to our lost homeland; what contains the solution to the last mysteries is not the ugly scar that life's rasp leaves on us, but the fine, almost invisible writing that is engraved in our body. (Meyrink 87)

Here, Pernath comes to the conclusion that his true identity (Pernath's "last mystery") is not determined by personal experience (the "ugly scar" life leaves on us), but rather predetermined by his innate essence (the "invisible writing" on the body). Pernath believes that his inner awakening will not come through the "dead end" of living, but through tracing an invisible essence inherited from the "lost homeland," an allusion to ancient Israel. This quote demonstrates his belief that Jewishness is an intangible, hereditary quality passed down from the "lost homeland" that marks the Jewish body, and that Jewishness must be the defining quality to one's being. Thus, Pernath is a man who discovers he may be Jewish and must contend with that new identity. The solution to his crisis of self-identity will come through two ways: the discovery of the secret, inner quality of the Jewish essence within himself; and by being able to comprehend and emulate the Jewish image. The sum of these is what Pernath believes it means to be Jewish.

The golem, as we have already seen, is the embodiment of the Jewish essence, that which "would reveal the symbol of the soul of the masses." We might imagine that the Pernath's

relationship with the golem determines the formation of his Jewishness. However, the golem is an elusive and distant figure in the novel. As effective as it may be at forcing Jewishness on Pernath, it is not present enough to be his sole influence. Pernath will turn instead to the Jews of the ghetto and learn directly from them what it means to be Jewish.

After Pernath faints again, Zwakh leaves him in the care of Hillel, an experienced spiritual healer, who in a long conversation with Pernath seems to acknowledge Pernath's new found mirroring power and his relationship with the golem. More obsessed than ever, Pernath tries to dig deeply into his fractured mind and remember his former life. This leads nowhere, however, as Pernath's thoughts keep drifting back to two salient Jewish figures in *Der Golem*: Wassertrum, the Jewish junk dealer; and Hillel, the archivist of the Jewish town hall and learned scholar of the Kabbala. The former is a grotesque, conniving slumlord and the latter a saintly, orthodox Rabbinical figure. Both are stock stereotypes, a point other scholars have demonstrated and which I will expand on.

By far the most anti-Semitic portrayal in *Der Golem* is the slumlord and junk dealer Aaron Wassertrum. He embodies the most extreme stereotypes of Jews and of fiendish Jewish sexuality. His image is pivotal to *Der Golem*, a fact instantly clear by the opening of chapter two of the novel (the first chapter from Pernath's perspective) entitled "Day", a lengthy description of the ghetto streets and its characters in the immediate area around Pernath's apartment:

I suddenly found myself standing in a gloomy courtyard and through the reddish arch of a gateway opposite, across the narrow, filthy streets, I could see a Jewish junk-dealer leaning against a shop-front which had bits of old iron, broken tools, rusty stirrups and skates, and all kinds of other dead things hanging round the open doorway. (Meyrink 26)

This junk dealer is Wassertrum, an insidious, conniving, old patriarch of the slum who extorts and blackmails others for money, terrorizes women, and is a possible father for every illegitimate child in the ghetto. Wassertrum is a clear embodiment of the anti-Semitic stereotype of the corrupted, modern ghetto Jew.

Gelbin makes the same observation about Wassertrum, and demonstrates the key components of that stereotype that he embodies. First, Wassertrum is internally deadened. His “horrible, expressionless face with its round, fish’s eyes” (Meyrink 28) reflect the useless junk he sells (Gelbin 102).⁴⁹ I would add here that Wassertrum’s profession also exemplifies the myth that Jews were incapable of creation.⁵⁰ A junk dealer does not create his goods like a professional artisan. He does not even have the status of a merchant, who deals in goods made by others. The junk dealer sells trash, “old iron” and “broken tools” that pollute the city. These “dead things” are the extreme opposite of art and creativity.⁵¹ Secondly, Gelbin notes that Wassertrum is frequently likened to a “spider,” a common contemporary anti-Semitic caricature of the Jew depicted as a conspirator, secretly controlling the world. Wassertrum reflects this comparison by being secretly rich and manipulative (Gelbin 102). Thirdly, Wassertrum evokes the myth that Jews were guttural and incapable of language as “Wassertrum” is a bastardization of the German word “Wasserturm,” meaning “water tower” (Gelbin 102).⁵² I would second this

⁴⁹ “Fish eyes” are a consistent marker in German lit for Jewishness, see Annette v. Droste Hulshoff “The Jew’s Beech” (1842).

⁵⁰ Sander Gilman argues that this myth that “the Jew could not produce transcendental works of aesthetic value was... commonplace in Germany from the Enlightenment on. That this inability was a psychological fault resulting from their Jewishness was a discovery of the medical science of the nineteenth century” (*The Jew’s Body* 129).

⁵¹ The junk dealer is also correlative to the archetype of the Hausieser, a Jew who goes door to door peddling his wares, a common trope of early 20th century Jewish literature.

⁵² “The image of the ‘Jew who sounds Jewish’ is a stereotype within the Christian world which represents the Jew as possessing all languages or no language of his or her own; of having a hidden language which mirror the perverse or peculiar nature of the Jew; of being unable to truly command the national language of the world in which he/she lives or, indeed, even of possessing a language of true revelation, such as Hebrew” (Gilman *The Jew’s Body*, 12)

observation with further evidence in the crude and distorted way Wassertrum is often described as speaking.⁵³ Wassertrum's foremost sinister trait, however, is his sexual degeneracy, a major contemporary anti-Semitic myth.⁵⁴ He seems to have fathered all the illegitimate children of the ghetto, raped Charousek's Christian mother, and pimped out Rosina (who may be his daughter). Even the way he speaks is described as sexually threatening.⁵⁵

Pernath finds Wassertrum's complete opposite in Hillel. The Czech student Charousek tells Pernath,

In Hillel you have a person who is the opposite of Wassertrum in every atom of his being... he has the reputation of being a miser and a secret millionaire; in fact, he's incredibly poor...

Poorer than I am, if that's possible. I think he only knows the verb 'to receive' from books. When he leaves the Jewish Town Hall on the first of the month, the beggars run away from him because they know he would press his meagre salary on the first one he came across and end up starving.⁵⁶ (Meyrink 135)

⁵³ "He stammered a few words of excuse in his impossible dialect" (Meyrink 157); "You could hear the conscious effort he was making to speak standard German" (158); "[I did not listen] to the continuous dribble of excuses slobbering from his lips" (161).

⁵⁴ "The lack of redemption of the Jews is made manifest by their perverse sexuality. The sexuality of the Other is always threatening. The implicit charge against the Jews invokes one of the ultimate cultural taboos of nineteenth-century thought. Inbreeding is incestuous and is a sign of the Jews' "primitive" nature, their existence outside of the bounds of acceptable, Western sexual practice" (Gilman *Difference and Pathology* 158).

⁵⁵ "There was something frightening in the abrupt way he could shift from one tone to the other, switching like lightning from flattery to a brutal verbal assault. I imagined it was quite likely that most people, especially women, would be in his power in no time at all, if there was the least thing he could use against them." (Meyrink 160)

⁵⁶ This mirrors an earlier description of Wassertrum by Charousek: "His favorite verb is 'to have', and if he were capable of thinking in abstract terms, 'possession' would be the concept that expressed his ideal" (Meyrink 133).

Hillel is antithetical to Wassertrum in every way. Where Wassertrum is greedy and miserly Hillel is charitable and benevolent. Hillel is a saintly figure molded from the same archetype that Rabbi Loew embodied in *Nifla'ot* – the noble, wise, devout, wizened, and traditional Jewish patriarch. *Der Golem* clearly represents Hillel as a positive archetype of the Jew. Nonetheless, Hillel's image evokes many anti-Semitic myths that depict Jews as wizened, overtly religious, and mystical or highly superstitious.

Despite having ostensibly similar origins, as male Jewish patriarchs from the ghetto, Wassertrum and Hillel are clear opposites—the former is pure evil and the latter pure good. Many of the minor twisting plots of *Der Golem* are wrapped around these two, constant reminders to us and to the characters of *Der Golem* of what a Jew should or should not be. Hillel is an ideal Jews should aspire to and Wassertrum a degenerate whom Jews may become like through corruption.

Pernath's quest for spiritual awakening pulls him repeatedly towards Wassertrum and Hillel. In one scene, after Hillel and Pernath have a lengthy existential conversation on the kabbala, spirit world, and meaning of knowledge and memory, Pernath goes into a deep meditation where he tries to recall his childhood. This is fruitless, however, as his mind keeps returning to the images of Wassertrum and Hillel.⁵⁷ Pernath, realizing his inner Jewishness, is drawn to these men because he desires a model of Jewishness. They seem to be the only “authentic” representatives of the adult male Jew.⁵⁸ Their children, Hillel's daughter Miriam and Wassertrum's daughter Rosina, are feminine versions of the same archetypes of the Jew that

⁵⁷ “First of all I tried to go to the point farthest back in my life that memory could reach... But however hard I tried, I still could get no farther than seeing myself in the gloomy courtyard of this house with a view through the arched gateway to Aaron Wassertrum's junk-shop... I was back at that arched gateway again... Then I saw something which I had missed on my way back through my thoughts. It was Shemaiah Hillel passing his hands over my eyes...” (Meyrink 86). This back and forth happens several times. Note here that it is literally these men's images that surface in Pernath's thoughts.

⁵⁸ Others are assimilated, or in the case of Zwakh, previously assimilated (an exception I will return to).

their fathers embody, suggesting that these images are hereditary. This hereditary aspect may prompt Pernath to seek a Jewish father figure, one that would bestow the correct Jewishness upon him.⁵⁹ Pernath describes Hillel as such, “The friendly, almost kindly tone in which Hillel concluded this speech restored my calm, and I felt safe and sound, like a sick child that knows its father is close by” (Meyrink 84), and Pernath certainly looks up to Hillel and seeks to emulate him. Wassertrum, on the other hand, is a possible father for Pernath implicitly. Many of the illegitimate children of the ghetto are alleged to be Wassertrum’s children. When Pernath tries to think back to “point farthest back in [his] life” he sees the image of Wassertrum, suggesting that Pernath may be another of his castoff children (Meyrink 86).

Framing *Der Golem* as an investigation of Jewishness, we can see that Pernath perceives two alternate modes of Jewish masculinity through Hillel and Wassertrum, the wise, devout, and traditional Jew and the conniving, degenerate, urban Jew. Because different the images of these men appear to be hereditary and because there appear to be no other options, Pernath must choose between becoming like one of these two men. Hillel is clearly the one Pernath prefers. His reverence for Hillel and his attempt to reach Hillel’s level of Kabbalistic knowledge shows that Pernath attempts to emulate him. However, Wassertrum proves to be a powerful image, which Pernath cannot help but contort to. We see this in Pernath’s growing insanity in the novel. He will experience feverish murderous thoughts, participate in Charousek’s schemes, and have sex with the grotesque, but alluring, Rosina – activities reminiscent of Wassertrum and his depravity. As Pernath attempts to discover his inner-self, he cannot help but jump back and forth between the images of Hillel and Wassertrum, suggesting an inability to align himself with

⁵⁹ Hillel and Wassertrum are described as being from different lineages. Charousek tells us, “There’s an old Talmudic legend that says that of the twelve tribes of Israel, ten are cursed and two holy. If that’s true, then [Hillel] represents the two holy ones and Wassertrum all the ten others put together.” (Meyrink 136)

either. This may be because there is something more to Hillel and Wassertrum that is yet indiscernible to Pernath – an element of their Jewish essence that his *Doppelgänger* nature will not let him reconcile with.⁶⁰

Hillel and Wassertrum also have daughters, Miriam and Rosina, both sexual obsessions of Pernath, who appear as female variants of the stereotypes their fathers represent. To them I will now turn, for through them we learn of a major component of Jewishness: sexuality. Miriam is saintly and devout like her father, with inscrutable morals and an obsession with the kabbala and existentialism. Rosina, never given a voice in the novel, is the 14 year old prostitute and probable daughter of Wassertrum. A matching female counterpart to the anti-Semitic stereotype of her father, Rosina embodies less the venom and aggressiveness and more the grotesque appearance and lascivious nature.⁶¹ After telling the story of the golem, Zwakh makes a strange leap, comparing the creature's resurgence to Rosina's sexuality:

That Rosina with the red hair, she has one of those faces that you can't get out your mind, that keep on popping up all over the place. That frozen, grinning smile has accompanied me throughout my life; first her grandmother, then her mother! Always the same face, not the slightest change. The same name, Rosina, each was the resurrection of the previous

⁶⁰ Both men are described as having inexpressible qualities that divide them: "It wasn't [Wassertrum's] dreadful ugliness which was so repulsive (that, rather, aroused my compassion; he looked like a creature whom nature herself had given a furious, disgusted kick in the face at birth), but something else, some indefinable aura he gave off. The influence of his 'blood' as Charousek had so aptly formulated it." (Meyrink 158); "Hillel represents something completely incomprehensible to [Wassertrum], something he just cannot work out." (Meyrink 136)

⁶¹ "I had to squeeze past [Rosina], and she stood with her back against the banisters, arching her body lasciviously. She had her grubby hands curled round the iron rail for support and I could see pale gleam of her bare arms in the murky half-light.... Her teasing smile and waxy, rocking-horse face disgust me. I feel she must have white, bloated flesh, like the axolotl I saw just now in the tank of salamanders in the pet-shop. I find the eye-lashes of people with red hair as repulsive as those of rabbits." (Meyrink 27)

one.... Just like Rosina today, [her mother's] image used to haunt the minds of all the young men." (Meyrink 62)

Rosina's seductive sexuality is reincarnated through generations. The image itself is what seems to live on, even bodiless, like the golem. Again, this indicates that the Jewish image is hereditary. Zwakh recounts that a "simple-minded man" used to wander between bars, paying for his drinks by cutting silhouettes for customers. When he got drunk he would "sob and weep as he snipped away at a girl's pert profile, always the same one, until his stock of paper was all used up.... He had fallen so deeply in love with a certain Rosina – presumably the grandmother of the current one – that he had gone out of his mind" (Meyrink 62-63). What haunts this man is literally the image of Rosina, her silhouette, which he cannot help but replicate. Rosina's mode of Jewishness is bound to cultural memory it would seem, not just biological, but carried on in the desire of generations of Jewish men.

Miriam displays a similar sort of immortal sexuality, though like the relationship between their fathers, it is entirely oppositional to Rosina's. Pernath muses,

What a strange girl she is, that Miriam... with a beauty so foreign that at first you can't comprehend it, a beauty that strikes you dumb when you look at her... the only explanation I could come up with was that her face must be formed according to laws of proportion that have been lost for thousands of years... (Meyrink 114)

Her very profile, which was closer to the sixth Egyptian dynasty – though much too spiritual, even for that – than to our own age with its rationalistic types... (Meyrink 156)

Miriam's exotic beauty harkens back to ancient times. Again, the Jewish image appears hereditary, lasting even since the "sixth Egyptian dynasty" as Pernath wagers. For Jewish women, the inherited image is bound to sexuality almost entirely. Just as Pernath is torn between the images of Hillel and Wassertrum, he is torn between the images of Miriam and Rosina. He craves both sexually, courting Miriam and yet giving in to the temptations of Rosina. Through them Pernath learns that Jewish sexuality is hereditary and bound to the Jewish image. For women, the inherited image seems to be even more binding than for men as Rosina has no personality beyond her stereotypical image and even shares the same name with her forebears.

Looking at Hillel, Wassertrum, Miriam, and Rosina, Pernath sees a ghetto community that is constructed entirely out of oppositional Jewish archetypes. Attempting to quarrel with his inner Jewishness, Pernath must make a choice between them, or, more accurately, to choose the side of Hillel and "good" Jewishness, while resisting the influence of Wassertrum and the "bad" side of Jewishness. His inability to match his own image to either side shows that Pernath is struggling in his journey of self-identity.

There is, however, a third path, one also bound to a woman's image. Pernath has an affair with Angelina, the wife of an aristocrat, who is also sleeping with Dr. Savioli, a young German doctor. She asks Pernath to prevent Wassertrum from revealing her affair with Savioli, which if it came to light would mean divorce and the loss of her child. Pernath meets her in a cathedral, and describes her as a sacred, overpowering image, "The holy images all around came into sharp focus... My eyes did not leave her face, which presumably seemed paler in the twilight alcove than it was in reality. Her beauty took my breath away and I stood there, spellbound. It was all I could do not to fall down on my knees and kiss her feet because she was the one I was to help"

(Meyrink 92-93). Angelina is another woman Pernath is torn between.⁶² Like Miriam and Rosina, Angelina has an identity bound to her sexual image. We might assume, as Pernath appears to, that Angelina is a goodly mother figure because her image appears as such. Gelbin takes this reading, “Miriam, Rosina, and Angelina each form aspects of the misogynistic trinity of saint, mother, and whore that circulates through Pernath’s tormenting sexual fantasies (Gelbin 105-106). This reading, however, misses the crucial fact that Angelina is an adulteress. Though she may put on a good image, she is clearly a devious manipulator, using her sexual influence over Pernath to protect her illicit affair.

Angelina represents another image of the Jew, one separate from the dichotomy of the ghetto: the assimilated Jew. There is never explicit evidence that Angelina is Jewish, but this is logical if she is assimilated. She has covered up her origins and left the ghetto. Angelina is also connected to Pernath’s past, or so she claims. Though this connection is never fully explored, if we accept that Pernath is a Jew who was raised as a Jew and then lost his memory, than we can read Angelina, familiar to him from childhood, as Jewish as well. The name “Angelina,” the divine image Pernath ascribes to her, and the fact he meets her in a Cathedral indicates that this adulteress may be not only an assimilated Jew, who has left her culture, but a convert to Christianity, who has abandoned her faith. If true, it implies an even deeper level of treachery to Angelina’s character. Comparing it to *Nifla’ot*, we can remember that Rosenberg takes a consistent and harsh stance against converts and even lapsed Jews. To him, a woman’s religious infidelity is synonymous to her sexual infidelity. Bad Jews are prone to adultery. Meyrink

⁶² In one bout of existential crisis we see this most clearly as Pernath’s mind jumps between the images of the three women in the same manner he jumped between Hillel and Wassertrum’s image: “My breast was filled with the sprouting shoots of a feeling of being in love which had no precise object... At first it had been Angelina’s body nestling against mine, then I was in the middle of an ostensibly innocent conversation with Miriam; hardly had I torn up that image, than Angelina returned and kissed me; I could smell the scent of her hair, and the soft sable she was wearing tickled the skin of my neck, slipped from her bare shoulders and – she turned into Rosina, dancing with drunken, half-closed eyes... naked.” (Meyrink 164-165)

reinforces the same relationship. Angelina being a convert would explain why she has no issue with sexual manipulation.

As a seductress, Angelina is not all that different from Rosina. What separates them is that Rosina is bound to the Jewish image while Angelina is not. However, it would seem that Angelina has not been able to totally whitewash herself of Jewishness. She is sexually licentious for one, and her sexual affairs take place within the ghetto. She meets Dr. Savioli in the apartment next door to Pernath's in the ghetto. This return to the ghetto to commit sexual deviance implies that Angelina is unable to escape her ghetto origins, a permanent corruptive influence on her soul.

Angelina represents a third form of Jewishness that Pernath could take: assimilation, a choice that would mean the disguising of the Jewish image rather than adherence to a particular form of it. Assimilation, however, proves to be a non-viable option. It only removes the image of the Jew, the essence of the Jew cannot be erased. In *Der Golem*, when assimilated Jews try to hide their Jewishness they are invariably corrupted by it and prove no better than the grotesque image of the Jew in the ghetto, like Wassertrum. This is demonstrated best by the story of Dr. Wassory. In their first encounter, Charousek tells Pernath the story of Dr. Wassory, an insidious eye-doctor who tricked his patients into expensive eye operations:

Only a year ago the whole city was raving about him, about that great 'scientist'. No one knew then that he'd changed his name, [from Wassertrum]. He used to like to play the unworldly man of science, and if ever the conversation came round to origins, he would modestly intimate, with a few deeply felt but vague words, that his father came from the Ghetto; had to work his way up from the very bottom... (Meyrink 44)

Wassory, Charousek informs us, is actually a son of Aaron Wassertrum. The junk-dealer poured all of his resources into educating Wassory and giving him a better life, pushing him out of the ghetto and encouraging him never to look back. Altering his son's image is what Wassertrum deemed most important. As Miriam tells Pernath, "[to spare] him the discomfort of a life of apparent poverty," Wassertrum "imbued [Wassory] with the pernicious cult of 'beauty', taught him an aesthete's responses and gestures, brought him up to appear outwardly like one of the lilies of the field, whilst inside he was a vulture." (Meyrink 171-172) Wassertrum has to instill his son with a non-Jewish image in order to assimilate him, but makes no attempt to erase the Jewish essence that passed on to his son, insidious cunning and heartlessness.

Wassory was an assimilated Jew who has left behind his dark, corrupted origins in the ghetto. However, his Jewish roots could not be escaped so easily. The ghetto finds a way to corrupt Wassory at a distance, it seems to be ingrained in his very blood. Wassory performed unneeded eye surgeries on witless patients.

[This] increased Wassory's fame as an incomparable doctor who had never yet failed to avert the danger of blindness, [and] satisfied his lust for money and flattered his vanity.... Only a man whose roots were in the ghetto and whose every fibre was soaked in Ghetto lore, a man who had learnt from his earliest childhood to lie in wait for his prey like a spider, could have gone on perpetrating such atrocities for years without being caught.... (Meyrink 49)

It is Wassory's Jewish greed and pride that lead him to crime, and his cunning and secretive Jewish nature that helps him to commit it. Wassory proves to be the worst Jew of all. As an

assimilated Jew, he has all the insidiousness of a ghetto Jew, but can hide it, unlike his father, Wassertrum, who displays his foul brand of Jewishness in every action and on his grotesque face. The class difference between these two men is pivotal here as well. As a wealthy assimilated Jew, Wassory has a veil of respectability and legitimacy about him that his father does not.

Eventually, Wassory's crimes are brought to light by Dr. Savioli, and Wassory commits suicide before the police can arrest him. According to Charousek, however, it was he who orchestrated Wassory's downfall. Charousek was able to do this because, like Wassory, he is secretly a Jew. "I also grew up in the Ghetto, my blood is tainted with fiendish cunning as well" (Meyrink 49). Charousek is also the son of Aaron Wassertrum, he reveals to Pernath, but unlike Wassory he grew up a street urchin estranged from and loathing his father. He did not expose Wassory for justice, but to take revenge on Wassertrum.

Charousek is also an assimilated Jew, though still living poor in the ghetto, a less successful one than Wassory. Like Wassory, Charousek proves an inability to remove his inner Jewishness. His plotting, though it may be with just intentions, mirrors his father's insidious scheming. Charousek is partially deranged too, and murderous. He seems to have escaped none of his father's corruptive Jewishness. When Pernath is released from prison at the end of the novel he learns that Charousek was finally successful in orchestrating his father's murder, and even inherited all of his fortune. Charousek died as well though, committing suicide over his father's grave, seemingly in an attempt to pursue him into death.

The examples of Angelina, Wassory, and Charousek prove that assimilation is not a viable option for Pernath. Changing the Jewish image through assimilation proves to be ineffective against the immutable Jewish essence. Thus, *Der Golem* takes a stance definitively

against assimilation. The assimilated characters of the novel are presented as having abandoned their origins and their real Jewish nature to integrate into society outside of the ghetto.

Assimilated characters are deceitful and untrustworthy, thin facsimiles of the upper-class urban life outside of the ghetto who are unable to fully erase the more contemptible elements of the Jew within them. These characters have been taken out of the ghetto, but it appears the ghetto cannot be taken out of them.

To summarize briefly what has been discussed so far before concluding, Pernath is a man living in the Jewish ghetto who realizes he may be a Jew. In order to contend with this change of identity he must change himself to match what he considers Jewishness to be, a combination of both the intangible Jewish essence and the visible Jewish image. The Kabbalistic power of the book of *Ibbur* began this crisis in self-identity, but also allows him to resolve it by making Pernath function as a *Doppelgänger*, giving him the power to conform to the Jewishness of others. Pernath outlines two conflicting images of the Jew, embodied in Wassertrum and Hillel. He seeks to emulate the latter, but is unable to because of the corruptive influence of Wassertrum's "side" of Jewishness, and because the Jewish image appears to be hereditary. Pernath, unsure of his ancestry, believes he cannot become like Hillel if he is not of Hillel's "tribe." Pernath is unable to resolve this conflict in his Jewish image, but also cannot change it to be non-Jewish. Assimilated Jews in *Der Golem* are doomed by abandoning their Jewish image, eventually corrupted by their immutable Jewish essence. Pernath's predicament seems irresolvable, until the golem, again, wanders back into our story.

Around half way through the novel, Pernath has become engaged in a number of intersecting plots and entered the deep stages of his identity crisis. The chapter "Ghosts" begins as Pernath sits in his dark apartment, his thoughts again bouncing between the images of Hillel

and Wassertrum, imagining spirits in every movement and sound of the city outside. After a brief interruption by Charousek, Pernath's mind drifts into a dreamy state of existential crisis, drawn by "something invisible" calling him, "something from the other side." Searching for a "key" to unlock his "inner being" he descends through a trap door in his building that he had not seen before (Meyrink 104). After wandering a pitch-blank labyrinth of dungeons, Pernath emerges in the secret room where the golem sleeps. There he confronts the creature, "across the room he sat, he... I... myself. Mute and motionless, we stared into each other's eyes, the one a hideous mirror-image of the other" (Meyrink 110-111). After staring the golem down and "wrestling" his life from it, Pernath again combines with it, entering the golem's body.

By merging with the golem Pernath discovers his Jewish essence. He bonds fully with the golem, the embodiment of the Jewish essence, bringing on a flood of lost memories.⁶³ Like the woman who saw the golem on the street and saw her own soul within it, he finds his lost soul within the golem, as only a Jew of the ghetto could. Possessing the golem for a short time, Pernath wanders around the streets of the ghetto, running into Jews terror-stricken by his appearance. He is chased by a crowd through the streets until he loses them and rips off the golem's clothes, returning to being Pernath.

The recovery of Pernath's Jewish essence instils him with confidence, but he still has not achieved the Jewish image. Little will be done to resolve this in the next 100 or so pages of the novel as Pernath will become embedded again in the many confusing subplots of *Der Golem*, but these will be cut off again suddenly when Pernath is sent to prison for a lengthy fourth chapters.

⁶³ "Immediately I was engulfed in a tidal wave of memories: desks bespattered from top to bottom with ink, arithmetic jotters, songs bawled out at full voice, a boy setting a cockchafer loose in the class, readers with sandwiches squashed between the pages and smelling of orange peel." (Meyrink 112)

There Pernath meets the soon-to-be-hung rapist and murder Laponder, a somnambulist and mystic who seems to have completed the same quest for inner awakening that Pernath is still on.

Laponder recognizes that Pernath is being pulled in different directions by the spiritual forces within him, but says that this conflict is almost resolved - the answers are already within Pernath:

To a certain extent you have to understand your experiences symbolically.... The circle of... beings around you was the chain of inherited 'selves' which all those born of woman carry with them. The soul is not a single unity; that is what it is destined to become, and that is what we call 'immortality'. Your soul is still composed of many 'selves', just as a colony of ants is composed of many single ants. You bear within you the spiritual remains of many thousands of ancestors, the heads of your line. (Meyrink 234)

Laponder explains that the beings Pernath has been torn between are alternate versions of himself. They are hereditary, but the soul is composed of many selves, not one "single unity." Reading this in terms of our discussion, the many "selves" within Pernath are analogous to the Jewish images he is torn between. As we have already surmised, these images are hereditary, the "inherited 'selves'" that are "spiritual remains" of Pernath's ancestors. Pernath's observations of Hillel, Wassertrum, and the rest of the ghetto suggested that Jewish images were hereditary, but also singular – each Jew had a single image they inherited from their parents. Without that familial lineage, Pernath was unable to become any one Jewish image. What Laponder reveals to Pernath is that his conflict between images is normal, and that Pernath does not need to know his

familial lineage. Being a Jew makes any Jewish image a possible “self” for Pernath. Laponder does not doubt Pernath’s Jewishness, telling him, “The existence of ‘instinct’ indicates the presence of our ancestors in our bodies and in our souls” (Meyrink 234). This inherited “instinct” is equivalent to the Jewish essence, which Laponder recognizes is now within Pernath.

Laponder is executed shortly after his conversation with Pernath. Though fascinated by the man’s revelations, Pernath is unsure of them and suspicious that Laponder may have murdered Miriam. Pernath is released from prison in the next chapter and returns to the ghetto to find it completely destroyed. An urban renewal program had wiped the district clean of a familiar feature. Pernath wanders looking for anyone, but Hillel, Miriam, and everyone else he knows in the ghetto seems to have vanished when its tangling, ancient streets were erased.

Pernath’s crisis of self-identity returns in full strength. Laponder had informed Pernath that he was filled with all the “selves” of his ancestors, thus, he could finally match the image of Hillel, one of the many “selves” he had inherited. Yet Hillel is gone. How can Pernath become like Hillel without Hillel to guide him? It is still the *Doppelgänger* power of the book of *Ibbur* that allows Pernath to change himself. It requires that the image be present, however. With Hillel gone, Pernath cannot become like him.

Pernath finds a resolution. Eventually, Pernath finds Jaromir, the deaf-mute. Pernath tries to ask him about Hillel, Miriam, Zwakh, and the others, but they have difficulty communicating. Eventually Pernath draws their images on paper. Jaromir understands and is able to communicate that most have left the ghetto and Hillel and Miriam have disappeared. Jaromir cuts out Rosina’s silhouette, which brings him to tears and he runs away. This scene mirrors one story heard earlier in the novel: a simple-minded man who worked as a silhouette cutter would get drunk and cut

out the silhouette of Rosina's grandmother, one of Rosina's former selves. The man was obsessed with literally the woman's image, reduced to a silhouette.

This scene is pivotal. When Pernath was unable to find the Jews of the ghetto he etched their *images* on to paper. Jaromir responded by cutting out their *images* in silhouettes. These people may have vanished, but their images remain. The Jewish image lives on without the ghetto, or even the Jew. The Jewish image proves to be not only hereditary, passed on within the blood of Jews, but immortal, living on itself. The fact that the Jewish image can be separated from the Jew is not surprising when we remember that the Jewish essence could live separately from the Jew as well, within the ghostly form of the golem. That Jaromir mirrors the older story of the silhouette cutter is further proof. Jewish images live on forever, as do the stories of the ghetto that contain these images. The Jewish image seems to live on in stories. If we step back through the frames of *Der Golem's* narrative we see this again. Zwakh told the story of the silhouette cutter to Pernath, who is inadvertently telling it to the unnamed narrator possessing Pernath, who, in turn, is passing the story to us, the reader. Through every frame, the Jewish image persists.

Possessed of an eerie calmness, Pernath wanders the ruins of the ghetto. He rents a room in a house on the only street that remained standing in the ghetto. As it happens, the house is the same one where the golem's secret room is said to be. One day the building catches fire and Pernath escapes by crawling down the side of the building on a rope. He comes to the window of the golem's room and sees Hillel and Miriam. He shouts to them, but falls, and his narrative ends.

Pernath found the images he sought so desperately. They were hidden in the same place where the Jewish essence lives on indefinitely: the golem's secret room. In the end, we see that

the cultural memory of the golem is bound to both the immortal image and immortal essence of the Jew. They persist within the ghetto, something Pernath also thought had disappeared, but which proves to be similarly immortal. Its mysterious, unreachable heart is the golem's room, which cannot be destroyed.

The unnamed narrator wakes from his long vision 33 years in the future and goes on a desperate search for Pernath in the district that had formerly been the ghetto. He goes to Loisitchek's Bar, where Zwakh had told Pernath many stories of the ghetto. As he questions the people there about Pernath he mirrors Pernath's same desperate search after the ghetto had been destroyed. He finds Pernath living on the Street of Alchemists⁶⁴ in a mystical house that is only sometimes there. In a scene steeped in Kabbalistic imagery the narrator sees Pernath at a distance with Miriam, whose beauty seems to not have faded at all.⁶⁵ The narrator stares into Pernath's eyes without speaking and sees that "*His face is so like mine, that it is as if I were looking into a mirror*" (Meyrink 262, italics original). The narrator repeats the earlier mystical interaction between the golem and Pernath, who has at last seemed to become the image of Hillel. Pernath believes that Jewishness is composed of the intrinsic Jewish essence and Jewish image. When he realized he was a Jew, he had to gain both of these qualities in order to become a Jew. He was able to do this because both elements of Jewishness live on immortally within the Jew and within the ghetto. By turning inward, he was able to find Jewishness within himself.

Now we must question how this reading pertains to the scholarly discourse on *Der Golem* and the persistent question of whether it is anti-Semitic. In the context of our discussion this means asking whether the assumptions that Pernath makes about Jews – mainly that Jews have a

⁶⁴ Also called the "Golden Lane," a street situated within the Prague Castle. Its name is connected with 16th century alchemists, who had to look there, according to legends, for a reaction to produce gold.

⁶⁵ Further evidence that the Jewish image, and in particular the more binding female Jewish image, is immortal.

unique quality or essence that differentiates them from non-Jews and that their personalities can only be one of a number of limited and predetermined archetypes – are also Meyrink’s assumptions.

In order to argue that these assumptions are only Pernath’s and not Meyrink’s we have to qualify how the novel can be read in a way that does not condone its anti-Semitic content. My attempt to read *Der Golem* this way would be as a story about a man who is rigidly anti-Semitic and must overcome his beliefs about Jews when he discovers he is, in fact, Jewish. There are numerous issues with this reading. First, Pernath does not overcome his anti-Semitism in the course of the novel. There are “good” and “bad” Jews throughout whose alignment is based on the intrinsic quality of their Jewishness and not by individual standards. Characters like Wassertrum are just as sinister and grotesque at the end of the novel, Pernath does not change this portrayal, he just chooses to be one of the “good” Jews. Secondly, the novel still assumes that there is an innate quality of “Jewishness” that defines the Jew which Pernath must contend with. With no cultural or familial history, Pernath must still have some inner quality of Jewishness, his Jewish essence. We do not have to accept, like Pernath, that this essence is so crucial to Jews that without it they would die, but nonetheless the novel does accept that there is an intangible quality of Jewishness that Pernath must embrace.

I would argue that there is a middle reading, one that expands on a point Gelbin makes:

Pernath’s rootlessness, his sense of being ‘homeless in the midst of life around’ having lost his history (65), marks him as the exemplary modern man, which the discourse of the period had aligned with the figure of the Jew. Similarly, Weininger had meant by Jewishness ‘neither a race nor a people nor a recognized creed,’ but rather ‘a tendency of

the mind,... a psychological constitution which is possible for all mankind, but which has become actual in the most conspicuous fashion amongst the Jews' (Gelbin 102, Weininger 303).

Though overall my analysis differs from Gelbin, we mostly agree here. Meyrink does seem to treat Jewishness the same as Weininger does, as a psychological condition that one can take on. Pernath has no idea that he is a Jew at the start of the novel and adopts Jewishness through a shift in mentality, the inner self that is the essence and the outer self that is the image. Both *Nifla'ot* and *Der Golem* are about Jewish portrayal, as we have seen, but Meyrink, unlike Rosenberg, has no interest in making a political statement about Jewish portrayal, rather he seems to enjoy playing with how anti-Semites perceive Jews and what it means to be Jewish. While Rosenberg is determined to alter the Jewish image, Meyrink is simply playing with images of the Jew. Meyrink seems to view Jewishness in the same way he does occultism, as a mystical and exotic subject bonded to identity and one's inner self. Jewishness was another topic for him to experiment with as he did yoga, occultism, and Kabbalah. Pernath is his experiment in what a modern man would do if he found out he was Jewish. Pernath holds the beliefs of contemporary anti-Semitic discourse, but Meyrink's goal is not to confirm or deny those beliefs, rather to explore them – throwing them in the unstable pot of *Der Golem* and stirring it to watch the results.

Conclusion – *Finis Ghetto*

In December of 1896 a massive explosion was heard in the Old Town of Prague. Forty-five houses in Josefov,⁶⁶ the Jewish Quarter, and nine more houses just outside the district had been destroyed by dynamite. This explosion was the beginning of the *Finis Ghetto* program, an urban renewal project that over the next sixteen years would remove all but seven of the 260 buildings in Prague's Jewish Town (Giustino 203).⁶⁷ Though there were many causes of the *Finis Ghetto* program other than anti-Semitism, Cathleen M. Giustino argues, anti-Semitic sentiment was deeply embroiled in the initiative before, during, and after the ghetto's clearance (114). As one person wrote in the middle-class Czech magazine *Golden Prague*,

[...] on the right bank [of the Vlatava] is the monumental building of the Rudolfinum and behind this rich entrance to a modern city, in most close proximity, is the repulsive labyrinth of twisting, narrow streets filled with devilish odors from gutters, smoke gushing forth from low chimneys, and animated figures and scenes, which look as if they were carried to Prague straight from the Orient, from somewhere in Baghdad.

Foreigners who visit Prague do not forget to visit this our Jewish Town, and it cannot be denied that it offers much of interest. Why travel far to the East, when it is possible to find the most neglected corner of Istanbul here in the middle of the capital city of the Kingdom of Bohemia! (Giustino 124)

⁶⁶ The Prague ghetto was renamed Josefov (or Josefstadt) in 1850 to honor Emperor Joseph II.

⁶⁷ The buildings that were not removed were the Jewish Town Hall and six of the nine synagogues including the Alt-Neu Synagogue where legend has it the body of the golem resides. Most of the Old Jewish Cemetery was also preserved.

The plan promised to remove what many middle class Czechs perceived to be the foreign, backward, and disease-ridden part of the city – the ancient Prague ghetto.

Many in Prague felt a tinge of regret. Before the ghetto's clearance, Josefov was a prominent district of the city that bordered the historic Old Town Square of Prague, extending along much of the Vlatava River, and was situated directly across from Hradčany, the palace district. Its "labyrinth of twisting, narrow streets" and densely packed buildings seemed, to some, more characteristic of Prague's landscape than the wide, Parisian-style avenues that replaced them.⁶⁸ The ghetto had been a characteristic feature of the city for centuries, and for the past half-century a major cultural center for both Jews and Christians.⁶⁹

As the buildings of the Prague ghetto were destroyed, the golem rose again from the rubble. Alfred Thomas argues that the demolition of the Prague ghetto was a major instigation for the explosion of golem narratives at the end of the 19th century and first two decades of the 20th century (46). This coincided with a major backlash against the Prague municipal government not long after the ghetto's destruction. City officials attempted to placate those upset by the removal with memorials, notably a statue to Rabbi Loew built in 1908 (Thomas 48). Golem narratives gained in popularity as people reminisced about the old Jewish Town. The golem, associated with the Prague ghetto the mid-19th century, became an artifact of cultural memory bound to the old ghetto for both Jews and gentiles alike.

Nifla'ot (1909) and *Der Golem* (1913) were written in the aftermath of the ghetto clearance. Although their novels were set in different eras, both were bound to the memory of the

⁶⁸ The *Finis Ghetto* program was largely inspired by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's remodeling of Paris in the 1870s (Thomas 46).

⁶⁹ Though the district was still associated with the Prague Jewish community, many Jews had left it after they were granted emancipation from the ghetto in 1859. Most wealthy and middle-class Jews moved to more expensive areas of Prague, while poor Jews largely stayed in the ghetto and were joined by impoverished Christians. By 1890, the majority were poor Christians, many lower middle-class artisans and shopkeepers. The Jewish presence, however, was still significant (Giustino 6).

former Prague ghetto. Thomas argues, “If the golem legend can be understood as a palimpsest, the Prague ghetto can similarly be seen as a multilayered text of memory and forgetting” (46). While the golem’s location had previously been transient, both Jewish and non-Jewish ethnographers had rooted the golem firmly to Prague and to its ghetto in the mid-19th century. By the turn of the century, every text inscribed on the golem-palimpsest was layered with the history and memory of the Prague ghetto. The destruction of the ghetto came as an earthquake to the golem legend, removing its origin. The golem went from being a cultural memory within the ghetto to being a cultural memory that memorialized the ghetto. With the ghetto gone, the clay of the golem’s body became one of the remaining testaments to the ghetto’s memory. Rosenberg and Meyrink preserve their memories of the Prague ghetto through their retellings of the golem, though from opposite perspectives: Rosenberg as a Jew looking outward from within, and Meyrink as the gentile looking inward from without. I conclude my examination of both *Nifla’ot* and *Der Golem* by contextualizing them with the *Finis Ghetto* program.

Rosenberg likely saw the clearance of the Prague ghetto and the other major ghetto removal projects around the same time as an attack on Jews, in the same way that he saw the resurgence of the blood libel as an attack. As he saw it, both events were rooted in the same issue - the way Jews were portrayed - and thus his response was to change the image of the Jew. Through recreating the golem, a cultural artifact of the old Prague ghetto, Rosenberg attempted to give his Jewish audiences a role-model that could combat modern anti-Semitism and preserve the memory of the fabled ghetto. The clearance of the Prague ghetto both alarmed Rosenberg and perhaps brought the golem to his attention, seeing that its powerful body was ripe to be made into a guardian hero of the Jewish people.

The huge and strong body of the golem easily fit the mold of Max Nordau's then popular idea of the "Muscle Jew." Rosenberg envisioned the new, powerful, and athletic Jew that the golem embodied as a role model that would be able to protect the Jewish community and the ghetto through the sheer force of its might. Rosenberg adjusted Nordau's Muscle Jew, however, by subordinating it to the traditional, orthodox archetype of the Jew, the very same image of the Jew that Nordau and others in the Zionist discourse were attempting to replace.

In bringing the golem back Rosenberg also brought back the location it had become so bound to, the Prague ghetto.⁷⁰ The Prague ghetto, along with the golem, became an artifact of cultural memory for Jews. By resurrecting the golem within it, Rosenberg increased the fame of the ghetto as a unique site of "old" Jewish culture. *Nifla'ot* strengthened the old ghetto's association with the mystique of the so-called "Golden Age of Prague Jewry," "Magic Prague," and the mythic Rabbi Loew. Rosenberg implicitly inscribes these ideas onto his cultural memory of the ghetto. It is given almost no description in the novel. Whereas Rosenberg reinvented the story of the golem almost completely, he allowed readers to supply their own knowledge of the ghetto. He may not have felt the need to detail the ghetto, assuming that his Jewish readers would already have a basic knowledge of it. Or, he may simply not have been able to describe the Prague ghetto, as it is not clear he had ever even been there. He also may have left the ghetto featureless because he wanted the cultural memory he was creating from it to be applicable to any ghetto. His desire to preserve the ghetto's memory, then, can be read as an endorsement of the traditional and segregated Jewish lifestyle that it embodied, not only a desire to preserve the memory of the now disappeared Prague ghetto in particular.

⁷⁰ The golem only became attached to the Prague ghetto in the late 19th century, but Rosenberg would have had no way of knowing this.

By resurrecting both the golem and the ghetto, Rosenberg responded to modern forms of anti-Semitism by reasserting Jewish tradition. Indeed, the revival and preservation of tradition prove to be his primary strategy throughout *Nifla'ot*.

We have not discussed other Jewish authors of the golem at length in this study as it is limited in scope, so thus far we have treated Rosenberg as the *de facto* singular voice of Jews, which of course he was not. In fact, his adamancy about the preservation of tradition in the face of the ghetto's removal did not reflect what many of Prague's Jews felt. Many Jews in the city strongly supported the tearing down of the Prague ghetto (Giustino 205). While Rosenberg saw the ghetto as a site of renewed strength these Jews saw it as precisely the opposite, a source of physical degeneracy. As one Prague Jew, Theodor Weltsch, wrote in an article entitled "The Sanitation of Prague's Josefov" in 1894, just before the *Finis Ghetto* plan had begun:

The pull of the times consists of, [...], the turning of continually-wider circles of attention to the pressing postulates of public-health teachings; concern about health, that precious treasure of humans and the interest of which is tied both to the individual and to the whole, makes [...] it a duty to put the lessons of modern hygiene into practical form....

It is established in the natural course of development that the old must disappear with time and make room for the new; the spirit of Prague Jewry, which long ago learned to join itself to the spirit of the new era, will experience in this no rupture. (Giustino 187)

Here, Weltsch argues for the clearing of the Prague ghetto for sanitary reasons. He is supporting a similar idea that Max Nordau did through the Muscle Jew, and that Rosenberg endorsed through the golem. Weltsch's image of the ghetto runs completely contrary to Rosenberg's. He

does not see the ghetto as a source of Jewish strength, rather something that harms Jews and will renew their strength in its elimination. If Weltsch sees the Jewish ghetto as a source of tradition, it is not one he deems worthy of preservation. The “spirit of Prague Jewry” will push on through “the natural course of development,” which left the ghetto behind as an artifact of the past.

Other Prague Jewish writers disagreed with the use of the ghetto as a cultural memory. In *Nifla'ot*, Rabbi Loew comes to Prague with the express purpose of stopping the blood libel, which had been plaguing the community:

When Rabbi Leyb first arrived in Prague, the blood libel was making life very difficult for the Jews, and much innocent Jewish blood had already been shed because of that foul accusation. Rabbi Leyb proclaimed he would struggle with all his might against the blood libel and rid the Jews forever of that dreadful lie (Rosenberg 6).

The cultural memory Rosenberg is constructing around the ghetto is one built on a history of violent oppression. Loew comes and ends that oppression, but he does not erase it from memory. Rather, Loew’s mythical defeat of the blood libel immortalizes its history as a permanent feature of the cultural memory of the ghetto. When Loew leaves the golem’s body in the attic of the Alt-Neu Synagogue, he leaves an eternal reminder of the oppression he defeated. The rumor that the golem is there, and thus the memory of the blood libel, is carried on by the Jewish community. That memory delineates, in part, where the border of that community is. Those who know of the golem, Jews, remember their oppression as a community for as long as the legend of the golem persists. Thus, the Jews of the ghetto are continually separated from those not of their

community, gentiles, who do not know the legend and who are not bound to its memory of oppression.

Many Jews in support of *Finis Ghetto* had a similar memory of oppression bound to the ghetto. They, however, very much wanted this reminder to disappear. Two Jewish writers expressed this in *The Jewish Municipal Times* in the four years following the first demolitions:

Along with the last traces of [the ghetto], let religious prejudice, which disturbs peace and only begets hatred, disappear.

[Speaking to the structures of the ghetto:] We call on you, you dismal shadows of the Middle Ages, you witnesses of erstwhile injustice and intolerance, to go away! Disappear you foggy shapes of one-time tyranny and lack of appreciation of human rights! In your place freedom and justice may come. (Giustino 188)

These writers tied the cultural memory of the ghetto to the same history of anti-Jewish oppression that Rosenberg did, but rather than preserve that memory, they sought to erase it in order to prevent that oppression in the future. To them, the ghetto emblemized the enduring memory of anti-Semitic oppression that would continue to threaten the Jewish community as long as the ghetto remained. Whereas Rosenberg built on the cultural memory of the ghetto in *Nifla'ot* as a reminder of oppression and a continued means of separation, these writers wanted to tear the actual ghetto down, erasing their history of oppression to remove the last walls of separation between Prague's Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

In summary, Rosenberg's retelling of the golem legend 1) reflected a desire to change the portrayal of the Jew into a stronger image that would be able to combat growing anti-Semitism at

the beginning of the 20th century, and 2) sought to reclaim and reassert a traditional form of Jewish culture that Rosenberg idealized, embodied in the ghetto and evident in his stance on assimilation, sexuality, and his maintaining of the older traditional form of Jewish masculinity. The golem's enduring function as a protector after *Nifla'ot* demonstrates that many readers were attracted to Rosenberg's first modification to the legend, but the latter proved to be an issue for the readers who did not share Rosenberg's conservative stance on Jewish tradition.

We can also read the removal of ghettos at the turn of the century as a removal of the Jewish image as it had been constructed by anti-Semitic discourse. Many anti-Semitic myths about Jews were rooted in the idea that the Jew was bound to the ghetto and to the degeneration of urban life: "The Jew is, for the medical literature of the nineteenth century, the ultimate example of the effect of civilization (i.e., the city and 'modern life') on the individual" (Gilman 49). Contemporary anti-Semitic discourse claimed that the psychopathology of the Jew was a consequence of their long term association with the city and its perceived decadence (Gilman *Difference and Pathology* 154), as was their sexual deviancy (Gilman *Difference and Pathology* 158). Those claims relied on the assumption that the Jew was an inhabitant of the ghetto. Anti-Semitic discourse may have applied this to Jews well outside of the ghetto, but the basis of these theories was that the roots of Jewishness were in the ghetto. When the ghetto was removed the basis of these theories disappeared as well. Thus, removal of ghettos caused the image of the Jew held by anti-Semitic discourse to become destabilized. What was a Jew without the ghetto?

Meyrink's *Der Golem* explores this question. When the ghetto is destroyed at the end of the novel, the stereotyped images of the Jew, like Hillel and Wassertrum, that had been so intrinsically rooted in the ghetto, seemed to vanish as well. They prove to be immutable, however, as we have already seen. The novel shows that Jewishness is a hereditary quality that

persists through the family, and yet even without the family it can persist disembodied. Meyrink seems to suggest that the archetypes of the Jew on which he bases his novel do not need the ghetto to survive. They endure as intangible elements that will forever differentiate the Jew.

We can read the ghetto clearance in the context of assimilation as well. Finkelkraut reads *Der Golem* as exposing “the potent fear among Christians in Central Europe [of] the ‘hidden Jew’ who has infiltrated Gentile society and thereby threatened its very structure and stability” (Finkelkraut 1994, 69, Cited by Vito 42). The removal of the ghetto intensifies this fear of the assimilated Jew. By erasing the location where the grotesque Jew was thought to live the question becomes where the Jew has gone, turning the gaze of the anti-Semite to the “hidden Jew” that is anywhere and cannot be seen. We can see this reflected in the assimilated characters of the novel who are both sinister and subtly devious: for instance, the seductress Angelina who manipulates Pernath with her sexuality and Dr. Wassory who greedily tricks innocent patients into harmful and unnecessary surgeries.

Similarly, the changes Meyrink makes to the golem itself also reflect the removal of the ghetto. Non-Jewish writers before Meyrink often used the golem’s frightening and huge body to signify the perceived violent, monstrous nature of Jews.⁷¹ In contrast, Meyrink shapes his golem into an elusive, intangible, and unrecognizable ghostly form, corresponding to a more modern fear that Jews were now “hidden.”⁷²

⁷¹ “By the early 19th century, German interest began to turn toward the golem, a figure also undead but lacking any redemptive qualities, thus indicating the increasingly hostile attitudes toward Jews with the rise of German nationalism... While still tying the Jews into a narrative of Christian redemption, however ambiguously configured, this discourse at the same invokes the emerging construction of a racial essence through the body. The golem, a monstrous and silent nonhuman, becomes the perfect signifier for the new configuration of the Jews’ absolute difference, the modern symbol of their spiritual and physical corruption, as well as their flawed mode of discourse.” (Gelbin 23)

⁷² Thomas makes a similar conclusion: “As a consequence of the physical transformation of the ghetto, the reinvention of the golem as the embodiment of the past is rewritten as a ghostly incarnation of its absence.

Unlike Rosenberg who rarely details the ghetto, Meyrink luxuriates in his creepy and grotesque descriptions of the ghetto. As Thomas puts it, in *Der Golem* “the ghetto becomes the central, obsessive focus of the story—we might even say its main protagonist” (50). Indeed, this ghetto seems to be almost a living entity. On several occasions Pernath describes the buildings of the ghetto as bordering on a malicious sentience. It is,

as if they were asleep, and you could feel none of the malevolent, hostile life that sometimes emanates from them when the mist fills the street on an autumn evening, partly concealing the changing expressions that flit across their faces....

Often I dream I had eavesdropped on these houses in their spectral communion and discovered to my horrified surprise that in secret they are the true masters of the street, that they can divest themselves of their vital force, and suck it back in again at will, lending it to the inhabitants during the day to demand it back at extortionate interest as night returns. (Meyrink 42)

As Pernath describes it, the ghetto is a site that exudes hostility in its very existence. The Jews who live there are intrinsically bound to it, bound to the living essence of the ghetto itself. As the living buildings of the ghetto conspire as “true masters of the street” and greedily charge “extortionate interest,” it would seem that the essence the ghetto imparts to its inhabitants is analogous to the essence of the Jew.

Meyrink’s golem is no longer envisaged as a servant or a rebel (as in most versions) but as an elegiac incarnation of a vanished world...” (51)

In Meyrink's depiction the ghetto is a nightmarish place for everyone, including Jews. The topic of assimilation is again pertinent here. *Der Golem's* strong stance against assimilation implies that Jews should remain in the ghetto. Those who reject the ghetto and their Jewish origins are corrupted by the internal Jewishness they fail to acknowledge. Yet the ghetto does not seem to be a pleasant place even for non-assimilated Jews. Meyrink's ghetto only mirrors the sinister and grotesque image of Wassertrum and Rosina. Hillel and Miriam, also unassimilated Jews, are the ghetto's "natural" inhabitants as well, but it does not seem to reflect them. In Meyrink's eye, the Jew may possess mystical, traditional, and orthodox qualities, but the ghetto only displays the corruptive elements of modernity that the grotesque Jew exhibits. Indeed, Hillel and Miriam tend to be secluded within the ghetto in a private space away from that corruption. Pernath almost always sees them both in the confines of Hillel's apartment, where no one else seems to intrude. We see them both again in the final moments of Pernath's narrative in the secret room of the golem, the heart of the ghetto. Meyrink seems to agree with the contemporary anti-Semitic discourse that portrayed the ghetto as a corruptive influence of modernity for the Jew, but contends that uncorrupted Jews must live sequestered from its influence. *Der Golem* assumes that there are "good" and "bad" Jews, and that they live in separate spaces within the ghetto.

To conclude, the demolition of the Prague ghetto destabilized the image of the Jew in anti-Semitic discourse that had based the Jew so firmly within the ghetto. When the ghetto was destroyed the image of the Jew became shaky and had to be redefined out of context of the ghetto. We can read *Der Golem* as reflection of this in that Meyrink spends the whole novel toying with Jewishness by implanting it and removing it repeatedly. He removes Jewishness when Pernath's memory is erased then makes Jewishness return when Pernath discovers he is a

Jew. Finally, at the end of the novel, Meyrink removes Jewishness with the erasure of the ghetto. Yet here, he even finds a way to insert it again. The last remnant of the ghetto, the golem's room and the building it is concealed in, persists in a realm that is no longer the ghetto. Meyrink implants Jewishness into the non-Jewish world. The "heart of the ghetto" persists without the ghetto, in the same way that Jewish essence lived on, and the same way that the last seven buildings in Josefov remained standing.

We can note a collusion between Rosenberg and Meyrink regarding the ghetto. At first their portrayals appear totally oppositional. Rosenberg saw the Prague ghetto as a source of heritage and unity for the community, while Meyrink saw it as a corruptive influence on the Jew and a source of division with the Jewish community. Yet, by condemning assimilation, both construct the ghetto as the place where Jews are supposed to be, spurning the Jews who have left the community. To Rosenberg, the ghetto is an ancestral home to Jews in need of protection. The strength to protect the ghetto comes from within it. Just as Rabbi Loew found strength by forming the clay of the ghetto into a man, Rosenberg suggests that Jews will find a new strength - a new Jewish manliness - by turning inward towards the community. To Meyrink, the ghetto is a grotesque slum that births equally grotesque Jews, but nonetheless "good" Jews remain within it. Hillel, Miriam, and eventually Pernath at the end of the novel overcome the corruptive nature of the ghetto through a spiritual discipline and self-awareness.

Finally, this study returns to the idea of the golem as a palimpsest. Scholars have argued that the legend of the golem can be viewed as a palimpsest, a manuscript, on which text is written, erased, and rewritten. Authors do this when they rewrite the legend for their own purposes, deleting and inscribing the meanings that have been written onto its clay body.

We have seen this repeatedly as Rosenberg and Meyrink reformed the golem and its story to match their own interests. As I have attempted to demonstrate, these two key creators of the golem inscribe contrasting images of the Jew onto the golem's malleable form. These images correlated to how Jews were portrayed in the contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish discourses that each writer was connected with. The images Rosenberg and Meyrink molded the golem into were completely oppositional. Rosenberg presented the golem as an ideal that Jews should aspire to (athletic, sexually pure, obedient to traditional authority), while subordinating that type of Jew to a traditional figure, Rabbi Loew (orthodox, sexually restrictive, intelligent), which had to exist alongside the golem. Meyrink presented the golem as a culmination of all the flaws Jews could not help but possess (the "faltering gait," listlessness, the inferior Jewish "essence"). In a similar sense, Rosenberg portrayed the golem as a symbol of Jews' renewed strength, while Meyrink portrayed it as a symbol of their eternal weakness. They also differed on the portrayal of Jewish agency: Rosenberg's golem was an incarnation of the Jew's potential for empowerment, Meyrink's an incarnation of the Jew's perceived inability. Last, they disagreed on the how to depict the golem's home. For Rosenberg, the golem embodied all of the lost heritage and unity of the traditional ghetto life. To Rosenberg, the golem marked the undying influence of the ghetto as a corrupter and divider of Jews.

This strong dichotomy between these retellings of the golem demonstrates the legend's malleability as a palimpsest, one that could be easily recast to fit the agendas of authors writing in different literary traditions. However, here we must add a nuance to this idea that has appeared in some of the most recent scholarship on the golem, most pointedly by Elizabeth Baer in *The Golem Redux* (2012). It concerns the fact that the ancient palimpsest was, in fact, quite a poor tool. In many cases it was impossible to remove all of the original text on the palimpsest

material. Unable to fully erase the original text, scribes often rewrote over it, adding layer after layer of new text on top of old. In context of the golem, these “texts layered upon texts through intertextual gestures... reveal and valorize various emphases at various times. These texts superimposed upon one another brings with it the notion that no one text is the ‘true’ text and that all golem legends continue to exist and serve as both sources and intertexts” (Baer 22). Inscriptions made on the golem’s clay cannot be fully erased, Baer argues. Though authors may think they have erased components of earlier golem texts, these inscriptions will appear again and again. For instance, when Rosenberg retold the legend he completely removed any trace of the golem as a destroyer. Yet this component of the legend would surface again in later versions, such as in Leivick’s play *Der Goylem* in which the golem goes mad and murders Jews – destruction was a text that could not be erased from the golem’s clay. When it came back, however, the golem was not only a destroyer but also a failed protector. Rosenberg’s change to the golem legend had endured as well. Leivick’s golem is not only a destroyer, but beyond that a failed messiah. It had both the murderous rage of earlier golems and the divine mission of protection Rosenberg gave it. Thus, the golem proves to be easily malleable, but also covered in scars. Its clay body cannot be erased completely; the scars made by previous creators only appear to go away. These scars only build on one another as more writers reach their hands into the clay.

This characteristic of the golem may explain partly why the golem’s legend has seemed to explode since the beginning of the 20th century. Rosenberg and Meyrink took the legend in opposite directions, bending the golem’s body to different extremes, to match different images. This divergence caused the legend of the golem to twist and expand because neither image could be erased. Neither Rosenberg nor Meyrink’s novels led to a single, definitive alteration of the golem legend. Rather, many golem texts after them have conflated Rosenberg and Meyrink.

Many of the golems that later writers would create came with the same messianic charge Rosenberg had sculpted into his own golem and the mysterious and phantasmagoric air that Meyrink instilled into his. As more writers added changes, the golem swelled far beyond its mold. It became the enormous myth today that no scholar or writer, and few remaining oral storytellers of the golem can encapsulate.

Leivick looked back from across the Atlantic and back across the golem's evolution since the dawn of the century. He saw what Rosenberg, Meyrink, and others had done to convolute the golem's body and found no comfort in what he saw. He created his golem knowing that the legend had been warped beyond anyone's control. At the beginning of *Der Golem* Rabbi Loew shapes the golem's body but seems to sense that it has been formed before. He has the sneaking suspicion that he will not be able to control his creation. Another image than he intended seems to linger within in the body, a "shadow" he did not expect:

...I peer down at this enormous body,
Which has been kneaded, molded by my fingers,
And I can see the shadow striding toward me,
The shadow of a living human being...

...Who can say how many generations
The body has been sleeping there—who knows?—
While somewhere else his yearning soul is wandering?...

Amid proud joy, I saw a second shadow

Of this enormous, this tremendous body....

Who's waking on the surface of the river?

Who's drawing near to me yet draws no nearer?

Drawing away yet doesn't draw away?

Dark phantom, who are you? (Leivick 114-115)

The spirit Loew called to possess the golem's body has come. It will speak to the rabbi in this scene through the lines quoted at the start of this study, asking what form it will take, what shape the golem will become. It knew, like Leivick, that it was doomed to failure, that all previous golems would form "shadows" within it. Thus, when the spirit responds it seems to address not only Rabbi Loew, but *all* Rabbi Loews, all of the creators of the golem who had come before. It speaks knowing that it has entered the golem's body countless times, and will enter again countless more.

So when Loew asks "Who are you?" the spirit speaks out from across the water with a cold, familiar tone, "Why, don't you know me?"

And thus the golem is born again.

Appendix – Timeline of Golem Texts from the Bible to H. Leivick

- Book of Psalms
- Babylonian Talmud
- 3rd – 6th Century – Book of Creation (Sefer Yezirah)
- 12-13th century – Rabbi Eleazar of Worms comments on Sefer Yezirah
- 13th century – Abraham Abulafia of Spain, writing in Italy, comments on arts of creation (related to, but not specifically about, the golem)
- 13th century – Circle of the Special Cherubin discuss golem creation
- 15th century – recipes for golem creation are collected in Northern Italy, translated into Latin and become popular among Christian Kabbalists
- 1517 – Johannes Reuchlin *De Are Cabalistica*, important Kabbalist text that popularized the golem
- 16th Century – Jewish Kabbalist Abraham Yagel, asks whether golem creation was witchcraft, concluded it was natural magic.
- 1614 – Samuel Benz, writes anti-Semitic pamphlet on the sorcery used by Jews in creation of the “hamor golem” (golem of clay)
- 1630 – Earliest known version of the legend in an anonymous manuscript in Oxford, golem story set in Polish city of Chelm
- 1674 – Christoph Arnold’s letter on golem building among Polish Jews, one of the earliest literary pieces, Details golem construction and forehead words, retells story of Rabbi Elijah [Elias] of Chelm and the version where the golem falls and crushes the rabbi
- 1714 – Johann Jakob Schudt, (Frankfurt) Early Short Golem Tale, major entry into popularized Christian sphere (adopted from Christoph Arnold) (later adopted by Jakob Grimm)
- 1808 – Jacob Grimm, *Journal of Hermits*, golem story set in Poland but non-specific to city, this was the major entry point of the golem into ethnography
- 1812 – Ludwig Achim von Arnim, “Isabella of Egypt”, short story, featured a female golem as an estranged bride, later popularized by commentary from Heinrich Heine in 1836
- 1834 – Joseph Seligmann Kohn, “Das jüdische Gil Blas,” first known text to connect the golem to Rabbi Loew and Prague
- 1834 – Poem “The Golem and the Adulteress” by Ludwig Philippson
- 1836 – Heinrich Heine writes a commentary on Achim von Arnim’s “Isabella of Egypt”
- 1836 – Ludwig August Frankl retells the golem tale in the Viennese literary magazine
- 1837 – Berthold Auerbach, *Spinoza* (novel), in one scene a character retells the story of the Prague golem
- 1841 – Gustav Philippson, *Der Golam, eine Legende*
- 1841 – Franz Klutschak, *Panorama des Universums: Der Golem des Rabbi Low*
- 1842 – Adam Tendlau, *Der Golem des Hoch-Rabbi-Low*,
- 1842 – Daniel Uffo Horn, golem story that includes Loew

- 1st Half of 19th Century – Rabbi Eliyahu ben Solomon the Gaon of Vilna claims to have attempted a golem creation
- 1844 – Annette von Droste-Hulshoff, poems “The Golems” and “Hold On Tight”
- 1845 – Meir Aaron Goldshmidt, *En Jode*, novel that contains a retelling of the golem tale, set in Lvov, Ukraine
- 1847 – Leopold Weisel (worked with Klutshack, more popular than him but less descriptive and academic), *Sippurim: Eine Sammlung judischer Volkssagen*
- 1870 – “ ” redited by Wolf Pascheles
- 1882 – Leopold Kompert, poem “Der Golem”
- 1882 – *Jewish-German Chrestomathia*, discussion by Max Grunbaum of the golem and Goethe’s “Sorcerer’s Apprentice” as relating to Judeo-German folklore
- 1883 – (Written 1858) Theodor Hebbel, opera libretto, love story about Rabbi Loew
- 1886 - Jaroslav Vrchlicky, “Rabinska moudrost,” first Czech-language source for the golem
- 1893 – Peretz, short story “The Golem”,
- 1898 – Israel Zangwill, “The Master of the Name”
- 1901 – Rudolf Lothar, poem, sexual interest in the rabbi’s daughter 1901 – Sholem Aleichem “*Der Golem*” in German periodical *Die Welt*
- 1902 – Walter Rathenau, rewrites story of Rabbi Elieser who makes a female golem for procreation
- 1903 – Hugo Salus, German poem
- 1908 – Arthur Holitscher, *Der Golem*, (play)
- 1909 – Yudel Rosenberg, *The Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague and the Golem*
- 1909 – David Frischmann, *Ha-golem*, story that later appeared in his collection *Ba-Midbar* (1923)
- 1913 – Yudel Rosenberg, *Sefer Hoshen ha-Mishpat shel ha-Kohen ha-Gadol*, (novel) sequel to *Nifla’ot*. About Rabbi Loew but not the golem.
- 1914 – Johannes Hess, *Der Rabbiner von Prag (Reb Loeb)*, play
- 1915 – Gustav Meyrink, *Der Golem*
- 1915 – Max Brod, *Tycho Brahe’s Weg zu Gott* (Tycho Brahe’s Path to God), about Loew but not golem.
- 1915 – Bremen: Carl Schunemann Verlag – Edition: Meyrick, G. *The Golem* 1976
- 1917 – Chayim Bloch, *Der Prager Golem: von seiner “Geburt” bis zu seinem “Tod”*, *The Golem: Legends of the Ghetto of Prague*
- 1920 – Paul Wegener, *Der Golem: wie we in die Welt kam* (film)
- 1920 – Chayim Bloch, “Israel the Warrior of God. The Baal Shem of Chelm and His Golem”, follow up to golem novel stolen from Rosenberg
- 1920 – Franz Kafka, “Das Stadtwappen” (The City Coat of Arms), alludes to the golem.
- 1921 – H. Leivick, *The Golem* (play)

Works Cited

- Ager, Jason P. *Heimat's Sentry: Images of the Golem in 20th Century Austrian Literature*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013.
- Baer, Elizabeth Roberts. *The Golem Redux: From Prague to Post-Holocaust Fiction*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2012.
- Bilski, Emily D., et al. *Golem! Danger, Deliverance, and Art*. New York: Jewish Museum, 1988.
- Blieiler, Everett Franklin. "Introduction to *Der Golem*." Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 1972.
- Collins, H. M., and T. J. Pinch. "Dr. Golem: How to Think about Medicine." Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005; 2008.
- Contrada, Norma. "Golem and Robot: A Search for Connections," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 7.2/3 (26/27) (1995): 244–254.
- Davidson, Jane P. "Golem - Frankenstein - Golem of Your Own," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 7.2/3 (1996): 228-43.
- Davidson, Jane P. "Golem - Frankenstein - Golem of Your Own." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 7.2/3 (1996): 228-43.
- Dekel, Edan, and David Gantt Gurley. "How the Golem Came to Prague," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 103.2 (2013): 241-58.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The "Uncanny"." *New Literary History* 7.3 (1976): 619.
- Gelbin, Cathy S. *The Golem Returns: From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808-2008*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011.

- Gilman, Sander L. *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Gilman, Sander L. *The Jew's Body*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Giustino, Cathleen M. *Tearing Down Prague's Jewish Town: Ghetto Clearance and the Legacy of Middle-Class Ethnic Politics Around 1900*. New York: East European Monographs, 2003.
- Hull, David L. "The Golem: What Everyone should Know about Science" Harry Collins Trevor Pinch." *Philosophy of Science* 62.3 (1995): 487-8.
- Kieval, Hillel J. *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- Laqueur, Walter. *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*. New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Leivick, Halper. *Der Golem* in: *The Golem: A New Translation of the Classic Play and Selected Short Stories* by Chayim Neugroschel. New York: Norton & Company, 2006.
- Meyrink, Gustav. *Der Golem*. Trans. Mike Mitchell. With "Introduction to *Der Golem*" by Robert Irwin. California: Ariadne Press, 1995.
- Murphy, Ruth. "The Making of a Jewish Folk Hero: The Maharal in the Golem of Prague," *The Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* 22 (2008): 113.
- Nordau, Max. "Muskeljudentum," *Jüdische Turnzeitung* (June , 1903) rep. In Nordau, *Zionistische Schriften* (Cologne and Leipzig: Juedischer Verlag, 1909).
- Presner, Todd Samuel. "'Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles': Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration," *Modernism/modernity* 10.2 (2003): 269-96.

- Qasim, Mohammed. *Gustav Meyrink. Eine monographische Untersuchung*. Edited by Ulrich Muller, Franz Hundsnurscher, and Cornelius Sommer, Stuttgarter Arbeiten zur Germanistik. Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1981.
- Robinson, Ira. "Literary Forgery and Hasidic Judaism: The Case of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg," *Judaism* 40.1 (1991): 61-78.
- Rosenberg, Yudel. *The Golem and the Wondrous Deeds of the Maharal in The Golem: A New Translation of the Classic Play and Selected Short Stories* by Chayim Neugroschel. New York: Norton & Company, 2006.
- Rottensteiner, Franz. Afterword to *The Green Face*, by Gustav Meyrink. Trans. Mike Mitchell. Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1992.
- Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. 1818.
- Sherwin, Byron L. "Golems in the Biotech Century," *Zygon* 42.1 (2007): 133-44.
- Sherwin, Byron L. *The Golem Legend: Origins and Implications*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985.
- Spiro, Mia. "Containing The Monster: The Golem In Expressionist Film And Theater," *Space Between: Literature & Culture, 1914-1945* 9.1 (2013): 11-36.
- Thomas, Alfred. *Prague Palimpsest: Writing, Memory, and the City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Weiner, Robert G. "Marvel Comics and the Golem Legend," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 29.2 (2011): 50-72.
- Wiener, Norbert. "God and Golem, Inc: A Comment on Certain Points Where Cybernetics Impinges on Religion." 7th ed. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1990.