The Golem: From Enlightenment Monster to Artificial Intelligence

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The Hulk, Superman, Terminator: all of these figures are popular culture echoes of the golem, that artificial human of Jewish mysticism. The golem tradition, which tells of the making of an artificial man from clay through a ritual of words, first arose from medieval Jewish mysticism in the German-speaking lands. Yet the wide-ranging stories told around this figure today are the product of secularization. On the cusp of the age of industrialization, looking back to an idealized image of the seemingly quainter Middle Ages, German Romantic writers constructed the golem as the sign of an assumed Jewish essence, fusing the medieval image of the uncanny Jew with their monstrous perception of the rising new age. Today's golem bears out these complex and varying meanings – which are both particular and universalizing – as the ambivalent sign of cultural interaction between non-Jews and Jews on the one hand, and the state of the human in the rising age of artificial intelligence (AI) on the other.[1]

The term golem is taken from the biblical word "galmi" (Psalm 139:16), which is often translated as "shapeless mass" or "embryo",

1 This article draws on some material from my book, *The Golem Returns: From German Romantic Literature to Global Jewish Culture, 1808-2008* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010). It is published here with the kind permission of the University of Michigan Press.

Figure 1. Joshua Abarbanel, Golem (study), 2013. Wood, ceramic, and metal. 18" x 18" x 4". Collection of the artist.

connoting the unfinished human being before God's eye. Midrashic literature understood the term "golem" as referring to the biblical creation story of Adam before he received a soul. Stories about the creation of artificial humans or animals by various Jewish sages preceded the medieval Kabbalah. But it was only here, in the German-speaking lands, that the term "golem" began to be applied to the mystical creation of a silent man from clay, brought to life through a Hebrew incantation. This secret ritual, the Kabbalists believed, would initiate the sage into the knowledge of divine creation.

Yet the modern stories told about the golem are notably distinct from the medieval Kabbalah, which in time became a mere cue for the supposedly different nature of the Jews. Today, it is commonly assumed that the tales of a secular golem are linked to the hazy origins of a centuries-old Eastern European Yiddish popular culture. This assumed path, however, is more than uncertain, and sprang at least partly from accounts by Christian German authors during and following the Renaissance, which Jewish writers have continually sought to (re)claim, spawning in turn further versions by non-Jewish writers.

I. From the Christian Kabbalah to Racial Antisemitism

From the Renaissance onwards, Christian German scholars such as Johannes Reuchlin showed a keen interest in the Kabbalah and its golem.[2] By the early 1600s, reports of golem creations took a distinctly sinister turn when Samuel Brenz, a Jewish convert to Christianity, reportedly attributed the golem to Jewish sorcery.[3]

However, the overall template of today's golem story first emerged later that century in a letter by the Christian German poet Christoph Arnold, published by Johann Christoph Wagenseil in 1674.[4] In his letter, Arnold recounted the creation of a golem for profane purposes by a Polish rabbi Elias, who is today assumed to have been the sixteenth-century historic figure of Rabbi Eliyahu of Chelm. According to Arnold, Jews customarily make themselves a golem, a silent man from clay, to help with domestic work after their religious festivals. Animated by an amulet inscribed with the Hebrew word for truth, "emet," the golem, who at first is very small, grows a little every day until it is stronger than its makers. Now fearing their creation, the Jews remove the first letter of its amulet, aleph, so that it reads "met," which means death. But Rabbi Elias's golem grew so tall that the amulet could no longer be easily removed, and when the rabbi attempted to lay it to rest, the golem fell over and crushed him.

Arnold's tale would become the template for the most prominent versions of the golem today. During the early eighteenth century, Rabbi Jacob Emden of Altona related the story of Rabbi Eliyahu's gigantic golem as well, but here, in a significant departure from Arnold's version, the golem merely slaps its maker without killing him at the end.[5] Christian Orientalist Johann Jakob Schudt's 1714 account of the golem would have a significant impact on the golem's reception during the Romantic period. Tracing the aforementioned Christian writings, Schudt constructed the genesis of golem stories which

2 Johannes Reuchlin, *De verbo mirifico, 1494. De arte cabalistica, 1517* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1964).

3 Samuel Friedrich Brenz, *Jüdischer abgestreifter Schlangenbalg* (Nuremberg, 1614). Cited in Salomon Zewi Offenhausen, *Jüdische Theriak* (Hanau, 1615).

4 Johann Christoph Wagenseil, *Sota. Hoc est: Liber Mischnicus de uxore adulterii suspecta* (Altdorf, 1674).

5 Hans Held, *Das Gespenst des Golem. Eine Studie aus der hebräischen Mystik mit einem Exkurs über das Wesen des Doppelgängers* (Munich, 1927), 72; Gershom Scholem, *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik* (Frankfurt a.M., 1973), 256.

6 Johann Jacob Schudt, *Jüdischer Merckwürdigkeiten* (Berlin, 1922 [Frankfurt a.M., 1714]), 208. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

7 Jakob Grimm, "Entstehung der Verlagspoesie," *Zeitung für Einsiedler*, no. 7 (1808), 56.

still underpins scholarship today. Here, once again, the golem is attributed to the Polish rabbi Elias, and it is a sign of sorcery and of "Kabbalist lies."[6]

German Romantics would borrow from Schudt's negative view of the Jews' relationship to the interlinked realms of the divine, nature and art. The Romantic preoccupation with artificial humans, automata and living statues ambivalently gauged contemporaneous Enlightenment dichotomies regarding nature and artifice, reason and emotion, and Christians and Jews in order to probe the escalating relationship between humans and technology during the first industrial revolution. These new texts used the golem as a vehicle to simultaneously displace onto Jews the crisis of the human in the ensuing age of mass (re)production, and to imbue them with the demonized residues of the natural world as a thing of the past.

It has been argued that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" (1797), with its "spirits that I called," may have been inspired by the golem. This argument was first proposed by Jewish authors of the 1840s and undoubtedly conveyed the high esteem that Goethe enjoyed among acculturated Jews. But Goethe's work also formed an obvious model for subsequent narrative embellishments of the golem. Following Jakob Grimm's publication of Arnold's tale in 1808,[7] Grimm's publisher Achim von Arnim would become the first to extensively fictionalize the golem in his novella *Isabella of Egypt* (1812). Von Arnim's hostility to Jews is well documented; his German-Christian *Tischgesellschaft*, a conservative dining club, formed an early example of racial antisemitism by banning not only Jews, but also Jewish converts and their offspring from membership. In Arnim's novella a female golem makes her first appearance. Created by a Polish rabbi (i.e. Arnold) in the image of the later Habsburg Emperor Karl V's beloved Dutch-gypsy hybrid Isabella, golem Bella is proclaimed the spitting image of her greedy Jewish maker: hypersexualized, duplicitous and

succinctly racialized, anticipating the modern stereotype of the Jewish femme fatale.[8]

And indeed, the Romantic conception of the monstrous and silent golem prefigured nineteenth- and twentieth-century antisemitism with its idea of the Jew's essentialized physical, spiritual and mental corruption. The Jew, the German composer Richard Wagner would claim in his 1850 essay "Judaism in Music," could only imitate rather than create German culture due to his deformed speech organs, his "creaking, squeaking, buzzing snuffle"[9] being the sign of his flawed intellect. And in 1903, the Viennese philosopher Otto Weininger would conceive of modernity as the most Jewish of all eras in his *Sex and Character*, at precisely the time when the golem was proliferating in an unprecedented manner.[10]

II. Jewish Folklore Writing

Meanwhile, a Jewish tradition of writing on the golem was emerging in Prague. The tales created here from the 1830s onwards follow the basic outline of Arnold's, Emden's and Grimm's accounts: a rabbi creates a golem which is animated through a ritual of words. The golem helps with profane tasks until one day it gets out of control. But this golem is now attributed to the sixteenth-century historical figure of Rabbi Löw, who lived in the city of Prague, then the capital of the Habsburg Empire and the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The writers, who were young Jewish reformers and intellectuals, thereby linked the rabbi and his golem to a distinctly German-speaking tradition in the vein of the Enlightenment.[11]

In Wolf Pascheles's 1846 *Sippurim*, a collection of Prague Jewish folktales, which are best read in the context of Johann Gottfried von Herder's and the Grimm brothers' folk collections, the Bohemian-Jewish physician and folklorist Leopold Weisel

8 Achim von Arnim, *Isabella von Ägypten, Kaiser Karl des Fünften erste Jugendliebe* (Stuttgart, 1997).

9 Richard Wagner, "Judaism in Music," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 3, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London, 1894), 75-122 (79).

10 Otto Weininger, *Sex & Character* (London, 1906).

11 Peter Demetz, "Die Legende vom magischen Prag," *Transit. Europäische Revue*, 1994. Hillel J. Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry. National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918*, 1st ed. (New York / Oxford, 1988).

Figure 2. Mikoláš Aleš, "Rabbi Loew and the Golem" (1899). Ink on paper. Institut für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

12 Wolf Pascheles, *Sippurim, eine Sammlung jüdischer Volkssagen, Erzählungen, Mythen, Chroniken, Denkwürdigkeiten und Biographien berühmter Juden aller Jahrhunderte, insbesondere des Mittelalters* (Prague, 1870), 52.

13 Ibid., 46.

14 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Prometheus," in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche: Gedichte 1756-1799*, 40 vols., vol. 1 (Frankfurt a.M., 1987), 203-204. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (London / New York, 1994).

portrays Rabbi Löw as "a skilled mechanic who made himself an automaton, which is the golem."[12] Conveying the optimistic Enlightenment vision of reason and technological progress, the rabbi remains unharmed by his creation. Weisel's subsequent story about the medieval Spanish-Jewish scholar Maimonides takes a darker turn when Maimonides subjects a young disciple from London (the latter pretending to be deaf and mute, a golem of sorts) to a "Promethean" experiment in which the student is killed, dissected and then reassembled in a lab, where he grows into a thing of horror.[13] Consumed by guilt and misfortune, Maimonides is murdered at the end of the story. Through obvious references to Goethe's "Prometheus" (1785/1789) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), this story appears to raise the dangers of an unchecked modernity in the world of Christian-Jewish interaction.[14] (The intellectual debate about whether Goethe and Shelley borrowed from the golem tale or vice versa continues.)

With the disappearance of ghetto culture during the nineteenth century, Jewish folk collections and, with them, the golem increasingly figured as an important clue when exploring the idea of the Jews' racial essence, typically epitomized by the "Eastern Jew." The intensifying cycle of supposedly
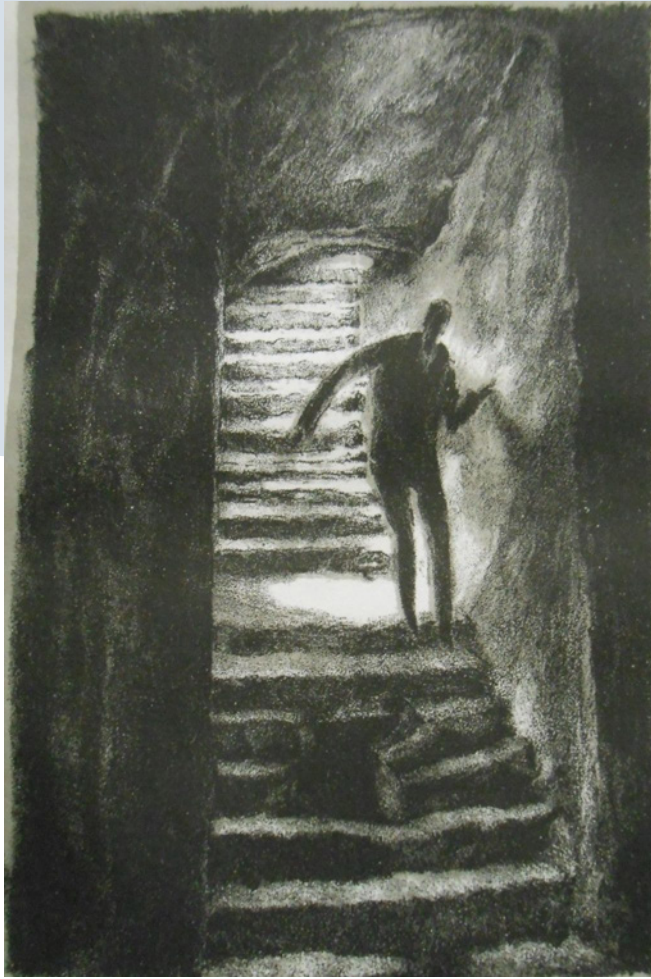
Figure 3. Hugo Steiner-Prag, Illustration for Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*, 1915.

originary and fictitious golem accounts, each spinning off the other, conveys the impending collapse of the imaginary German-Jewish dialogue. Yudl Rosenberg's (1908) and Chaim Bloch's (1920) fiction cycles on the Prague golem, which both misleadingly claim to originate from Yiddish folktales, were likely inspired by the 1858 Yiddish translation of the Prague *Sippurim*.[15] Rosenberg's and Bloch's fictional works, in turn, underpinned the purportedly Jewish folktale origins of subsequent golem versions, through which early twentieth-century authors constructed their vision of the Jews' racialized difference.

Gustav Meyrink's 1915 *The Golem*, which remains the most instantly recognizable golem account today, was the first extended novelization of the Jewish artificial anthropoid. In

15 Yudl Rosenberg, *The Golem or The Miraculous Deeds of Rabbi Leyb*, 1st ed., trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 2006). Chajim Bloch, *Golem: Legends of the Ghetto of Prague*, trans. Harry Schneiderman (Mila, MT, 1997). Wolf Pascheles, *Sipurim: Eyne zammlung: Yidisher folkszagen, mithen, legenden, kroniken...* (Prague, 1858).

Figure 4. Film poster for *The Golem: How He Came into the World* (1920), directed by Paul Wegener.

16 Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem* (Sawtry, 2008), 57-58.

conveying the golem as "a completely unknown person, . . . with a yellow complexion and mongoloid features,"[16] the novel, complete with Jewish artist Hugo Steiner-Prag's illustrations, conveyed the stereotype of the "Eastern Jew." Appearing in the midst of the First World War, Meyrink's work reflected the sense of an imminent apocalypse arising from the destructive potential of modernity, with the Jew as its sign.

Meyrink's novel is often assumed to have provided the blueprint for Paul Wegener's 1920 film *The Golem, How He Came into the World*, which followed Wegener's previous two stabs

at a golem film in 1915 and 1917. But Wegener was likely, at best, to have been inspired by the success of Meyrink's work, as the film's plot largely follows the stories related in Chaim Bloch's pretend folktale cycle, which was itself plagiarized from Yudl Rosenberg's fiction. Wegener's filmic images widely popularized the alleged folktales around the Prague golem, such as the golem chopping wood and defending the ghetto (the latter a more recent motif), the romance between the Jewish woman and Christian knight, and the golem running amok. At the same time, Wegener's 1920 version is far more than a visual reimagination of purported Jewish folktales. It brings to the fore – via the Faustian figure of Rabbi Löw – Wegener's vision of the film artist in the still youthful form of film, which Wegener envisioned as "kinetic poetry." As Wegener states:

> Film's actual poet is the camera. The spectator's ability to constantly change perspectives, numerous tricks such as split screen, mirroring etc., in short: . . . here [in *The Golem]* everything hinges on the image . . . . Rhythm and tempo, light and darkness play the same role in film as indeed they do in music. I envisioned a kind of kinetic poetry which finally relinquishes the image of objective reality as such.[17]

Wegener's images suggest the myth-making powers of film, such as in the projection of the figure of the Wandering Jew, but also film's ability to critically expose stereotypes, as suggested in the revealing shots of demeaning Christian spectators. Akin to Meyrink, Wegener's ambivalent construction of the Jew as the proponent of the new medium of film suggests the uncanny nature of modernity. Framed by technological progress in the form of the cinematic medium, the atavistic essence of the human still breaks through, both volatile in their own way.

What, then, happens when the age-old golem, whose medieval connotations signify the perceived atavistic nature of the Jew, fully morphs into a sign of technomodernity? 1920, the year in which Wegener's *Golem* was released, also saw the publi-

17 Paul Wegener, "Die künstlerischen Möglichkeiten des Films," in *Paul Wegener: Sein Leben und seine Rollen. Ein Buch von ihm und über ihn*, ed. Kai Möller (Hamburg, 1954), 102-113 (110-111).

18 Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.* (London, 2015).

19 Norma Contrada, "Golem and Robot: A Search for Connections," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts. Special Issue on The Golem – Rabbi Loew and His Legacy: The Golem in Literature and Film*, 7, nos. 2/3 (26/27) (1995): 244-254 (251).

20 Cited in https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/sf/r.u.r.html, accessed 13 May 2001.

21 E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Sandman* (London, 2016); Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (Germany, 1927).

22 E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Die Geheimnisse* (Frankfurt a.M. / Leipzig, 1996).

cation of Czech author Karel Čapek's dystopian play *R.U.R.*[18] Made for the purpose of providing slave labor, Čapek's robots revolt and kill their masters. But like Wegener's golem, they also have emotional stirrings and erotic desires. At the end of the play, they are proclaimed masters of the world by the last surviving human. Today, Čapek is considered a pioneer of AI, not least because he invented the word "robot" for his play, drawing on the Czech word "rabota," meaning "work" or "servitude." The connections between Čapek's robots and the golem are manifold, and Čapek himself stated in later interviews about the play that "the Robot is the Golem made flesh by mass production,"[19] and that

> [t]hose who think to master the industry are themselves mastered by it; Robots must be produced . . . *because* they are a war industry. The product of the human brain has escaped the control of human hands. This is the comedy of science.[20]

From E.T.A. Hoffmann's automaton Olimpia in his story "The Sandman" (1816) through to Fritz Lang's cyborg Maria in *Metropolis* (1927), modern culture rarely imagined the automaton doppelgänger – especially in its female shape – as more than an ambivalent creation.[21] Both pieces, each in its own way, reflect Romanticism's racialized conception of the doppelgänger in its close entwinement with the Jewish golem, as featured in Hoffmann's later tale "Secrets."[22] Lang's film, then, can be read as a modernist reimagination of Romantic doppelgänger figures, including Achim von Arnim's highly sexualized golem Bella (1812) and the mechanical nature of E.T.A. Hoffmann's automaton Olimpia, whom her creator Rotwang, whose name bears implicit Jewish connotations, brings to life in a Frankenstein-type electrical experiment.

Whereas *Metropolis* ultimately upholds the binaries between nature and artifice and re-establishes the traditional order of gender (and implicitly race) through the cyborg's destruction at the end, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), which opens with a visual homage to *Metropolis*, suggests far deeper ambiguities regarding the essence of the human at the dawn of a
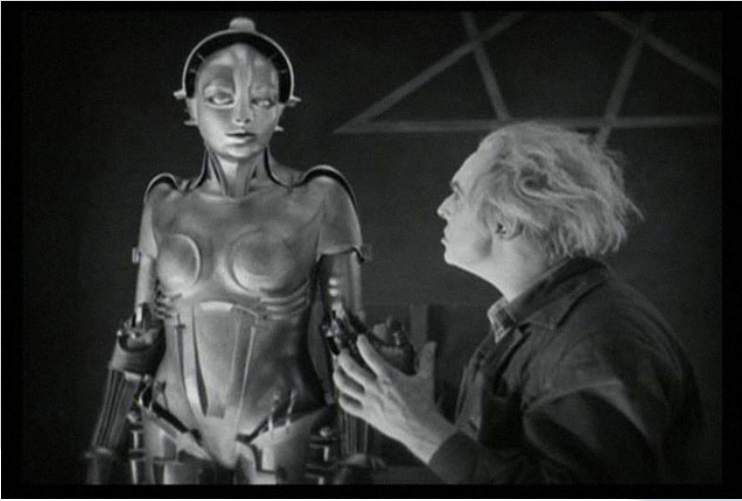
new android age.[23] In resisting determinability, Scott's replicants break down the Romantic dichotomies of nature and artifice, human and machine. The echoes of Weimar's racialized uncanny emerge in *Blade Runner'*s many Asian protagonists amidst the decaying cityscapes, and the film's numerous nods to Weimar film's themes and styles, which had themselves borne reference to a destructive Jewish modernity.

In addition to chiaroscuro lighting, Scott's homage to Weimar cinema includes the darker-toned femme fatale with her Jewish associations, here present in her older tragic form as the replicant Rachael. Like Shelley's *Frankenstein*, *Blade Runner* probes the key questions of feelings and empathy which had already concerned Romantic writers on the artificial anthropoid. In order to detect and "retire" a group of bioengineered anthropoids on the run, Deckard's testing device seeks to pinpoint signs of empathy (or the absence thereof). But the physical and emotional boundaries of the human become increasingly blurred in the film, such as when Deckard is saved twice by his replicant victims, suggesting their capacity for empathy, and when it is suggested that he himself is a replicant.

Such explorations of ideas about naturalized origins found nourishment and in turn nourished postmodern theories seeking to de-essentialize the biologized binaries inherited from Enlightenment debates. Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) was a milestone in the now enthusiastic reception

23 Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner* (USA, 1982).

Figure 6. The replicant Rachael in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (USA, 1982).

of the artificial anthropoid and its apparent rupture of essentialism.[24] For Haraway, the cyborg signals humanity's utopian release from the essentializing Enlightenment binary of nature / artifice as well as those related to gender, sexuality, race and class, which Haraway sees as closely linked to the emergence of capitalism. This postmodern conception of the cyborg has furthered textual constructions of the cybernetical golem, variously aiming at gender, racial and sexual indeterminability on the one hand, while simultaneously furthering such previously oppressed particularities on the other. In doing so, conceptualizations of the postmodern golem continue to straddle the divides of universality and particularity that have marked modern discourses on the Jews and their golem.

In a clear attempt to wrest the golem back from its negative Christian inscriptions of decadence, Gershom Scholem, who in a 1915 poem had precisely lamented those inscriptions in Gustav Meyrink's *Golem*, in 1965 resignified the golem as a constructive sign of Jewish technomodernity when he named Israel's first computer at the Weizmann Institute of Science the "Golem of Rehovoth," stating that it could "well compete with the Golem of Prague." As Scholem argued in his dedicatory speech, both the golem and the computer had

> a basic conception in common ... . The old Golem was based on a mystical combination of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are the elements and building-stones of the world. The new Golem is based on a simpler, and at the same time more intricate, system. Instead of twenty-two elements, it knows only of two, the two numbers 0 and 1, constituting the

binary system of representation. Everything can be translated, or transposed, into these two basic signs, and what cannot be so expressed cannot be fed as information to the Golem. I dare say the old Kabbalists would have been glad to learn of this simplification of their own system. This is progress.[25]

In a similarly optimistic vein, Boaz Golany, Professor at the Technion (Israel Institute for Technology) more recently pronounced the Prague golem as a metaphor for AI in a speech to visiting students from Prague's Technical University.[26]

If anything, Jewish writers and artists have continually sought to wrest back the golem as an autonomous symbol of Jewish culture, sometimes together with portrayals of a productive technomodernity, with its ubiquitous promise of social equality. Marge Piercy's cyberpunk novel *He, She and It* (1991) features a cybernetical golem, Yod, created to defend a small freetown of ethnically heterogeneous Jews from hostile corporations.[27] But when Yod embarks on a sexual relationship with one of the townswomen, he develops into much more than just the perfect fighting machine, becoming a perfect lover and surrogate father. Following Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," Piercy's postmodern conception of Jewishness imagines through the cyborg the utopian transcendence of the old, naturalized binaries of gender, race and sexuality in the industrial and post-nuclear wastelands left by rampant corporatism and sectarian violence.

Stanley Kubrick's supercomputer HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), which seems to evoke the Golem computer at Rehovoth and is shown here in the heart-rending scene of its deactivation, reflects – along with Ridley Scott's replicants, Marge Piercy's cyborg and more recently Kazuo Ishiguro's Artificial Friend Klara in the novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021) – the encroaching borders wars between humans and artificial intelligence, in which the latter often appear to be more human than humans themselves.[28] These creations, who may or may not look like us, end up surpassing us in what we believe to be our essence: namely, our supremacy above all other beings

25 https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/gershom-scholem/the-golem-of-prague-the-golem-of-rehovoth, accessed 13 May 2021.

26 Thomas Jelinek and Alan Rosenbaum, "From the Golem of Prague to Artificial Intelligence: Czech-Israeli Cooperation in the Sciences is Booming," *The Jerusalem Post*, 30 November 2020, https://www.jpost.com/international/from-the-golem-of-prague-to-artificial-intelligence-650713, accessed 13 May 2021.

27 Marge Piercy, *He, She and It* (Greenwich, CT, 1991).

28 Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (USA, 1968); Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun* (London, 2021).

Figure 7. Still from Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (USA, 1968).
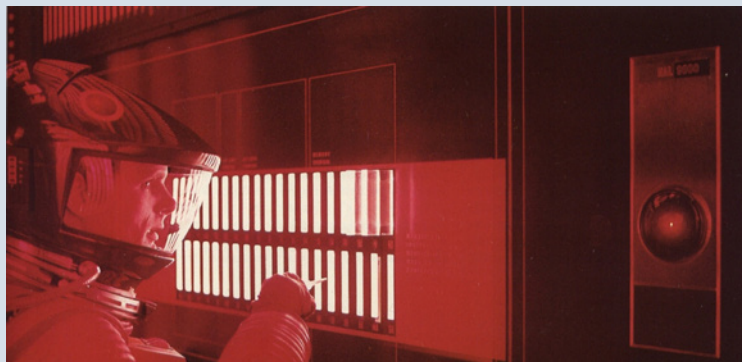
29 Immanuel Kant, "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays on Politics, History, and Morals*, trans. Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis, 1983), 107-144.

30 Suzanne Andrade, *Golem* (UK, 2014).

due to our capacity for reason, sapience and sentience. The dystopian vision painted in these texts rests at least partly on the human refusal to treat their creations with empathy and as equals; in other words, not to partake in Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitan vision of universal rights as outlined in his 1795 essay "Perpetual Peace,"[29] a project which, as we know, is fundamentally incomplete in human society.

But will this vision indeed come true in a world beyond biologized border wars? The British theatre duo 1927's multimedia production *Golem* (2014) explores our ambivalent relationship with cutting edge technology, which itself provides the form for the production's own stunning multimediality.[30] Its overlapping visual and sound media, including live theatre, video projection and musical performance, warn of the loss of individuality through ubiquitous technologies that have grown into extensions of the self – the production targets our ongoing love affair with smartphones – and which provide opportunities for constant surveillance. This, the production suggests, is a universal predicament of the current age. While abstaining from any mention of Jews, the signifiers of an uncannily perceived Jewish modernity are recycled throughout the production, from its references to early cinema to the font of the vaguely Hebrew-themed lettering of the title word "golem" on a yellow background.

The demonic implications of the golem cannot be made to go away because they are deeply ingrained in our popular culture, which formally transcends yet thematically often reinforces ideas of ethnic particularity, whether subtly or explicitly. Mean-

while, many see in the golem an originary Jewish sign of the Jews' cultural and physical survival in a hostile gentile world. Fusing the templates of the Chelm and Prague golem, Doron and Yoav Paz's recent Israeli horror film *The Golem* is set in the world of seventeenth-century Eastern European Jews, where a barren Jewish woman makes a golem child to defend her community against a Christian mob.[31] But her multiple transgressions – of female creatorship, rebelling against male-defined Jewish tradition and seeking to control her own sexual destiny – combine into a piece of "gynaehorror," which projects a monstrous perception of female reproduction as her creature begins to slaughter Jew and non-Jew alike, leaving her village in flames.[32] Not unlike Paul Wegener's golem, then, film both explores and proposes the Jewish woman's Otherness within Judaism, which is configured through the golem.

III. Conclusion

From its medieval origins as a man from clay to its modern and postmodern conception as robot and cyborg, the golem has straddled the multiple border wars of humanity. From a Jewish ritual for unlocking the secret of divine creation it has turned into a Christian sign of the negatively conceived physical, spiritual and cultural essence of the Jew before becoming a metaphor for technological progress. The golem's enigmatic quality derives from its ability to signify Jewish particularity together with universalist predicament; myth and history simultaneously. Our fascination with the golem no doubt stems from its historic function to assert the Jew's essential difference, which is deeply engrained in our cultural consciousness.

Animated through a ritual of words emulating divine creation, a fractured reflection of divine creation, the golem at least partly upholds a humanistic vision of AI as empathic equals, our (rival) siblings and rebellious children in kind. Will AI indeed remedy our intellectual, emotional and physical fallibility as humans and erase social inequalities rooted

31 Doron Paz and Yoav Paz, *The Golem* (Israel, 2019).

32 See Erin Harrington, *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror* (London, 2018).

Figure 8. Janelle Monáe, "Many Moons" (USA, 2008).

33 Janelle Monáe, "Many Moons" (USA, 2008). See also Meina Yates-Richard, "'Hell You Talmbout': Janelle Monáe's Black Cyberfeminist Sonic Aesthetics", *Feminist Review* 127, no. 1 (2021), 35-51.

in gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race, disability and class? What happens when the related deep-seated histories of oppression and annihilation are erased in this idealized vision of AI, a process which is critiqued in Black cyberfeminist Janelle Monáe's sonic piece "Many Moons"?[33] Is it possible, even likely that AI, the child of a new era of accelerating capitalist exploitation, will only enshrine these historic fault lines more deeply? At the dawn of the third industrial revolution, our questions about the nature of AI inherently reflect on the potential of humankind itself.

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