

Cultural Daily

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The Golems of Hanukkah

Roni Keller · Wednesday, November 21st, 2012

This holiday season, in the ripeness of my life, I find myself rethinking Hanukkah. My kids are older, and coincidentally I am too. So while our inner children are all alive and kicking, it is not all about the chocolate coins and the opening of gifts — although it is about the latkas, the smell of potato pancakes sizzling in oil and then being served smothered in sour cream and applesauce. Come by after six any evening during the second week of December, and I'll show you what I mean. Wait, I got distracted. I really do have some deep and meaningful observations, but if you do come by, bring your favorite bottle of red wine or at least some Coronas and we'll sit by the fire and get fat and happy. No matter what the pundits say about the economy, as long as I can afford to shop at Trader Joe's, these are still the best of times.

In 167 BC, the emperor Antiochus made the observation of Judaism an offense punishable by death. Latkas, instead of chestnuts, by an open fire, a perishable offense. If you are like me, our families only migrated to this country within the last century. Your family has its own story of why it crossed the oceans or deserts at peril of life and limb to live in America. Only a hundred years ago, my grandparents and great-grandparents were running from Cossacks because they lived in the hard, cold poverty of the shtetls. Latkas and beer in a home of their own with central heat, without fear of being invaded, raped and beaten, unimaginable.

What I am thinking about this year is imagination... and its Golem, defiance. There is a way things are – back then, Cossacks and starvation, and now, a sluggish world economy and looming consequences, for others far worse than me. Remind me to tell you about my friend who still has family back in her old country, Spain, where like in Greece, things are falling apart fast. Or my friend, the oncology nurse, who puts aside money from her paycheck to travel into the devastation of Gaza on mercy missions. I can imagine a better world, but the question is whether I have the defiance against the way-things-are to do something about it.

In my own small, sheltered life, I grew up wanting to be Louisa May Alcott, her the authoress who defied gender bias back in the dark ages and gave birth to a few books including *Little Women*, a book that is still in libraries and has spawned a few major motion pictures. My other heroine was Amelia Earhart who flew because she flew, the first aviatrix to fly solo across the Atlantic.

So when my writing partner [John Fasano](#) came to me with the story of the Golem, a creature born of clay and mud, imagination and defiance, who took in the breath of inspiration and became alive, I was hooked.

Evie and the Golem is a story of defiance, just as Hanukkah, the festival of lights, is a holiday of defiance. In our novel, Evie is a good girl, but she defies her rabbinical father and pursues her own yearning. The Jews of Prague defy their persecutors and defy reason. They breathe life into a lump

of clay that becomes a Golem, an unstoppable protector.

Life sparks in all of us. We are here, conscious and breathing, against the odds, against reason. Maybe we should be just lumps of flesh, cells multiplying and dying clinging to bone, like clumps of moss clinging to rocks by a river. But instead we are sparked with awareness — with a defiance and a will to live through our thoughts and actions, through our choices. To live is an act of defiance — a dance that defies passivity, entropy and inertia. The truth is that in this life, everything is punishable by death, including breathing. We are all going to die someday so there had better be some living in between birth and the end. In our own lives, we are all truly Golems. Some stories are immutable and undeniable. They slip into the world through magic portals, born of an alchemy between heaven and earth. John and I were lucky enough to catch this story, the way a midwife catches a newborn. We offer it to you and we hope you like it, and invite you to find and define your own acts of defiance this holiday season and make them your own acts of creation in the coming new year.

Evie and the Golem is available on [Amazon](#) or for a limited time only, autographed copies can be ordered directly by [contacting the author](#).

Abstract golem image by [Jeni Houston](#).

This entry was posted on Wednesday, November 21st, 2012 at 8:31 pm and is filed under [Fiction](#), [Lifestyle](#)

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