Review of Golem: Modern Wars and Their Monsters by Maya Barzilai

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Document Type
Review

Publication Date
9-8-2018

Department 1
English; Judaic Studies

Abstract
The golem crosses many borders. A popular culture icon and an enduring image of creative power, its hybridity contributes to its elusive nature. What it is and what it means shifts over time. Maya Barzilai's *Golem: Modern Wars and Their Monsters* takes a unique approach. Deeply interdisciplinary, as one must be to explore such a complex and paradoxical figure, and drawing on religious, literary, cinematic, and historical contexts, Barzilai weaves a rich tapestry of golem narratives. All the while, Barzilai keeps a clear eye on the golem's ongoing association with war, seeing its birth in the clay trenches of World War One and tracing its later evolution as emblematic of nuclear weapons, computer technology, and Israeli military policy.

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Version
Post-print

ISBN/ISSN
1948-5077

Recommended Citation

Required Publisher's Statement
The article can also be found on the publisher's website: https://muse.jhu.edu/article/702761#info_wrap

In her book *Golem: Modern Wars and Their Monsters* (New York University Press, 2016) Barzilai "traces the golem's appearances both within particular national frameworks of cultural production and across cultures, revealing the golem to be a powerful means of transnational exchange regarding the monstrosity of war" (21). The study marches through the trenches of World War I, through the history of the State of Israel, through the aftermath of the Holocaust via cinema, Yiddish theater, Hebrew literature, comic books, and cyborg theory, considering each period of conflict and the golems it creates. This episode of New Books in Jewish Studies features Maya Barzilai, Assistant Professor of Hebrew Literature and Jewish Culture at the University of Michigan and the author of *Golem: Modern Wars and Their Monsters* (New York University Press, 2016). This timely book traces the evolution of the golem, a clay monster animated by a rabbi to serve and protect his community, from its presence in literature, drama, and cinema in the 1920s to its use as a reference in Israeli and American cultures during the second half of the 20th century. Barzilai has also published a short article in The Forward la by Maya Barzilai. Add to my bookshelf. Publisher

This book showcases how the golem was remolded, throughout the war-torn twentieth century, as a muscular protector, injured combatant, and even murderous avenger. This evolution of the golem narrative is made comprehensible by, and also helps us to better understand, one of the defining aspects of the last one hundred years: mass warfare and its ancillary technologies. In the twentieth century the golem became a figure of war. It represented the chaos of warfare, the automation of war technologies, and the devastation wrought upon soldiers' bodies and psyches.