

Introduction

The Hulk, Superman, the Terminator—they are all modern popular culture echoes of the golem, that mystical Jewish artificial man of legend, a sort of friendly Jewish Frankenstein. Yet while in these later incarnations these Jewish meanings are apparent only by implication, the golem has remained the explicit sign of the particularity of Jewish popular traditions. By focusing on the golem, then, this book explores the special role that popular culture paradigms have played in the formation of modern Jewish culture over the past two hundred years.

The aim of this book is not to present an exhaustive study of all golem representations across modern cultural media. Rather, my study explores through key literary texts and films the golem's function to negotiate the contested notion of Jewish cultural authenticity over the last two hundred years. While the golem as artificial man of clay, animated by a ritual incantation, first appeared in the medieval Jewish mystic tradition of the Kabbalah, the range of tales told around this figure today are the product of its European secularization. This study concerns itself with the role that popular culture constructions of the golem since the early 1800s have played in forming the modern image of the Jews both in the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. In contrast to previous studies, I am thus not concerned with the reflection of a Jewish core tradition, which is assumed to be authentic, in modern popular culture texts on the golem, but rather with the ways in which the discourse on popular culture in modern scholarly and literary texts has constructed the assumed folktale figure of the golem as a signifier of Jewish essence.

My book thus studies the modern interest in the golem from a discourse arising among German Christians in the early 1800s to the current refiguring of Jewish culture in the global context. Widely seen as an icon of authentically Jewish lore, the golem continues to inspire writers across ethnic, cultural, and national affiliations in Europe, the United States, and Is-

rael. In spite of its heterogeneous cultural origins, then, it has become a signifier of globalized Jewish cultural identities today. The golem, while a theme in the construction of modern Jewish culture, has also come to have a much wider significance in modern thought.

I trace the golem's construction as a uniquely Jewish symbol through its alignment with folk traditions over the past two centuries, arguing that its ambiguous cultural origins provide unique insights into the decisive role that post-1800 popular culture formations have played and continue to play in the forging of modern ethnic and cultural identities. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the golem's supposed origins in medieval legend and its transformation into a generic Jewish symbol have served, in inverted form, the construction of modern Jewish popular culture. The golem is now ubiquitous in its widespread recognition as a Jewish folk motif, and, as this book argues, it is so enduringly popular precisely because it has functioned over the last two hundred years as a touchstone for the contested notion of Jewish cultural authenticity in the diaspora. And yet little is known in the English-speaking context about the German tradition of literary and scholarly writing on the golem, which has been crucial in shaping the modern parameters of this discourse.

Herder's late eighteenth-century writings had established folk traditions as the principal criterion of authentic national spirit and inspired numerous folklore collections among European peoples and around the world. Taking up Herder's arguments, German writers during the Romantic period used the golem to suggest that postbiblical Jewry did not possess a genuine cultural spirit, thus predicating the radical denial of the Jews' creative originality in Richard Wagner's infamous 1850 essay "Judaism in Music." In incorporating the golem into their writing, early nineteenth-century German authors drew on the distant echoes of Renaissance Christian writings on the Kabbalah. It seems that every century sees a surge of interest in the Kabbalah, which U.S. celebrities such as Madonna, Sandra Bernhard, and Demi Moore have lately brought once again into vogue. It is in the intertwining of non-Jewish and Jewish voices in the modern popular culture reworkings of the golem, however, rather than its Kabbalistic configurations, that this book is interested.

Over the last century, the pre-1800 sources on the golem have been covered by extensive scholarship including Held (1927), Rosenfeld (1934), Scholem (1976), Mayer (1975), Idel (1990), and Goodman-Thau (1999). The emergence of these studies itself indicates the remarkable interest sparked by the golem's proliferation in twentieth-century popular culture that these

writings—even though Scholem and Idel focus on the Kabbalistic traditions around the golem—take into account. Furthermore, these earlier studies have tended to maintain that Jewish Kabbalistic and folk traditions on the golem represented the source of the literary golem versions since the early nineteenth century, although Idel concedes that the medieval Kabbalistic configuration of the golem may itself be infused with traditions from outside the Jewish world. The scholarly focus on supposedly authentic premodern Jewish lore must itself be read as an expression of Herder's late eighteenth-century construction of folk narratives as an expression of national essence, which led to the interest in the golem as a distinctively Jewish folk motif.¹ With its insistence on the uniquely Jewish features of the golem, then, Scholem's brilliant opus throws the twentieth-century dissimulation of German Jews into particularly stark relief.

What emerges in this study, by contrast, is the close intertwining of Jewish and Christian accounts of the golem beyond the confines of Kabbalistic ritual, which arise in tandem from the seventeenth century onward. These entangled Christian and Jewish voices make the cultural origins of the body of golem stories told as Jewish folktales today far less clear-cut than has often been assumed. In my study of literary texts, film, and cultural discourse on the golem, I draw inspiration from the growing body of scholarship on the monster as a sign of difference in modernity. In his seminal book on outsiders, Mayer (1981, 9–13) has read literary monster figures as a metaphor for “existential outsiders.” Mayer employs this term for the Enlightenment's gendered, racialized, and sexual outsiders, whose configuration as monsters inadvertently acknowledges the failure of Enlightened humanism.

Subsequent scholars have presented a number of case studies on the particular meanings of the monster. Arnold Davidson (1991) and Marie-Hélène Huet (1993, 1–10) trace Christian medieval and Renaissance imaginations of the monster, which was, among other reasons, believed to derive from sin such as copulation with the devil or other species. Such sinful acts against the will of God, it was thought, would leave their stamp on the human body, and in the human imagination monsters thus often displayed physical deformities, such as missing or excess limbs, or others again had symbols inscribed on their body. As Huet (6) shows, the monster was frequently understood as a warning sign against transgression, and some believed that the word *monster* itself derived from the Latin word *monstrare* (to show), which is related etymologically to the word *demonstrate*.

It is not difficult to see the legacy of such conceptions of the monster

in seventeenth-century reports on the golem, which present the figure of the Jew as an abomination. The conflict deriving from these medieval conceptions of absolute otherness inscribed on the body and the Enlightened ideal of universality expressed themselves in the ever more ambiguous function of the monstrous since 1800. Indeed, the golem frequently resembles human form so closely that its artificiality is indistinguishable to the untrained eye. Resembling the discourse on the assimilated Jew, the golem's difference lies in its essence rather than clearly demarcated physical features. If medieval monsters were figures of horror, we are now dealing with the more subtle implications of the uncanny. In observing the ambivalent merging of the German word *heimlich* (homely or known) with its apparent antonym *unheimlich* (uncanny) Sigmund Freud concluded in his famous 1919 essay on "The Uncanny" (2003, 121–62) that the uncanny does not derive from the unknown, as the German word would suggest, but rather from the boundary zone between the known and the unknown.

As Kristeva (1982) contends, following Freud's work on the uncanny, horror is a function of the abject because it transgresses the boundaries of the inside and outside positions that are connoted with subject and object status respectively. Representing "the ambivalent border where exact limits between same and other, subject and object" disappear (185), the Jew is one of the abject figures per se explored by Kristeva. In the eyes of the non-Jew, the Jew appears as a "tyrannical brother" who is imagined both in terms of paternal mastery—through his adherence to biblical law—and submission—in his construction as effeminate—and the antisemite therefore acts as his "possessed servant" or "dibbuk" (184–85).² This is not the only time that Kristeva herself, perhaps unwittingly, touches on the golem tradition. Elsewhere in her book Kristeva discusses the short story "Aleph" by the twentieth-century Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, who made reference to the Kabbalah in a number of his works, as an example of the abject nature of literature, which "must necessarily become . . . a narrative of the infamous" (24). In contrast to Hans Mayer (1981), then, for whom monsters represent social outsider figures per se, Kristeva casts the uncanny in literature as the site of the fluid reimagination of social positions of power.

Postmodern theories of the artificial anthropoid, such as Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), have largely focused on Kristeva's imbrication of the uncanny with social dissidence. For Haraway, the postmodern artificial anthropoid is a self-consciously subversive postulate of gender and sexual alterity, a figure disrupting hegemonic conceptions of gender and sexual difference. Recent Jewish writings on the golem have ea-

gerly embraced the perception of postmodern fluidity and subversion in the anthropoid to signify the changing configurations of Jewishness beyond both Jewish traditionalism with its gender and sexual prescriptions, on the one hand, and the modern discourse on racial purity, on the other. In studying through the golem the ongoing refiguration of gender and sexual features ascribed to the Jew, I draw largely on Sander L. Gilman's groundbreaking *Difference and Pathology* (1985), which looks at the intersections between images of race, gender, and sexuality in broader German culture around 1900, and Daniel Boyarin's *Unheroic Conduct* (1997), which traces traditional Jewish constructs of masculinity to propose strategies of Jewish gender dissent within Gentile culture.

As I will show, golem representations in popular culture have thus come full circle from reflecting around 1800 the German-Christian denigration of the Jews' essential difference, with its racialized, gendered, and sexualized connotations, to a self-conscious and playful assertion of Jewish particularity at the beginning of the new millennium. Modern popular culture configurations of the golem afford us a unique view on the close intertwining of inside and outside perceptions of the Jew and Jewish culture over the last two centuries. The close relationship between anti-Jewish stereotypes and Jewish self-constructions in the German lands is the subject of Sander L. Gilman's seminal work *Jewish Self-Hatred* (1986), which argues that Jewish self-construction after the Middle Ages essentially rested on the acceptance of anti-Jewish stereotypes, on the one hand, and their reinterpretation into positive traits, on the other. Thus Gilman sees in the Jews' "constantly fluctuating series of self-images" a "central paradigm of self-hatred . . . a carbon copy of the nature of stereotyping itself" (12).

While Gilman describes a psychological dynamic of internalized stereotypes that is undoubtedly played out in the individual, texts afford us a more complex view of images and their cultural uses. In tracing the trajectory of images of the Jew and Jewish culture in golem writings by Jewish and non-Jewish authors, I follow Kristeva's interpretation of the uncanny as a site where positions of social power are constantly negotiated and reimagined. Stam and Spence's contention that film essentially positions the spectator also holds true for literary narrative, especially in its adoption of quasi-cinematic techniques in the film era, albeit utilizing a different set of aesthetic means. Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) work on post-colonial mimicry has opened up a host of new scholarly works studying the parodic deconstruction of the dominant look in literature and film, which enacts the controlling power of the colonizer in its reflection in the

subjugated subject. In the disjuncture opening up between the dominant look and its displacement in the colonized subject's gaze, Bhabha perceives a "terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" (2). Contemporary culture itself, according to Bhabha, represents such an interstice, "a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience" (5).

While I do not propose a simple conflation of the Jewish predicament with the postcolonial condition, the cultural semblance produced in the interaction between colonizers and the colonized in the South Asian context in Bhabha's study also represents a clearly discernible element in the modern Jewish-Gentile relationship, especially in the German context. The emphasis in my study, as indeed in Bhabha's, is not on an intra- or interpersonal dynamic of the Jewish-Gentile encounter but on a particular body of texts produced in this encounter. In other words, what interests me is the constant resignification of received images—in this case the golem's signification of the Jew's human semblance—in cultural artifacts connoting by nature a creative and open-ended process. Jewish culture, even in its traditional configurations, no more has an essence than any other culture does. It is rather the transient site of constantly shifting meanings and practices, a process that has been carrying on across the bridge of an astounding three millennia reaching into the present and future.

Popular culture, this book contends, has played an important role in the construction of modern Jewish culture. Indeed, in its older configuration as folk culture, the proponents of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the nineteenth-century scholarly study of Judaism, saw in popular culture a medium of both universal humanity and ethnic particularity. Texts such as the golem story thus formed a clue in the search for Jewish cultural paradigms beyond the confines of Jewish tradition itself. Whereas David Brenner (2008) studies modern German-Jewish popular culture through the lens of texts produced by Jews for Jewish audiences, my study of the golem theme proposes a broader delineation of Jewish popular culture that moves beyond the ethnicized agents of authors and their audiences. Modern Jewish culture, as indeed all culture, is a construct growing also from the creative engagement with cultural forces transcending the particular ethnic or cultural group to which it is assigned. Non-Jewish authors, even where they imbue the golem with anti-Jewish meanings, thus played a pivotal role in the shaping of one of the most iconic popular themes attributed to the Jews today. It may well be that the particular power of the

golem theme in the popular imagination derives from its multiple inscriptions of the historical discourse on the Jews, which makes this figure instantly recognizable to broad audiences across cultural, ethnic, and national divides. In this sense, we can read the golem itself as triggering the inadvertent collapse of the essentializing cultural and ethnic discourses it is meant to signify.

I seek to stress the creative element in this interaction that is characterized by modes of Jewish cultural agency and intervention reaching across the ruptures of the Shoah. In doing so, I build on the recent work of scholars such as Isenberg (1999), Hess (2002), and Brenner (2008), who have sought to revise the totalizing framing of the prewar German-Jewish relationship as a false “Myth of German-Jewish Dialogue” (Scholem 1976). Rather than being invested in this symbiosis per se, Isenberg, for example, explores a discursive modernist sphere shared by Germans and Jews to contend that “German-Jewish modernism was an effort, perhaps in vain, on the part of Germans and Jews alike to understand themselves within the context of two colliding worlds” (150). Similarly, Hess identifies modes of agency in the attempts by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “Jewish intellectuals seeking to fashion new forms of Jewish identity” (9). As I show through the golem, the dream of the New Jew straddling German-Jewish particularity and modern universality may have collapsed in the Nazi genocide; the onset of the new millennium, however, has spawned a new body of texts revisiting and elaborating this dream in ways pointing beyond the essentializing meanings of the past. The study of golem texts thus affords us a unique view on the continuing history of the relationship (rather than symbiosis) between Jews and non-Jews in the German-speaking lands, a relationship that is now embedded in a global cultural context.

To understand the culturally ambiguous origins of the popular culture golem figure, the string of texts emerging before 1800 shall be recapitulated only briefly here. The term *galmi* (my golem) first appears in Psalm 139:16. Its biblical meaning is often translated as shapeless mass or embryo, connoting the unfinished human being before God’s eyes. Midrashic literature understood the term *golem* to refer to the biblical creation story of the first human being, Adam, before he received a soul. Stories about the creation of artificial humans or animals by various Jewish sages precede the Kabbalah. However, the term *golem* only gained currency for such creations around the late twelfth century, when Jewish mystics in the German-speaking lands adopted this word to describe a silent man artificially created from clay and brought to life through an incantation of Hebrew

letters and words with their numerical value. As Held (1927) and Rosenfeld (1934) have shown, these traditions came to the attention of Christians early on, and the details of golem creation would see further narrative embellishment over the centuries.

Although Christian portrayals of the golem sometimes grew out of genuine interest in the Kabbalah in defense of the Jews, the golem, as I show, increasingly became infused with anti-Jewish discourses linking the Jews to sorcery and spiritual corruption. In discussing the forty-two-letter name of God without, however, using the word *golem*, the Christian humanist and Hebraist Johannes Reuchlin (1492) reports the creation of an artificial anthropoid whose forehead bore the Hebrew inscription “YHVH Elohim emeth” (The name of God is truth) and who fell dead to the ground when the aleph, the first letter forming the Hebrew word for truth, was removed. In 1614, the Jewish convert to Christianity Samuel Brenz relates in an anti-Jewish pamphlet the sorcery used by the Jews in their creation of a *hamor golim* (golem of clay), an image of close human resemblance, which is animated by whispering or murmuring an incantation.³ In his 1615 *Jüdische Theriak* (Jewish Theriac), the bilingual edition in German and Hebrew of which addressed both Christians and Jews, the Jewish writer Solomou Zvi Offenhausen retorted that Brenz was himself a “golim hamor,” here obviously in the colloquial meaning of clumsy fool (Held 1927, 67) that the term *golem* still retains in modern Yiddish. In defense of the Jews against Brenz’s insinuations, the Christian Hebraist Johannes Wülfer reprinted both Brenz and Offenhausen in Latin in 1681.

In 1674, Johann Christoph Wagenseil, another Christian Hebraist intent on proselytizing to the Jews, reprinted a Latin letter by Christoph Arnold accusing Polish Jews in particular of sorcery (Wagenseil 1674, 1198), a passage that would be translated into German by Wagenseil’s student Wilhelm Ernst Tentzel (Tentzel 1689, 145). This story would provide the foundation for the modern popular culture conception of the golem. Arnold finds proof for the Jews’ sorcery in the creation of a golem by a Polish Jew by the name of Elias Baal Shem (Elias, Master of the Name), the title “Baal Shem” connoting an adept in the Kabbalah. The silent anthropoid, Arnold reports, is customarily created after holidays from clay or mud to carry out domestic tasks. It is animated by an amulet inscribed with the Hebrew word for truth, *emeth*, and, although at first very small, the golem grows a little every day until it becomes stronger and taller than its human creators. Fearing its strength, the Jews therefore delete the first letter of the amulet, which now reads *meth* (death). Elias’s golem, however,

grew so tall that he could no longer reach the amulet, and so he made his creature bend down to remove his boots, allowing him to reach the amulet in the golem's forehead. However, when he removed the first letter from the amulet, the golem fell over onto him and crushed him to death. This golem, Tenzel comments, resembles the goblins known to help Christian peasants carry water, split wood, and fetch things. Goblins would play mischievous tricks when provoked, and Tenzel recounts how one farmer, in a vain attempt to rid himself of his goblin, succeeded only in destroying his barn in a fire (1689, 143–45).⁴

My study on the golem in modern popular culture follows from my contention that the extent to which Arnold's golem story draws on existing Jewish popular traditions remains quite unclear. Indeed, it seems plausible to suggest that the particular story related by Arnold has some basis in Jewish as well as Christian popular traditions, and it certainly draws from the latter in particular the common Christian stereotypes of Jewish sorcery and the need to punish the Jews for having transgressed against the divine order. Furthermore, through the inscription on the golem's forehead, the golem, and with it the Jews, become associated with the Antichrist. This is to not to say, of course, that stories about golems were not told among Jews of the period. On the contrary, at least one Jewish source of the Renaissance period suggests that a multitude of such oral traditions may have existed at the time, although they do not seem to have involved the frightening aspects of the golem in Arnold's account.

In 1625, the Sephardi Kabbalist Josef Solomou Delmedigo related that the medieval Spanish poets Abraham ibn Ezra and Solomou ibn Gabirol had each created artificial anthropoids, which were returned to their lifeless state without, apparently, doing any harm. According to Delmedigo "there are many such legends that are told by all, especially in Germany" (cited in Scholem 1996, 190, 199). The medieval Hebrew word for Germany, *Ashkenaz*, included the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe, and it therefore appears that golem stories, while representing a shared phenomenon across the European-Jewish world, enjoyed particular popularity among Jews in the German- and Polish-speaking lands. The reasons for the popularity of these Jewish beliefs can only be speculated upon. Idel (1990) sees in the Kabbalah more generally a response to the crisis of the Jewish world after the 1492 expulsion of Jews from reconquered Christian Spain.

It is tempting, then, to relate the emergence of golem rituals among medieval German-speaking Jews to the historical context of the Crusades

and to wonder whether the Kabbalistic anthropoid, postulating the messianic transcendence of death and the sublime nature of man as the jewel of divine creation, in some way echoed the plight of the Ashkenazi Jews, struggling for physical and spiritual survival as the Crusades wiped out entire Jewish communities from Western Europe to Palestine. The seventeenth century seemed to revisit the centuries of carnage suffered by German-speaking Jews on communities in Poland. At the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, the Chmielnicki pogroms crushed the brief golden age of Polish Jewry, and the Kabbalah and messianic fever were once again revitalized. The Sephardi Jew Shabbatai Zvi's self-proclamation as messiah in Constantinople in 1665 thus fell on fertile ground across Jewish communities in Europe, and the shock waves triggered by Sabbatianism, the movement of his followers, made themselves felt well into the nineteenth century.

I contend that these fundamental shifts in Jewish life and religious practice between the Middle Ages and the advent of modernity are reflected in Christian writings on the golem, which reiterate the notion of Jewish difference. Arnold's account has often been cited as the manifestation of a uniquely Jewish folk tradition on the golem, and while the Kabbalah indeed seems to have sparked popular Jewish beliefs around the golem, the Christian lens through which they are presented here must be taken into account. Arnold himself suggests an inherent relationship between Jewish and Christian popular beliefs and superstitions, an argument that points to the fluid ethnic demarcations of folk traditions, especially where peoples and cultures stood in close contact with each other, while also implying that Arnold's reading of the golem may itself be infused with Christian preconceptions. Whether or not the story told by Arnold existed first in Jewish circles is thus beside the point.

What we can say for sure is that this story of the golem, which modern commentators constructed as the authentic expression of Jewish folk spirit, is filtered through the lens of Christian writers and imbued with the stereotypes that their time held regarding Jews. Jewish writers, in turn, would continually reprise and rewrite this story in their search for a cultural counterimage, which would itself reiterate the central parameters of the Christian discourse on the Jews. In 1714, the widely influential Christian Orientalist Johann Jacob Schudt quoted the golem accounts related by Brenz, Offenhausen, and, in Tenzel's reprint, Arnold, which Schudt saw as being prefigured in the Talmudic story of a mute man made by Rabbi Ben Sira. Through this argument, Schudt constructed the genesis of stories on the Jewish artificial anthropoid⁵ that most modern scholars of the golem

would follow and develop.⁶ For Schudt, the Jewish ritual of making artificial anthropoids, in particular the golem made by the Polish rabbi Elias, embodies the Jews' sorcery and "Kabbalist lies" (208).

According to Schudt, however, other peoples also believed in such miracles, and a captured Christian artist thus once strove to make for the emperor of Morocco an iron replica of Memnonis's statue at Thebes, which was said to speak in a clear voice when the sun shone on it. The replica went to bow before the emperor and handed him the artist's supplication. In contrast to such artifacts, Schudt claims, the Jews themselves admit that their creations and images "are neither nature nor art / but want to turn them into something divine," thereby committing "shameful abuse of the name of God" (206). Schudt's use of Arnold's golem story to illustrate the Jews' flawed relationship with nature, art, and the divine would form the blueprint for the early nineteenth-century German Romantic conception of the golem.

During the first half of the 1800s, Rabbi Jakob Emden from the northern German town of Altona would tell a story similar to Arnold's, except that he has the golem slap the rabbi's face rather than crush him under his weight.

Rabbi Eliyahu Baal Shem, who was versed in the Book of Jetzirah, created a man. However, he was overcome with fear that the miraculous creature would destroy the world when he saw him growing to monstrous height, and so he took the Shem from his forehead and the creature was once again returned to dust.⁷

In his autobiography, *Megillat Sepher*, Emden relates that he heard this story from his father, the famous Moravian-born Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Ashkenazi, who had written a tract in which he argued that the golem could not be counted as part of the Minyan, the twelve men needed for a Jewish prayer service.⁸ Emden, who was born in 1697, would have heard this tale during the early 1700s, before his father's death in 1718. The identification by later scholarship of a Chelm tradition around the golem goes back to this account and its association with Emden's great-grandfather, the sixteenth-century rabbi Eliyahu of Chelm, supposedly the golem's maker. Some scholars' interpretation of this family narrative as evidence of a folk tradition linked to Chelm, however, cannot be verified, especially since the widely popular stories about the Jewish fools of Chelm do not appear to make any mention whatsoever of the Jewish artificial anthropoid.

The exact relationship between Arnold's and Emden's accounts must therefore remain the subject of speculation. Given both Ashkenazi's and Emden's fierce opposition of the Kabbalah and of Sabbatianism in particular, it seems unlikely that either father or son would have told this story for any reasons other than to convey their negative vision of Jewish mysticism. Zvi Ashkenazi, who was born in 1658, was descended from Vilna Jews who had fled to Moravia during the 1655 Cossack uprising. He spent part of his early adulthood in Salonika and Constantinople, and it was there that his negative impression of the Sabbatian movement formed initially. In 1710, Zvi Ashkenazi was appointed chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Amsterdam, where he soon became embroiled in a battle over Sabbatianism with the local Sephardi community. After fierce verbal and even physical attacks at the hands of his opponents, he fled Amsterdam in 1714 to conclude his career and life in Lemberg.

From 1751 onward, his son Jakob Emden would himself become involved in a highly visible and damaging war of words with the chief rabbi of Altona, Jonathan Eibeschutz, whom he accused of being a Sabbatian before banning him from his private synagogue. Attempting to gather support from Jewish authorities across Europe, Emden ultimately lost his case and was forced by community elders to leave his hometown, only to continue his futile polemics from Amsterdam. In this context, the golem story related by Emden seems to point to the dangers of the Kabbalah, a meaning that would also resonate with Schudt's negative vision of Jewish mysticism. What can be said for sure is that Arnold's and Emden's accounts appear as part of a broader fascination with the golem in both Jewish and Christian circles since the Renaissance. Later on in the eighteenth century, another famous Jewish figure, Rabbi Eliyahu ben Solomon, the Gaon (spiritual leader) of Vilna, would lay claim to the golem tradition when he reported that in his youth he had tried to create a golem but abandoned the ritual when he saw the shape of a figure passing over him.⁹

These and similar tales appear to have accompanied the messianic fever that had gripped Jewish communities with the rise of the false messiah Shabbatai Zvi. In the eyes of Christian contemporaries, however, the golem held particular significance insofar as it constituted proof of the occult nature of the Jews. As I show, this notion of the golem as the sign of the Jew's special nature took on new form in the early nineteenth century, when German Romantic writers rekindled Christian interest in the Kabbalah. It was then that Arnold's story, distinct from Emden's in the golem's final crushing of the rabbi, emerged in the literary realm in a similar man-

ner to the German fairy tales and legends collected by the Grimms. When Jacob Grimm published this story in 1808, the golem then came to connote the new stereotype of the Jew's lack of creative faculties. According to Herder (1993), true poetic spirit could only arise from a nation, that is to say, a people rooted in a particular geographic and linguistic setting. Post-biblical Jews, scattered across the globe and speaking many tongues, thus neither made up a nation nor possessed an authentic literary tradition. The Romantic writers following Grimm cast the Polish golem as the perfect embodiment of the Jews' absolute difference, of their flawed body, soul, and discourse.

Initially, the mid-nineteenth-century emergence of stories on another sixteenth-century rabbi, the chief rabbi of Prague Yehuda ben Bezalel Löw, and his creation of a golem closely follow the outline of the tale transmitted by Grimm. Furthermore, whereas the Romantics constructed the golem as the embodied essence of the Jews, Jewish intellectuals in turn wrote the golem into a popular tradition in an attempt to insert the Jews into the discourse of nationhood, which was defined by the work of Herder and the Grimms. The new Jewish golem stories, with their assumed folk origins, functioned to substantiate the national essence of the Jews. The tale of the Prague golem not only mediated the construction of nationalized Jewish identity in the Bohemian realm that Kieval (2000) has traced but also represented a broader German-Jewish counternarrative to the negative Christian configuration of the Jews through the golem.

By collecting popular stories such as these, the German-speaking Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) distanced itself from the negative Christian image of the Jew that, as Steven Aschheim (1982) has shown, had been epitomized by the Polish Jew in German-Jewish discourse since the early 1800s. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Rabbi Löw and his golem became central features in the narrative on the Jewish people and culture across the Western hemisphere. Today, Jews and non-Jews alike relate the golem to Jewish folk culture. It has become one of the most broadly recognized signifiers of modern Jewish popular culture, no doubt in part because the significant contribution of non-Jewish writers in the history of this theme is not always recognized.

This book shows how the construct of the golem as an authentic signifier of Jewish culture, arising from popular traditions among the Jewish people, inadvertently betrays the brittleness of ethnicized constructs of culture. Popular culture at large, I argue, is part of this paradox, for its construction around 1800 connoted the assumed stability of the ethnic, geo-

graphic, and linguistic context from which such narratives arose. These fixed demarcations, however, rarely ever existed, as narratives had been shared among neighboring peoples since antiquity, traveling across continents and sometimes appearing in very similar forms in apparently unrelated settings. The Grimms' legends and tales, which only became part of a common German heritage through their publication and literary reception, provide a case in point.

The case of Jewish popular culture is, as this study of the golem shows, no different. Modern Jewish popular culture, as we will see, reveals the heterogeneous nature of all popular culture, particularly because it is not tied to one particular language or national context. In this de-essentialized sense, the golem represents the self-reflexive nature of modern Jewish cultural paradigms even where it is made to perform an essentialized version of Jewish culture. Like the Grimms' German legends and tales, golem stories defy stable ethnic and national categorizations, as well as the assumed distinctions between folklore and literary fiction and low and high culture. The ways in which non-Jewish and Jewish writers since the nineteenth century have constructed the golem as the touchstone of Jewish culture highlights the role of reception as the site where notions of Jewish culture, and indeed those linked to other peoples, are constructed. Wirth-Nesher (1994) thus concludes that because of the international reach of Jewish civilization, Jewish literary texts can be written into various literary traditions, depending on their reception rather than their subject matter (5). Implicitly, however, this notion of Jewish culture still depends on the Jewish authors cited in Wirth-Nesher's study, such as Franz Kafka, Elie Wiesel, or Primo Levi, who are being understood as ethnicized subjects.

In contrast, the conclusions of this study rest on the understanding that modernity, while essentially concerned with the authenticity of identities and works of art, inadvertently subverts such claims. In the age of technical mass reproduction of cultural artifacts, the nineteenth-century distinction between popular and high culture becomes altogether obsolete. Indeed, it could be said that all culture today is popular culture. Kafka, having become something of a pop icon through texts such as his "Metamorphosis," is one case in point. Modern popular culture plays a significant role in the constitution of modern cultural identities and memories, perhaps even more so in the Jewish realm, which transcends the more homogenizing discourses around national cultures and identities. Here, the text has played a unique role in fostering group cohesion through collective norms of behavior and shared modes of cultural memory.

Since the nineteenth century, popular culture both in its older and more recent sense has in the West largely supplanted religion as society's cohesive gel. The golem story has become one such supertext for the constitution of modern Jewish culture and personal identities. In his recent autobiography, the Israeli writer Amos Oz thus uses the golem as a metaphor to describe his initiation into European literature and, by extension, into the pre-Holocaust Jewish cosmopolitanism of his parents' world. When his parents introduced him to literature, thus Oz, they acted as the sorcerer's apprentice and unleashed in him a flood, an image invoking the legendary story of the golem as water carrier. The young boy Amos became like a golem, whose amulet could no longer be removed from under its tongue.¹⁰

In its formulation through popular culture themes such as the golem, modern Jewish culture, like all cultures, emerges as an ethnically fluid concept, whose stable parameters break down beneath the weight of their constructed nature. By increasing the autonomy of culture through the constant circulating of images across the worldwide mass media (Storey 2003), globalization only further obscures the ethnicized agent of textual production and reception. This book, then, charts this development through the uses of the golem figure since its modern construction as a popular culture theme.

Chapter 1 outlines the discussion on legends and folk traditions begun around 1800 by Herder's and the Grimms' writings, which located cultural authenticity in the presumed unity of geography, language, and nation in folk tradition. I show how, spurred by Jacob Grimm's 1808 publication of the Polish golem story alongside a number of German legends, subsequent literary variations by German-Christian authors used the golem to construct the notion of a corrupt Jewish essence and culture, thus laying the foundations for the modern conceptualization of the golem theme.

Chapter 2 traces the rise of the now dominant Prague golem tradition, which links the creation of a golem with the sixteenth-century Rabbi Yehuda ben Bezalel Löw, among German-speaking Jewish literary and scholarly writers. I read the new cycle as evidence of a Jewish counterdiscourse to the Christian Romantic accusation of flawed Jewish creativity. The chapter uncovers how, in fiction and scholarship, Jewish writers of the mid-nineteenth century associated the Prague golem with the high-culture models of medieval Spanish-Jewish lore, on the one hand, and with Goethe's work, on the other, in order to distance the image of the Jew from the negative "Eastern" associations of the golem in Christian writings. In casting Yehuda Löw as a scientist, this discourse aimed to release German

Jewry from the derogatory stereotypes of medieval superstition, although the earlier anti-Jewish connotations of the golem continued to overshadow these new meanings.

Chapter 3 shows how the images of ghetto culture and the Eastern Jew became essential markers of the golem theme after 1870. I tie these images into late nineteenth-century German-Jewish critical scholarship on medieval Jewish popular literature, which used the Judeo-German *Ma'aseh* Books and their perceived references to the golem to stress Jewish authenticity in the vein of Herder and the Grimms' writings.¹¹ The modern configuration of the golem in Christian Romanticism fueled these meanings and facilitated the complex late nineteenth-century attempts by Jewish scholars to identify distinct yet universal Jewish folk traditions in the face of increasing racialized exclusionism. I identify in the simultaneous emergence of Eastern European Jewish literature and its golem texts a similar Romantic residue.

Chapter 4 then examines how golem figures in the work of early twentieth-century German- and Yiddish-speaking Jewish writers negotiated the Zionist idea of a new Jewish warrior type linked to a premodern agrarian lifestyle. While these golem texts reflect the growing German-Jewish dissimilation, they nonetheless develop through the golem alternatives to the Zionist "muscle Jew" by stressing traditional models of male Jewish masculinity incorporating emotionality and physical restraint. While attempting to redeem the Jewish male from antisemitic discourse, these texts, however, tend to relinquish the image of the Jewish woman to the fin de siècle stereotype of the Jewish femme fatale. In doing so, I argue, Jewish fictional configurations of the golem ambivalently strive to reconcile Jewish traditionalism with the universalizing tendencies of modernity, especially where they draw on a modernist aesthetic.

Chapter 5 focuses on the two seminal golem texts to date—Gustav Meyrink's 1915 novel *Der Golem* (The Golem) and Paul Wegener's 1920 film *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (The Golem, How He Came into the World). My discussion of both works highlights the important contribution that non-Jewish writers have made not only to most golem versions since, but also to a productive identification of the Jew with both aesthetic modernism and the new mass culture. In Meyrink and Wegener, I argue, this productivity does not arise from a harmonization of the Jew's image beyond negative stereotype but rather from the ways in which the ambivalent image of the Jew reflects the conditions generating the modernist aesthetic, within which both works situate themselves.

Chapter 6 shows how, by drawing on the prewar association of the Jew with aesthetic modernism, post-Holocaust poets rewrite the golem, and with it the whole of the destroyed European-Jewish culture, into a high-culture model. I show how these works draw close inspiration from the Kabbalah scholar Gershom Scholem, whom Biale (1982), Bloom (1987), and Finkelstein (1992) have characterized as one of the paradigmatic modern and postmodern literary intellectuals. Finkelstein in particular sees the figure of Scholem himself, who sought to disturb the often negative reception of Jewish mysticism by the proponents of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, as a productive model of the disruption that intellectual endeavor should pose. I show that, in casting the golem to signify the disruption of Jewish lives and culture through the Shoah, German-Jewish poets after the Shoah prefigured these academic readings of Scholem's work.

Chapter 7, finally, explores the post-1990s formation of a globalized Jewish cultural paradigm through the golem, a configuration variously drawing on antisemitic and postmodern discourses. In particular, I argue, the golem has served various contemporary forms of Jewish self-construction beyond national and racialized delineations of the past. As, on the one hand, Jewish self-definitions move even further away from the previous linkage to traditional forms of Jewish practice or biologized definitions of Jewishness through matrilinearity or ethnic purity, on the other hand the traces of ethnicized authorship become increasingly obscured in the emergence of a globalized mass culture. Whereas, previously, being Jewish carried inescapable positional connotations of social ostracism and death and was also part of the public debate of authors and their work,¹² the growing temporal and generational distance from the Shoah has rendered this increasingly less so since the 1990s. This is not to say that Jewishness no longer forms an important part of individual self-construction and cultural practice, but that its boundaries with other forms of cultural and individual expression are becoming ever more fluid. In this chapter, then, I abandon the previous distinction between Jewish and non-Jewish authors to signify the particular as well as generic meanings that Jewish signifiers are assuming in the globalizing mass culture in the West.