

“The Golem of Theresienstadt –  
Folklore in Tragic Times”

By Amanda Baker



“The Golem of Theresienstadt” is a short story set in the Czech town of Terezin in the 1940s, when the town (under its German name of “Theresienstadt”) served as a Jewish ghetto in the Nazi occupied Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The story explores the history of the Holocaust and the reality of the ghetto through fantasy and folklore. Blending historical fiction and fantasy into a work of magical realism, as suggested by its title, the story reimagines the Jewish legend of the Golem of Prague – in which the Rabbi Loew brings to life a being of clay to protect the Jews of Prague against antisemitic violence and expulsion – for the bleakest period of Jewish history in Europe. The story’s protagonist, 8-year-old Valerie Lochowitz, relives this legend as she deals with grief, loss, and the trauma of growing up under Nazi rule. The story draws variously from Kabbalah, silent film, and weird fiction to craft what I hope to be a unique and richly imaginative exploration of the most extensive tragedy of the 20th century as seen through the eyes of a small child. My presentation at Honors Day, “The Golem of Theresienstadt – Folklore in Tragic Times” will include a reading of the story, in part or in whole, depending on what time allows. In addition, I will explore my process of researching and writing the story, as well as the sources of visual, auditory, and literary inspiration I drew from throughout this process.

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