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For more information:
Journal of Religion and Culture
Department of Religions and Cultures (FA-101)
Concordia University
1455 de Maisonneuve O.,
Montreal, Quebec
H3G 1M8

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Content

Articles

- 103 *Tragic Violence, Hate Crimes and Grieving Within Sacred Geographies of Faith:*
Sikhs and the Oak Creek Gurdwara Shootings, 2012
Doris Jakobsh
- 132 *The Epistemology of Violence and the Conception of Otherness: The Case of The Islamic State (Daesh).*
A Mutation of Contemporary Islamism, or a Prolongation of it?
Amany Fouad Salib
- 160 *Maintaining Multiculturalism*
The Muting of Anti-Syrian Refugee Sentiment in Canadian Public Discourse
Georgia Carter

Book Reviews

- 173 ***Key Terms in Material Religion***
Alexander Nachaj, reviewer.
- 175 ***Is Islam an Enemy of the West?***
Georgia Carter, reviewer.
- 178 ***Hagiography and Religious Truth:
Case Studies in Dharmic and Abrahamic Traditions.***
Alexander Nachaj, reviewer.
- 180 ***The Jews of Harlem:
The Rise, Decline, and Revival of a Jewish Community.***
Lindsey Jackson, reviewer.
- 184 ***Golem
Modern Wars and their Monsters***
Elliot Mason, reviewer.

JR | RELIGION & CULTURE

Volume 27 no. 2



Golem: Modern Wars and their Monsters. Maya Barzilai. New York: New York University Press, 2016. 288 pages. \$16.84CDN (Kindle); \$31.93CDN (Hardcover).

As the field of monster studies has expanded and gained wider notoriety in the realm of cultural studies, analyses of the relevance of particular monstrous tropes and figures to broader cultural contexts have become more frequent and complex. In Maya Barzilai's study of the role of the golem in twentieth and twenty-first century culture demonstrates, monsters and the monstrous contain a morphogenic potential that allows them to maintain cultural relevancy as they transform to suit the metaphoric and representational needs of the societies that construct them. Rather than setting out to present a comprehensive historical account of the golem figure and its myriad guises, Barzilai arranges her study thematically around the particular use of the golem as a metaphor for twentieth century conflict, as well as around Jewish identity politics both in America, and in an Israeli context. The result is a book that is easy to navigate for the specialist and non-specialist alike, and which will appeal as much to cultural historians of the twentieth century as it will to religious studies scholars and those with a general interest in the golem figure.

With the publication of Helene Wecker's 2013 novel, *The Golem and the Jinni*, and the public's continued love affair with the superhero genre (itself, as Barzilai shows, a world filled with its own golems), the golem has once more stepped onto the stage of cultural relevance. Based, of course, on Barzilai's associations of the golem figure with the robot, cyborg, and android, we might argue that the golem never left the cultural spotlight. Nonetheless, Barzilai's study emerges on the heels of what appears to be a resurgence of literary interest in the golem figure. The book begins, however, just over one hundred years earlier, with a consideration of the golem of the silent screen, and the reception of Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1914), and its sequels: *Der Golem und die Tänzerin* (1917), and *Die Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (1920). Of central importance for Barzilai in her first and second chapters is an analysis of Wegener's physical appearance (for he also played the title monster in his films), and the popularity of his films both in Germany and America. Most significantly perhaps, for historians of the golem, is the enduring legacy of Wegener's aesthetic choices regarding the golem's appearance. The blocky, gigantesque, and earthy appearance of Wegener's costume, according to Barzilai's reading, evokes the trench warfare of the First World War, as well as Wegener's own experiences in

those trenches. Though it seems impossible that Wegener's experiences could have influenced his first golem film (the movie was released in 1914), Barzilai's arguments ring true for Wegener's later works. If, as Barzilai suggests, the golem figure of the twentieth century has become inextricably bound to humanity's dependence on, and obsession with, increasingly distant forms of warfare and weaponry, then this early link between the golem phenomenon and the two world wars is of utmost importance to the thematic connection she makes throughout the rest of her study.

Barzilai's third chapter addresses the golem's relevance to the work of Israeli authors and screenwriters such as S. Y. Agnon, Yoram Kaniuk, and Dani Horowitz. In the Israeli context, Barzilai emphasizes the use of golem imagery to express the horror and dehumanization of the soldier, as well as the failure of Israeli militarization to fulfill its Zionist mission. Building on the first two chapters, her third chapter skillfully identifies the use of the golem to express not only the military's relationship with its weaponry, but the ways in which the golem itself becomes a symbol for the suffering Israeli soldier. It must be noted, however, that despite the complexity of Barzilai's analysis, her reading does not address the work's troubling tendency to render the disabled body as both golemic and, by association, monstrous. Here, much is made of the ways in which culture and war configure and transform the figure of the golem, but little of the manner in which the application of golem imagery to human bodies similarly re-configures and transforms those bodies by association. The topic seems ripe for further discussion and analysis, especially in light of the connection Barzilai later draws between the cyborg and golem.

In her fourth chapter, Barzilai presents a concise and well-articulated account of the golem's history in comic books. Here, also, we find Barzilai's discussion of the golem as hero, and as an oft-times avenger of the Holocaust. In this context, Barzilai analyzes Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) alongside Michael Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, and several other graphic depictions of the figure. The portrayal of the golem in the works under discussion is generally shown to be that of a positive, redemptive, or avenging hero. Questions of the morality and humanity of the golem, first addressed in the context of Wegener's films and select nineteenth century literary traditions, are here brought to the fore. The monster, in this case, is presented as a problematic hero, capable of great violence and atrocity, but in service of a greater cause.

Artificial life and the figure of the robot or cyborg are addressed in Barzilai's final chapter. Two central themes from the rest of the book are artfully merged in this analysis: the question, raised by the golem, of what makes a human being, and the repercussions of twentieth and twenty-first century military developments. Barzilai engages with feminist interpretations of the cyborg, including "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1983) by Donna Haraway, as well as the fears and hopes expressed chiefly in science-fiction, that our machines will one day surpass their human creators in thought, ability, and even humanity. A fine analysis in its own right, one wonders if more could be said concerning the synthesis of robot and golem imagery that must have taken place throughout the twentieth century. For example, is there perhaps a fusion of the Jewish golem narrative and that of Faust and the homunculus? This question seems worth investigating, and could represent an avenue for further research. Additionally, it seems that more might be made of the shift from Wegener's clay-based monster (constructed, as it is, of natural, earthly material) to that of the unnatural, chromium cyborg.

Many of Barzilai's chapters and shorter discussions would be at home on an advanced undergraduate or a graduate level syllabus. Despite this, the accessibility of Barzilai's writing and her avoidance of jargon also makes the book useful for a broader audience who may be approaching the golem from a non-academic background. *Golem: Modern Wars and their Monsters* is highly recommended to those with an interest in the intersection between Jewish tradition and pop culture, as well as anyone with a focus on monster and twentieth century cultural studies.

Elliot Mason
Concordia University