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Divine and Demonic in the Poetic Mythology of the Zohar
The "Other Side" of Kabbalah

Nathaniel Berman

BRILL

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To the three incarnations of the Shekhinah in my life: my mother, Daisy Berman, my wife, Julie Peters, and my daughter, Kaia Berman Peters. Without them, *nothing* would be possible.

וסלקא שכינתא על ההוא טורא
ותשתמע תלת קלין

And the Shekhinah ascends upon that mountain
and makes three voices resound …

ZOHAR ḤADASH, 56a

∴

Contents

Prefatory Note: Bibliography, Footnotes, Principal Texts, Translations, and Transliterations

This note contains some preliminary information that might be helpful before beginning reading the book, but is only supplementary to the detailed descriptions in the bibliography. Please see the bibliography for any information not contained here.

I Bibliography and Footnotes

The bibliography contains the complete publication information for all sources. For brevity's sake, the footnotes contain only abbreviated citations, easily amplified through reference to the bibliography. Authored works are cited in the footnotes by the author's last name, abbreviated title, and the relevant page numbers. Other works are cited by an abbreviated title and page number.

II Principal Texts

Sefer Ha-Zohar [*Book of Radiance*]: Until very recently, there was no standard critical edition of *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, first published between 1558 and 1603, but largely written in the late 13th century. I have taken as my basic text, and as the basis for page citations, the most widely-used edition, published by Mosad Ha-Rav Kook, edited by Re'uven Margoliot (see bibliography for details). I have also made reference to the 16th century Cremona and Mantua editions (see bibliography), and later glosses. Most importantly, however, I have systematically adopted, except where otherwise noted, the emendations of the new critical edition of the entire *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, established by the translators of *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (2004–2017): Daniel Matt, Nathan Wolski, and Joel Hecker (see bibliography for details). I note also that, in the Introduction, I discuss the challenges posed by recent scholars to the notion that *Sefer Ha-Zohar* can be considered to be a unitary work, or even a "book" in the traditional sense.

Bible: I have used the standard Masoretic text for the original Hebrew and taken the King James Version (KJV) as the basis for my English translations (see bibliography for details). Due to the importance of the specific names of God in the Zoharic literature, I generally substitute transliterations of those names for the KJV's translations. Where I depart from the KJV, due to the way

particular passages are interpreted in the Zoharic literature, I so note in the footnotes.

III Translations

All translations from non-English works are mine, except where otherwise noted. In composing my translations of *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, the *Ra'ya Mehemna*, and *Sefer Tikune Ha-Zohar*, I have drawn on a wide variety of sources, including the Hebrew translations in Yehuda Ashlag's *Sulam* and Daniel Frisch's *Matok Midevash*, and, rarely, the English *Soncino* translation, as well as commentaries such as Moshe Cordovero's *Or Yakar* and others (see bibliography for details on all sources mentioned here). Most importantly, I have frequently consulted the new *Pritzker Edition* translation by Daniel Matt, Nathan Wolski, and Joel Hecker on difficult passages (see bibliography for details). When I quote verbatim from the *Pritzker Edition*, I so note in the footnotes.

IV Transliterations

I have used a simplified transliteration system, as follows:

Consonants

א	at the beginning of a word, designated by the appropriate vowel; if sounded in the middle of a word, preceded by a single closed quote (')
בּ	b
ב	v
ג	g
ד	d
ה	h (always added at the end of a word that ends with a ה, even if ה is silent)
ו	v (if a consonant; otherwise designated by the appropriate vowel)
ז	z
ח	ḥ
ט	t
י	y (if a consonant, otherwise designated by the appropriate vowel)
כּ	k
כ	kh
ל	l
מ	m
נ	n

ס	s
ע	at the beginning of a word, designated by the appropriate vowel; if sounded in the middle of a word, preceded by a single closed quote (‘)
פ	p
פ	f
צ	ts
ק	k
ר	r
שׁ	sh
שׂ	s
ת, תּ	t

Vowels

Pataḥ and *kamats*: a
Tsere, segol, and *mobile shewa at the beginning of a word*: e
ḥiriq: i
ḥolem, *kamats katan* and *ḥataf kamats*: o
shuruk and *kubuts*: u

Acknowledgements

This project, as deeply personal as academic, would not have been possible without the encouragement and inspiration of more people than I can name, indeed nearly everyone who has been in my life over the past decade and far longer. I must first thank my mentors at University College London, Ada Rapoport-Albert and Naftali Loewenthal. Your intellectual support and existential inspiration, not to mention your selfless time and labor, have been invaluable. To Elliot Wolfson: I owe you an immeasurable debt for pointing me towards the study of the Zohar a lifetime ago in the green pastures of Western Massachusetts, as well as for the inspiration provided by your immense and crucial oeuvre. You have cleared the path for so many of us to explore the intellectual and poetic possibilities of Zohar scholarship. To Shaul Magid: thank you for the important years of our study together and for making the connection which led me to UCL. To Art Green: even beyond your intellectual and personal encouragement over the years, not to mention your trip to London, I am grateful to you for modeling a way of writing about kabbalah that combines academic rigor and spiritual meaning. To Melila Hellner-Eshed: I cherish your personal, intellectual, and spiritual engagement, not to mention your beautiful books; Shavu'ot will never be the same. To Ronit Meroz: your fortifying support and generous words at a crucial stage of this project were vitally important; your imaginative and path-breaking scholarship has been a true inspiration. To Danny Matt: apart from the monumental contribution of your work, our conversations and your generous help over the past few years have been vital to me.

To two titans of the field, Moshe Idel and Yehuda Liebes: I have, of course, been deeply influenced by your work, far beyond specific citations, and your kind words have meant so much to me.

To Sally Freedman and Elisheva Urbas: I will always remember your help at a turning-point in this project.

Over the past few years, I have been engaged with an astonishingly creative group of kabbalah scholars, a contemporary band of *Ḥevraya*, Companions, who have provided a floating, shifting trans-Atlantic home for intellectual and spiritual exploration. Beyond those I have already named, Shifra Assouline, Jonatan Benarroch, Clemence Boulouque, Jonathan Dauber, Glenn Dyner, Eitan Fishbane, Pinhas Giller, Ellen Haskell, Joel Hecker, Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, Tsippi Kauffman, Hartley Lachter, Ariel Mayse, Biti Roi, Marla Segol, and Leore Sachs-Shmueli have all accompanied me on this journey.

Since 2012, I have had the privilege of teaching the Zohar in my home to an explosively creative and imaginative group: writers, artists, psychoanalysts, architects, academics, seekers. Launched by Basmat Hazan and Ruby Namdar, the group has enriched my life and my understanding of the Zohar (and so many other mysteries) in ways that never cease to amaze me. The membership of the group has evolved over the years, as people have drifted across the seas, continents, and boroughs, and it would be impossible to name all of its participants. But it is a part of my life that I will never take for granted. Each time the door opens, and my "*Ḥevraya de-Sitra de-Nahara*" wander in, I am amazed at the immense gift that you all bestow.

I have had the privilege of studying "*be-ḥevruta*" with deep lovers of the kabbalistic tradition over the years: Kaia Berman Peters, Naftali Citron, Fern Feldman, Steve Greenberg, David Ingber, Shaul Magid, Roly Matalon, Ruby Namdar, Elliot Wolfson, and others. Basya Schechter and Eden Pearlstein have provided a musical "*ḥevruta*" that has enabled me to see texts with a different range of senses. I have also had the honor of teaching with David Silber, whose literary engagement with kabbalistic texts has opened new doors for me.

My family, above all. My father, Herbert Berman, of indelible memory, presented me with my first copy of the Zohar many years ago, on a trip to the Lower East Side that I will never forget. Despite his self-proclaimed "Litvak" leanings, he never ceased in his support for my endeavors.

As for the three incarnations of the Shekhinah in my life, Daisy Berman, Julie Peters, and Kaia Berman Peters: there words fail me. It is to them that I dedicate this book.

Introduction: Poetic Mythology for a Broken World

Hollow! It's all hollow! A chasm! It's cracking!
Can you hear?
There's something – down there – that's following us!
Away! Away!

ALBAN BERG, *Wozzek* (1923)

•••

Why has the abyss remained in this world? … The reason is that each time the blessed Holy One works a great miracle, he sifts siftings from [it] … And from this raw material come into being creations that the blessed Name creates through his wonders. And this is the mystery of "the abysses were congealed in the heart of the sea" [Exodus 15:8]. Also the King Messiah has already sifted several times from it.

NATHAN OF GAZA, *Discourse on the Dragons* (1666)[1]

•••

Come and see: among these evil species [demons], there are levels upon levels; the highest level of these are those suspended in the air … [In regards to] one who has only merited a life-force [*nefesh*], and this life-force wishes to receive *tikun* and receive a spirit [*ruaḥ*]: … something issues from this life force, and seeks, and does not seek, to rise – until it encounters those [demons] suspended in the air and they tell him matters, some near, and some far. And by means of this rung, he goes and becomes connected to his dream, and acquires a spirit.

SEFER HA-ZOHAR[2]

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1 מדוע נשאר התהום בעולם הזה?… הטעם הוא שבכל פעם שהקב"ה עושה נס גדול, בורר מסוד הטהירו הזה בירורין, וגולם זה נתהוה ממנו יצירות שיוצר האל ית' ע"י נפלאותיו. וזה סוד הכתוב "קפאו תהומות בלב ים" [שמות ט"ו:ח]. גם מלך המשיח כבר בירר כמה פעמים ממנו …
Nathan of Gaza, 'Derush Ha-Taninim', in Scholem, *Be-Ikevot Mashi'aḥ*, 19. Nathan Benjamin ben Elisha HaLevi of Gaza (1643–1680) is best known as the prophet of the messianic Sabbatean movement. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

2 *Zohar* III, 25a:
ת"ח באינון זינין בישי אית דרגין אלין על אלין דרגא עלאה דלהון אינון דתליין באוירא … ההוא דלא זכי יתיר אלא בנפש וההוא נפש בעי לאתתקנא לקבלא רוח … נפק מה דנפקא מההוא נפש ואתפשט בעלמא ובעי לסלקא ולא בעי עד דיערע בהו באינון דאוירא ואינון מודעין ליה מלין מנהון קריבין ומנהון רחיקין יתיר ובההוא דרגא אזיל ואתקשר בחלמיה עד דקני רוח.

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⁘

I Otherness and Brokenness

The relationship to the "Other" – ethnic, racial, sexual, religious, unconscious – is the central challenge of our time. From the bloody wars that ravage the planet to the "culture wars" of academia, from parliaments to the streets, from theological walls between religious denominations to concrete walls between countries, from divided families to divided selves, the contemporary world seems in a veritable state of hysteria about alterity. Embrace or exclude? Efface difference or respect it? Protect or crush? Celebrate or ignore? Repress or express? Our world poses all these alternatives and more.

We oscillate between wildly divergent responses to the confrontation of our collective and individual Selves with the Others that fill us with love, hate, desire, and revulsion. In a world that is painfully divided, divisions also found within our souls, we rush from one stance to another, seeking to overcome, or at least manage, that pain – propelled by a deep-rooted resistance, even if often unconscious, to this alienation from the Other, this transformation of the Other *into an alien*, and by our desire for harmony with the Other, indeed for the Other's embrace.

This book is about the poetic mythology of Otherness in the Zoharic tradition in kabbalah. "Kabbalah" is the common appellation for a vast and heterogeneous array of texts and practices that emerged on the historical stage in the 12th and 13th century in Provence, Catalonia, and Castile, and spread all over the Jewish world and beyond it. "The Zohar" – or "the Zoharic literature"[3] – the crowning glory of the formative period of kabbalah, is an array of homiletical, mythological, and mystical texts composed primarily by mid- to late 13th century Spanish writers, largely in Aramaic. These unsigned texts articulate their teachings through the imagined discussions of a group of 2nd century sages, the "Companions," the *Ḥevraya*, during their peregrinations across an imaginary Holy Land. These texts, gradually collected over the generations, were published in Italy in the mid-16th century as the *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, the "Book of

I note that the translations from the Zoharic literature are my own, except where otherwise noted, but see the Prefatory Note and Bibliography for the variety of previous translations which I have often consulted in making these translations.

3 See below for a discussion of the current scholarly debate about the composition and unity of "the Zohar."

Radiance," and, a few decades later, in an additional volume of such texts, the so-called *Zohar Ḥadash*, "New Zohar."[4]

While focusing on these textual collections, this book will also often discuss passages from two slightly later Spanish works, also anonymous and composed primarily in Aramaic, the *R'aya Mehemna*, the "Faithful Shepherd," and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, the "Adornments (or Rectifications) of the Zohar," written in the late 13th or early 14th century – works that are partly pastiches of the main body of Zoharic literature, partly dramatic stylistic and substantive departures from it. Beyond these works, reference will be made to kabbalistic precursors of the Zoharic literature, particularly the *Sefer Ha-Bahir*, the "Book of Clarity," which appeared in Provence in the late 12th century, and successors to the Zoharic literature, particularly works written during the great kabbalistic flourishing in 16th century Safed. I will primarily discuss works outside the Zoharic literature only to illuminate texts within that literature.

The genre of Zoharic literature that will be my focus consists of mythical portrayals, written with a literary audacity and virtuosity that can only be compared to poetry, indeed often avant-garde poetry. *Myth*: dramas of divine and diabolical *personae*, male and female, engaging with each other through love and hatred, desire and repulsion, grace and judgment. *Myth*: a world in which there is nothing, neither plant nor animal, heaven nor earth, ocean nor land, star nor planet, that does not symbolize, or rather embody, some archetype or *persona*. *Myth*: the wedding of a divine King and Queen, chaperoned by their Supernal Mother, wars of a God with a Great Dragon, seduction of a divine Woman by a diabolical Serpent and of a divine Man by the diabolical Lilith, and on and on. *Poetry*: a proliferation of evocative images, often shifting kaleidoscopically, swamping the efforts of generations of interpreters to reduce them to conceptual paraphrase or symbolic decoding. *Poetry*: rhythm, rhyme, meter, alliteration, parallelism, defiance of conventional syntax, all in the service of arousing, provoking, startling the reader. *Poetry*: not a round-about way of stating the prosaic, but true poetry, a conjuration of that which cannot be evoked any other way.

Alterity is the explicit theme of much of this textual proliferation: Zoharic poetic mythology is centrally preoccupied with the relationship between the two "sides" of the cosmos, the divine *Sitra di-Kedusha*, the "Side of Holiness," and the demonic *Sitra Aḥra*, literally the "Other Side." Zoharic texts on the demonic are marked by all the fear, desire, violence, and love – as well as the

4 The entire work now known to us as *Sefer Ha-Zohar* and *Zohar Ḥadash* was published for the first time in a series of stages and versions between 1558 and 1603. For a concise summary, see Wolfson, 'Zoharic Literature and Midrashic Temporality', 322.

reciprocal projections, constructions, and illusions – one finds in all profound confrontations with alterity. Zoharic writers articulated their poetic mythology through audacious adaptations, reconfigurations, and often subversions of the entire Jewish textual legacy. Indeed, the vast set of discourses and rituals concerned with evoking, naming, repressing, domesticating, annihilating, and embracing the demonic Other are central to kabbalistic reinterpretations of Judaism as a whole.[5]

One way to read Zoharic writing on the demonic is to treat it as a set of "etiological" myths or mythemes, narratives and images that recount the origin of deeply disturbing features of the world as we live it. The appeal of such myths generally does not rest on their ability to satisfy causal, logical, or normative criteria, but on their narrative, dramatic, or poetic force, often, though not exclusively, of a tragic dimension. They construct a poetic mythology of a world marked by the break between Self and Other: not seeking to deny the brokenness as an illusion, as in some acosmic theologies, nor to provide a justification of apparent injustice, as in theodicy, nor to attribute the world's ostensibly perverse state to the limitations of human cognition, as in negative theology. Rather, they elevate mundane brokenness to metaphysical drama, in often theologically scandalous terms, indeed often aggravating the theological problem that provoked the myth.

A short example can serve to illustrate this etiological quality:

> תאנא יומא חד הוו אזלי חברייא עמיה דר' שמעון. אמר ר' שמעון חמינא אלין עמין כלהו עלאי וישראל תתאה מכלהו מ"ט, בגין דמלכא אשדי למטרוניתא מניה ואעיל אמהו באתרה

> It has been taught: one day, the Companions were walking with Rabbi Shim'on. Rabbi Shim'on said: 'I see these nations are all elevated and Israel is the lowest of all. What is the reason? Because the King has cast the Queen [*Matronita*] away from him and inserted the bondwoman in her place.[6]

5 Much of the vast oeuvre of Elliot Wolfson has been devoted to the problem of the "Other" in kabbalistic writing. For just one example, which addresses the kinds of broader concerns broached in this Introduction, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*. However, the huge impact of Wolfson's oeuvre on modern kabbalah scholarship, which has made books like the present one possible, cannot be adequately portrayed by particular citations or quotations. On the relationship between the kabbalistic Other Side and ethnic/religious "otherness," see also Haskell, *Mystical Resistance*, ch. 2.

6 *Zohar* III, 69a.

This passage virtually declares itself to be an etiological myth: the unacceptable political condition of the world, which one can "see" everywhere, leads us to a narrative of the divine King who has rejected his true, divine consort, the Queen, to dally with her bondwoman. The remainder of this passage, which I discuss more fully in Chapter 3, associates this bondwoman with the female diabolical *persona* commonly known as Lilith, as well as with one of the archenemies of the earthly Israel, the Egypt of slavery. It also explicitly identifies the bondwoman with alterity: the "alien crown" and the "Other Side."[7]

The text does not theologically rationalize the degraded condition of Israel, but rather sets it in a mythical frame. Without any reference to human sin or any other normative justification, the text portrays the perverse state of the world as a product of the desire of the divine King for the demonic Other, here in the form of illicit heterosexual desire.[8] The personified, gendered, demonic Other is indispensable to the etiological narration, as is the erotic desire of the King for her.

The Other is thus both absolutely alien to proper metaphysical and political selfhood and yet cannot be kept away from it, either narratively or libidinally. The two realms, divine and demonic, Self and Other, continually intermingle, here impelled by the unstable vicissitudes of erotic desire – but elsewhere, as we shall see, also by a myriad of other, equally intimate drives, ranging from tender suckling to fierce rage. This passage evokes the disturbing features of divine/demonic relations – the power struggles, often of a transgressive, as well as violent character, struggles pervasively gendered, sexualized, and nationalized. But it also suggests the hidden desire for reconciliation with, indeed the love of, the Other.

The text implicitly attributes the esoteric nature of the knowledge it offers to the gap between the surface appearance of quotidian reality and the mythical narrative which holds the key to its truth. The narrative is recounted by Rabbi Shim'on, the master sage of the Zoharic literature, as a revelation to the few of a truth hidden to the many. Everyone can "see" the perverse state of the world, but not its participation in a perverse state of the divine. Without Rabbi Shim'on's narrative, his disciples would be beset by a classical theological quandary: how can a world ruled by an omnipotent and beneficent God be marked by injustice (even if we understand "God" in the Zoharic sense of a unification of male and female *personae*)? Rabbi Shim'on's myth teaches them that, though it may look like the divine male and female rule the world, and though this *should* be the truth, in fact the male deity's consort is a diabolical female *persona*. Without

7 סטרא אחרא ... כתרא נוכראה.

8 Compare Wolfson's discussion of the "lust for the other," in Wolfson, 'Iconicity of the Text', 240.

Rabbi Shim'on's mythological creativity, one could never know, or even dare to suggest, that the divine King is united with a demonic consort.

This account not only makes the theological problem far worse, scandalous in every sense, but presents a most terrifying existential predicament: the difficulty of distinguishing between divine and demonic, good and evil, friend and foe, theology and demonology. Such indeterminacy, the existential difficulty, and yet urgency, of discernment between divine and demonic, is itself a feature of our world for which Zoharic tales serve as etiological myths. Absolute opposites that continually interpenetrate, absolute opposites that appear indistinguishable: these are features of our world for which Zoharic myth serves as a poetic etiology.

Alterity, however, is never simply a brute material fact. On the contrary, it is always constructed – socially, libidinally, politically, and so on – and always in culturally, historically, aesthetically distinctive ways. In this book, my primary focus is on the *textual construction* of alterity in the Zoharic literature. I analyse this construction primarily along two axes: rhetorical technique and ontological portrayal. Both concern the distinctive ways Zoharic texts *produce* meaning – as opposed to treating them as vehicles for concepts or narratives of which they would be more or less adequate *expressions*. Zoharic writings must be read not only for their pervasive brooding *on* Otherness, but for their construction *of* that Otherness.

The rhetorical axis of my analysis demonstrates the detailed techniques by which Zoharic texts construct a cosmos split between the structures and *personae* of the Side of Holiness and those of the Other Side. This analysis reveals a startling feature of these techniques: their destabilization of the cosmic split in the very act of constructing it. I explicate these features of Zoharic textuality using both classical and contemporary methods of rhetorical analysis.

Zoharic rhetoric, however startling, produces an elaborate ontology of divine and demonic structures, *personae*, indeed entire cosmic realms. This ontology is itself paradoxical: featuring an Other who is not only an absolute opponent of the (divine or human) Self, but also an inseparable intimate of that Self. My analysis, accordingly, explicates not only the ontological split between the two realms, but also their simultaneous emergence and ongoing relationships, relationships of desire, intimacy, nurturance as well as fear, revulsion, violence. A full understanding of this paradoxical construction of alterity can only be achieved by an analysis of Zoharic rhetorical techniques; those techniques, in turn, generate the complex ontology of the "two-sided" cosmos.[9]

9 This distinction here between the rhetorical and ontological levels of analysis bears some affinity with the distinction between kabbalistic texts' "literary form" and their "performative dimension," in Seeman & Magid, 'Mystical Poetics', 319.

The fundamental paradox of the Zoharic demonic thus pervades both the rhetorical and ontological dimensions of my analysis. It is the most crucial thing in the world to establish, to know, and to reinforce the difference of the Other Side from the Side of Holiness; yet that difference is nonetheless continually destabilized, dissolved, transgressed by the very rhetorical techniques and ontological structures that establish it. It is this paradox of alterity, this irreducible criss-crossing between Self and Other, the pyrrhic quality of all attempts to definitively disengage absolute opposites, which this book explores.

I note that I will often have recourse to psychoanalytic terminology to explicate Zoharic ontology, particularly drawn from psychoanalytic discussions of the formation of human subjectivity. Such terminology, while emerging from observation of the most earthly phenomena, is highly productive for understanding Zoharic mythologies of the formation of divine and demonic *personae*. A key theorist upon whom I draw is Julia Kristeva, whose oeuvre spans the fields of linguistics, literary theory, religion, and social criticism, as well as psychoanalysis. This broad vision makes her a particularly productive reference for understanding the broader implications of the Zoharic mythology of the Other Side. Thus, a third, if more implicit, axis of this book concerns the social and psychological insights into Otherness that are the fruit of Zoharic mythology.

I emphasize that it is not my intention to directly engage the debate about the relationship of psychoanalysis, or psychology generally, to kabbalah, or religion generally. A number of scholars have already discussed the complex and vexed relationship to psychoanalysis of Gershom Scholem, the founder of the academic study of kabbalah.[10] Nonetheless, I will often employ concepts such as ambivalence, splitting, and abjection heuristically, as a way of reading, organizing, and making sense of the heterogeneous portrayals of the divine/demonic relations so fundamental to Zoharic writing as well as to much of kabbalistic literature. Moreover, although a demonstration of this point would go far beyond the scope of this book, I believe that 20th century psychoanalysis could be shown to be heir to the kinds of traditions of which 13th century kabbalah is also a part (a hypothesis that has nothing in common with fanciful notions of an "influence" of kabbalah on Freud). In any case, I believe that each of these discursive worlds can contribute to illuminating some of the deepest truths of the other.

10 See Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 187–199.

II A (Very Short) Kabbalistic Primer

For those readers for whom 13th century kabbalistic writing is unfamiliar, I offer here an extremely brief introduction to its terminology. I caution that this section only presents some basic kabbalistic vocabulary. The Zoharic literature, by contrast, is its poetry, its mythology, its poetic mythology. Knowledge of the basic vocabulary is indispensable for understanding Zoharic writing, but it can also stand in the way of a deep appreciation of it. An imperfect analogy: while a working knowledge of French is indispensable for reading the convention-shattering writings of Apollinaire or Mallarmé, adhering too closely to a dictionary may easily stand in the way of knowing anything about their poetry. With this caution in mind, here is the primer.

In all works of kabbalistic theosophy, beginning at least in the late 12th century, the basic structures of the divine, cosmic, and human realms consist of ten archetypal "Sefirot" (singular: Sefirah), each of which is invested with a great abundance of mythical imagery. The word Sefirot originates in the Hebrew words for numbers and counting. In accordance with their order and terminology as they crystallized in the 13th century, the ten Sefirot are: *Keter* (Crown), *Ḥokhmah* (Wisdom), *Binah* (Understanding), *Ḥesed* (Lovingkindness), *Gevurah* or *Din* (Might or Judgment); *Tif'eret* (Beauty), *Netsaḥ* (Endurance), *Hod* (Majesty), *Yesod* (Foundation), and *Malkhut* (Royalty or Kingdom). Furthermore, beginning with the 13th century kabbalists whom Scholem called "the Castilian Gnostics," these ten divine Sefirot are doubled by ten demonic Sefirot – known variously as the "Left Emanation," the "Left," and, from the Zoharic literature onwards, the "Other Side."

A key sign that the Zoharic writers did not wish the vocabulary of kabbalah to overshadow their poetic mythology: the word "Sefirot" never appears in Zoharic texts. Though they assume knowledge of the ten-Sefirot structure throughout their writings, and though "Sefirot" had by their time become the standard term in kabbalistic writing, the Zoharic writers apparently desired to prevent their readers from reifying the cosmic entities whose dynamic, protean, and destabilizing narratives they recounted. The Zoharic writers use, instead, a variety of other terms, such as "levels," "crowns," "kings," "lamps," "lights," "sapphires," "rivers," "names," "places," and so on. In this book, when I engage in the widespread practice among commentators of decoding Zoharic images in terms of their "sefirotic" associations, I generally say that this or that image is "presumably" associated with this or that Sefirah. I thereby seek to register the Zoharic writers' own reticence to make such direct associations explicitly and to evoke the poetic distance they were careful to safeguard between their multivalent images and any one referent. In Arthur Green's formulation, one

should approach the Sefirot as "clusters of symbolic associations," rather than seeking any univocal "reference points."[11] It is, therefore, just as proper to refer to these ten "clusters" as "sapphires" or "crowns" as Sefirot, though, following convention, I will tend to use the latter term – even at the risk of offending the authors of the texts themselves.

Zoharic texts pervasively associate the Sefirot with a variety of divine *personae*, both male and female, mythical figures with whom this book will be centrally concerned. Two male/female erotic and nuptial couples feature prominently: the "Supernal Father" and "Supernal Mother" and their children, the male "blessed Holy One" and the female "Shekhinah" – also known as the "Bridegroom" and the "Bride," the "Son" and the "Daughter," and many other appellations. The Father and Mother are associated with second and third Sefirot, *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*; the "blessed Holy One" and the "Shekhinah" are primarily associated with the sixth and tenth Sefirot, *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut* – though the blessed Holy One is also frequently associated with the six Sefirot from *Ḥesed* to *Yesod*. The blessed Holy One is also often called *Ze'er Anpin*, the "Lesser Countenance" or "Impatient One," especially in the Zoharic treatises called the *Idrot*, the "Assemblies." The endless cycles of separation and reunification of the lower male/female couple, the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah, form the central drama of Zoharic mythology. Above these two couples stands the Holy Ancient One [*Atika Kadisha*], associated with the first Sefirah, *Keter*. The Holy Ancient One is also called *Arikh Anpin*, the "Greater Countenance" or the "Patient One."

Different Zoharic texts emphasize varying sets of these five *personae*. Such sets often consist of three *personae*: for example, the Mother, her Son (the Bridegroom), and her Daughter (the Bride); or the Holy Ancient One, the Lesser Countenance, and the Shekhinah (also called, in this context, the "Orchard of Holy Apples").[12] Other texts may foreground the two couples.[13]

I note also that the five *personae* are associated with the Hebrew letters of the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, *Yod-Hei-Vav-Hei*: the Holy Ancient One with the upper tip of the *Yod*, the Father with the *Yod*, the Mother with the first *Hei*, the blessed Holy One with the *Vav*, the Shekhinah with the last *Hei*.

My designation of these figures as "*personae*" follows the practice of scholars such as Wolfson and Benarroch[14] – even though the Zoharic literature,

11 Green, 'Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs', 44.

12 For the first triad, see, e.g., *Zohar*, III, 97a–98b; for the second, see, e.g., *Zohar*, II, 88a–88b.

13 See, e.g., *Zohar* II,145b.

14 See, e.g., Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 183; Benarroch, 'God and His Son: Christian Affinities in the Shaping of the Sava and Yanuka Figures in the Zohar' 48.

curiously, does not employ any general term to refer to them. Later kabbalistic texts, particularly beginning with the Lurianic corpus, pervasively designate them with the term "*partsufim*," a rabbinic Aramaic word for "faces" or "facial features."[15] "*Partsuf*" is itself a loan word from Greek, deriving from *prosopon*, whose original meaning was "mask" or "face." "*Persona*" is the Latin equivalent of *prosopon*. Ancient Greek culture viewed the *prosopon* as revealing the identity of its wearer, even while covering him or her, a paradox well-suited for the play of revelation and concealment which the Zoharic writers attribute to divine names, Sefirot, and *personae*.[16]

Both the Greek and Latin words played central roles in the history of Christian debate about the relationship between the three members of the Trinity.[17] No normative Jewish kabbalist, of course, would explicitly refer to the formulation of the Christian theologian Tertullian (ca. 155–240), "three *personae*, one substance" [*tres personae, una substantia*], even if expanded to the full five Zoharic *personae*. Nonetheless, Zoharic writing contains equivalent formulations. Writing of the Father, Mother, and Son, one Zoharic text declares, "All these three are one in one unity" [כל הני תלתא אינון חד ביחודא חד].[18]

Zoharic writers, moreover, often associate each of the Sefirot with biblical figures. For example: *Ḥesed* with Abraham, *Gevurah* with Isaac, *Tif'eret* with Jacob, *Netsaḥ* with Moses, *Hod* with Aaron, and *Yesod* with Joseph. *Binah* and *Malkhut* are associated with a variety of female figures, for example with Leah and Rachel, respectively – though *Malkhut*, the Shekhinah, is also associated with almost all biblical heroines. I caution, moreover, that none of these associations are rigid: Moses, for example, may also be associated with *Tif'eret*, Solomon with *Binah*, David with *Malkhut*. The Zoharic writers were composing poetry, dynamic, associative, kaleidoscopic poetry, not establishing a codebook.

On the Other Side, the main *personae* are Sama'el, the diabolical homologue of the blessed Holy One, and his consort Lilith, the homologue of the

15 See, e.g., bYevamot 120a; bBerakhot 61a. The later use of the term "*partsufim*" in kabbalistic writing may have been decisively shaped by the rabbinic myth that God created the first human as a being with two faces, *du-partsufin* [דו פרצופין], male and female. See, e.g., bBerakhot 61a. The Zoharic literature transposed this myth to the divine sphere as referring to the emanation of the blessed Holy One and his consort, the Shekhinah. See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 10b.

16 On the Greek *prosopon*, see Frontisi-Ducroux, *Du masque au visage*. On the play of revelation and concealment in the Zohar, see, e.g., Matt, *Zohar, the Book of Enlightenment*, 209. For a beautiful treatment of the Zoharic portrayal of the divine "faces," see Hellner-Eshed, *Mevakshe Ha-Panim: Mi-Sodot Ha-Idra Raba she-be-Sefer ha-Zohar*.

17 See, e.g., Clark, 'An Inquiry into Personhood', 10–19.

18 *Zohar* II, 133b.

Shekhinah. Zoharic texts often emphasize the resemblance between the erotic relationships of this diabolical couple and those of their divine counterparts. A second couple, Ashmedai and the Lesser Lilith [*Lilit Ze'irta*], appear at a lower level of the diabolical hierarchy in pre-Zoharic kabbalistic texts, particularly the 13th century *Treatise on the Left Emanation* of Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, a crucial precursor to Zoharic writing on the demonic.[19] There would thus be two male/female couples within each realm. However, while this tradition lived on, for example in the writings of the 16th century kabbalist, Moshe Cordovero, this second couple makes no appearance in the Zoharic literature. Ashmedai himself, however, the Talmud's "King of the Demons,"[20] does appear with some prominence.

Zoharic writers, like other 13th century kabbalists, refer to the primordial divine as the *En-Sof*: literally, "without end," an originally adverbial phrase that, in a characteristic kabbalistic gesture, was transformed into a noun. At least in regard to its use in the Zoharic literature, I would not use the term "proper noun" to refer to the *En-Sof*, since, as we shall see, it precedes the crystallizations of bounded divine *personae*. Indeed, it may be better to refer to the *En-Sof* as the "proto-divine." Divergences in kabbalistic metaphysics often turn on the issue of the relationship of the *En-Sof* to the Sefirot. Some kabbalists identify the *En-Sof* with the first Sefirah, *Keter*. This position yields a more immanentist vision of the relationship between the divine and the cosmos. This position seems to be that of the bulk of the Zoharic literature. The opposed position, that the *En-Sof* is above the Sefirot, yields a more transcendentalist view.

Zoharic writers designate the demonic realm with a variety of names. For reasons suggested in the preceding section, I generally favor the term "Other Side," the *Sitra Aḥra*. This "side" is also often called the "Side of Contamination" [*Sitra Di-mesav'uta*]. It is also the realm of demonic entities, called *kelipot*, literally husks, shells, or peels – by contrast with the *mo'ah* (Hebrew) or *moḥa* (Aramaic), the "kernel," "essence," or, "brain," designating the divine. In Chapter 2, I discuss the different valences of these two principal names for the demonic, the Other Side and the *kelipot* – although the Zoharic literature and, particularly, post-Zoharic kabbalistic works often employ them interchangeably.

I also follow the general convention in English-language scholarship of using the term "demonic" to designate the opposite of the divine. I caution, however, that this term can create confusion between the metaphysical structures and the ruling *personae* of the evil realm, on the one hand, and the everyday "demons" [שדים, *shedim*] who have permeated the everyday life of the rabbinic

19 Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, 'Ma'amar al Ha-Atsilut ha-Smalit,' 93.

20 bPesaḥim 110a.

and popular Jewish imagination since at least Talmudic times, on the other. Though I will at times distinguish between "devils" for the former category and "demonic spirits" for the latter, the pervasive use of the word "demonic" for the Other Side in the academic literature makes this distinction impractical to follow consistently. Whenever possible, therefore, I use the term "Other Side." It foregrounds both the "otherness" of the demonic, and its embodiment of the other "side" of a cosmos whose totality includes both divine and demonic. This ambivalence is the major theme of this book.

III Overview of the Book

I now offer a brief overview of the book's trajectory and structure, even if many of the theoretical terms I introduce here will only be clarified by the discussion in Chapter 1. At the broadest level, the book is structured by a heuristic division into two large sets of rhetorical techniques and corresponding ontological constructions, as a way of organizing the vast number of Zoharic texts concerned with the divine/demonic relationship. The first set is concerned with the establishment of a cosmos split between divine and demonic realms, the second with the dynamic relationships between the two realms' forces, entities, and *personae*. In both sets, the rhetorical construction of the ontologically split cosmos both establishes and destabilizes the split, generating a pervasive ambivalence about this most fundamental feature of the Zoharic vision. Chapter 1 explores the theoretical assumptions underlying the relationship between these two sets, as well as the contours of the ubiquitous Zoharic ambivalence; Chapters 2 and 3 each take one of the two sets as its primary focus.

Chapter 2 thus concentrates on the *ontological splitting* between the divine and demonic realms and the *rhetorical parallelism* through which that splitting is textually constructed. I borrow the term "splitting" from psychoanalysis, as a way of describing the ontology of a cosmos in which two realms are posited as absolutely different, one good, one evil. In particular, I am concerned with the positing of bounded entities – natural or linguistic entities, Sefirot, and *personae* – who face adversarial Others who are nearly or utterly indistinguishable from them. This split cosmos is textually constructed through the rhetorical techniques of *parallelism*, the most important of which is *anaphora*, the composition of small textual units through a series of phrases each of which begins with identical words. As I suggested above, texts marked by ontological splitting and rhetorical parallelism both construct *and* destabilize the fundamental division of the cosmos between the two realms. Indeed, the very

term, "splitting," hints at a primordial common origin, and an ongoing process of differentiation, the themes of Chapter 3.

Chapter 3, then, focuses on dynamic relationships between the two realms, specifically *genealogy, intimacy*, and *nurturance*. In other words, I look at texts concerned with the ontological genesis of the two realms out of a primordial undifferentiation, as well as with their ongoing relationships after their emergence. The latter include relationships of intimacy, especially erotic intimacy, and nurturance, particularly those called "suckling." Such dynamic relationships may be generally described as involving a two-step process, *abjection-and-crystallization*, terms inspired by the work of Kristeva and which I explain in detail in Chapter 1. These relationships are textually constructed through the rhetorical technique of *tropes of transition*, specifically, *tropes of limitation* and *tropes of representation*, terms inspired by the work of Harold Bloom. Tropes of limitation, such as irony (for example, the irony of a divine being emitting some form of inchoate refuse) give way to tropes of representation, whose fullest expression is the crystallization of that inchoate refuse into a fully constituted and formidable demonic realm, including demonic Sefirot and *personae* such as Lilith and Sama'el.

In sum, Chapters 2 and 3 explore two different portrayals of the relationship between the demonic and demonic realms, those of *splitting* and *abjection-and-crystallization*, constructed through rhetorical techniques of *parallelism* and *tropes of transition*. I associate the first with the construction of bounded entities, especially divine and demonic *personae*, in the face of adversarial Others. I associate the second with the primordial and ongoing dynamics of identity-formation, the constitution and perpetual reconstitution of bounded entities and *personae*.

The second of these portrayals, that of abjection-and-crystallization, may be taken as the deeper of the two, since it explores the constitution of the entities whose opposition is the affair of the first portrayal. Portrayals of abjection-and-crystallization concern "secret and invisible" processes, depict the "uncertain spaces" of "unstable identity," and evoke the "simultaneously threatening and melding … archaic dyad," phenomena over which language has no hold without being "interlaced with fear and repulsion."[21] Nonetheless, Zoharic portrayals of splitting coexist with the portrayals of abjection-and-crystallization. Zoharic texts unfold within the ambivalences and multiple layers they construct, rather than masterfully deploying them in the service of a doctrine, even a doctrine as paradoxical as abjection-and-crystallization. The

21 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur*, 73.

textual complexity of passages comprised of both sorts of processes forecloses a reduction of one to the other – just as it forecloses the reduction of the rhetorical dimension to its ontological referents.

In Chapter 4, I explore two polar consequences of the processes described in the preceding chapters, returning to the themes of etiology with which I began this Introduction. First, I turn to Zoharic portrayals of a split cosmos thoroughly pervaded by the crystallization of a mighty demonic realm, nearly indistinguishable, both linguistically and ontologically, from the divine realm. The ultimate danger in such a world, *our world*, is that of the impersonation of the divine by the demonic. This danger results from a method of combat between the two realms I call "aggressive enclothing," the capture of the divine by the demonic in such a way that one can no longer tell of particular entities to which realm they belong. In this reified world, a world of grotesque masquerade, beset by terrifying dangers of misprision and indeterminacy, meaning itself may come to seem always already captured by its opposite. And yet, as I shall show, this horrifying convergence of divine and demonic may contain a secret path to redemption, towards the reunification of a broken world.

I then turn to the opposite danger implicit in the cosmic vision elaborated in the earlier chapters – the dissolution of meaning, a danger embodied in the biblical abyss, the *Tehom*. In this section, I show how Zoharic texts portray the abyss as the ultimate danger to established beings and meanings, but also as the ultimate source for new beings and meanings. The return to the primordial source, a return fraught with the possibility of catastrophe, is also the key to unlocking reification and re-opening creativity. The abyss is portrayed variously in Zoharic texts as the dwelling-place of lethal demonic forces *and* as the reservoir of flowing metaphysical abundance, as an apocalyptic threat to the cosmos *and* as the indispensable source of the primordial Creation and the renewal of creativity in an ossified world. The ontological ambivalence of the abyss is that of the primordial undifferentiation from which emerge both subjects and their abjects, both Selves and Others. "Re-birth," indeed, any kind of truly creative internal or external renewal, must draw on the menacing, yet vital resources of the ambivalent abyss, which is the matrix of both Self and Other, portrayed by Kristeva as "re-birth with *and* against abjection."[22]

Finally, in the Conclusion, I draw together some of the most radical hints about the divine/demonic relationship broached throughout the book. I recast the separation of Self and Other as a "primordial crisis," rupturing both language and being, and suggest that their primordial kinship is the ultimate secret lurking in the Jewish tradition – with implications for thinking about

22 *Ibid.*, 39 (emphasis added).

"Otherness" of all varieties. Zoharic texts, the very same texts that fiercely construct the adversarial relationship between Self and Other, also just as surely destabilize the notion that one can definitively distinguish them. The Zoharic Self that both is, and is not, the Other; the adversarial relationship that originates in a secret etiology that may only be mythologically and poetically portrayed; the ongoing relationships of often illicit desire and nurturance – all these point the way towards the most difficult, and yet surprisingly realistic, descriptions of the concrete struggles with alterity in a world, *our world*, a world broken and longing for redemption.

IV A Final Introductory Note

As I have emphasized throughout this Introduction, this book offers a new interpretation of the textual construction of divine/demonic relations in Zoharic writing. In Chapter 1, I situate this kind of work in the rich and diverse field of contemporary Zohar scholarship. While much of that scholarship offers new interpretive approaches to reading Zoharic texts, crucial strands of that scholarship focus on other concerns. These include new historical contextualizations of the emergence of kabbalah in 12th and 13th century France and Spain, as well as meticulous text-critical work exploring the complex processes by which the texts that began circulating in late 13th century Spain came to be gradually collected and eventually published in the 16th century as *Sefer Ha-Zohar*. In Chapter 1, I suggest how the specific approach of this book may offer one bridge between interpretive scholarship and text-critical scholarship.

It is, however, one of the advantages of this richly creative era in Zohar scholarship that one can situate one's own work in a collective endeavor, whose individual components shed light from many different directions on the fascinating spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic phenomenon that emerged onto the historical stage in the 12th and 13th centuries. One may view the ever-growing international fellowship of scholars creating new approaches to this phenomenon as an academic equivalent of the mythical band of the Zoharic *Ḥevraya*, the Companions, out of whose discussions Zoharic poetic mythology emerged. My hope for this book is that it takes its place as one voice in the rich conversation of this new fellowship.

CHAPTER 1

Demonic Writing: the Rhetoric and Ontology of Ambivalence

I Demonic Fascination, Zoharic Writing and Zohar Scholarship

The approach of this book to the Zoharic rhetoric and ontology of divine/demonic relations departs, sometimes dramatically, from previous and current scholarship. Nonetheless, it also shares some of the central substantive predilections and methodological concerns of much of that scholarship. In this chapter, therefore, I set forth the theoretical frameworks that inform my approach, as well as briefly situating them in relation to pertinent strands in previous and current scholarship. My presentation here, as throughout the book, will attend to the relationship between the way language is used to construct the divine/demonic relationship (Zoharic rhetoric) and the being of the cosmos thereby constructed, particularly its divine and demonic *personae* (Zoharic ontology).

This book shares its fascination with the demonic Other with the central figures of the academic study of kabbalah since its inception, as well as with the kabbalistic materials themselves, both in the Zoharic period and long after. It shares its focus on textuality with the literary turn in Zohar scholarship over the past generation. It shares its foregrounding of the encounter with alterity with key debates across the humanities over the past century, particularly over the past generation. The presentation of the theoretical distinctiveness of my approach, the task of this chapter, thus requires a brief preface situating it in relation to its predecessors. I will occasionally illustrate this preface with some key 13th century texts in a way that anticipates the direct methodological discussions later in this chapter.

At the most general level, of course, a preoccupation with the Other is hardly novel. In the (slightly adapted) words of the poet Robert Hass: "All the new thinking is about Otherness / In this it resembles all the old thinking."[23] While such "old thinking" can, in the Western philosophical tradition, be traced back at least as far as Parmenides, the "new thinking" includes much of theoretical reflection in the humanities for many decades. German Idealism and the

23 Hass, 'Meditations at Lagunitas', in *Praise*, 4. The original has the word "loss" instead of "Otherness," but the sense might not be that different.

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Frankfurt School, existentialism and psychoanalysis, and, more recently, feminism and post-colonial theory: all have been centrally engaged in the struggle with Otherness, variously seeking to reveal, integrate, sacralise, or resurrect the Other at the very core of the Self. Many of these schools of thought plunge their roots in much older, often religious, traditions, even while dialectically transforming them. Relations to the Other – whether to a transcendent god or to an alterity opposed to the divine, as well as the relations between their earthly avatars – have been central to many religious traditions, whose direct or indirect traces can often be detected in the thought of the past hundred years.

More proximately to my concerns here, the theme of alterity has been central to the work of the most important scholars in academic kabbalah studies. Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), generally considered to have founded the discipline in the 1920s, made his cultural-modernist fascination with the vitality brought to Jewish history by mythic and historical demonic forces and *personae* central to the field. Elliot Wolfson, one of the most important scholars of our own day, through his Heideggerian and post-structuralist inquiries, has placed the ethical and ontological implications of the kabbalistic "Other" in the foreground of current concerns.[24] While these scholarly preoccupations have, of course, been shaped by their own times, they are also thoroughly justified by the kabbalistic materials themselves, particularly by the Zoharic literature.

A Zoharic text, drawn from one of the two Palaces ("*Hekhalot*") treatises in the Zoharic literature, provides a kind of anticipatory allegory for the stance of the modern academic study of kabbalah toward the demonic.[25] These treatises portray a series of metaphysical palaces through which prayers pass on their way upwards through the divine realm, and through which the soul ascends after death.[26] The palaces also form progressively ascending stages in the

24 Aside from his well-known preoccupation with the "false messiah" Sabbatai Tsevi, Scholem's "demonic" interests extended to tracking the detailed genealogy of demonic *personae*. See Scholem, *Shedim, Ruḥot u-Neshamot, passim*. On Wolfson, see, e.g., *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism, passim*. I note that, far beyond this one book, a large part of Wolfson's vast and influential oeuvre is relevant here. The debt to which I, and most other contemporary scholars owe to his transformation of the field extends far beyond particular citations.

25 There are two *Hekhalot* sections, one printed in the pericope *Breishit*, the other in the pericope *Pekude*.

26 I note that, for the sake of convenience, I will use the term "the Zohar" as shorthand for the collection of texts in the standard printed editions of the "Sefer ha-Zohar," taking the Margoliot edition as my basis, but excluding the *Ra'ya Mehemena* sections,. The *Hekhalot* sections are two related compositions printed in *Zohar Bereshit* I, 38a–48b, and *Pekude* II, 244b–268b. As will become evident in this Introduction, I am fully cognizant of the many critiques directed against the notion that the Zohar is a unitary book with a single

human quest for divine secrets. The following passage declares that the "first" of these palaces stands on the threshold between the divine and demonic realms:

> היכלא קדמאה, שירותא גו מהימנותא, והאי איהו שירותא לרזא דמהימנותא ... ובגין דהאי איהו שירותא דמהימנותא, כתיב (הושע א ב) תחלת דבר יהו"ה בהושע, דחמא מגו דרגא דא, שירותא דכל דרגין לסלקא לעילא, וסופא דכל דרגין לנחתא לתתא. ובגין דהושע חמא מגו שירותא דא, סופא דכל דרגין, ... כתיב קח לך אשת זנונים[27]
>
> The first palace, the beginning within faith, and this is the beginning to the mystery of faith ... and since this is the beginning of faith, it is written "The beginning of the word of YHVH by Hosea" (Hosea 1:2) – for he saw from within this level, which is the beginning of all the levels to ascend above, and the end of all levels to descend below. And since Hosea saw from within this beginning, the end of all levels ... it is written, "take unto thee a woman of whoredom." [*Ibid.*]

With its insistent stress on the descriptor "beginning" (*sheruta*) to portray a palace nonetheless situated squarely in the middle of a cosmos divided between divine and demonic, the passage challenges its reader with a paradoxical vision. The palace can be viewed as a threshold on either side of which the mirror images of the levels "above" and "below" face each other. This "beginning" is also the incipience of the journey of the prophet, portrayed as the paradigmatic kabbalistic debutant, within "faith" – a term the Zoharic literature never uses to refer to a cognitive act, but rather, to active participation in the process of unification of a multiplicity, often of opposites. The prophet's "beginning within faith" must depart from the place from which both divine and demonic realms can be equally "seen." The paradox of the "beginning" thus applies both to the palace itself and to the journey of the prophetic seeker who occupies it.

The passage accentuates the paradox of this twofold "beginning," both an ontological feature of the palace and an experiential feature of the seeker's

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author or even a unified group of authors. Some prominent examples of such critiques are Yehudah Liebes, 'Ketsad Nitḥaber Sefer Ha-Zohar', 1–87; Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts,* esp. 224–428. A more accurate, if somewhat cumbersome, label for the texts in the printed editions is "the Zoharic literature" or, more ponderously, "the texts written in the late 13th century that came to be collected and printed together in the 16th century and called the 'Sefer Ha-Zohar.'" Nonetheless, for reasons that should become clear in this Introduction, I think there are good reasons for reading the texts of "the Zoharic literature" together, even while rejecting any *a priori* assumptions about common authorship.

27 *Zohar*, II, 245a.

quest, by declaring that it is also the ontological and experiential "end," marking the point where the divine realm concludes. Yet this "end" is also an *other* ontological and experiential "beginning," now within the Other Side: for Hosea's initiation "within faith" must commence with his descent into intimacy with the nether regions. Indeed, the biblical phrase "woman of whoredom," describing Hosea's ordained consort, is a phrase Zoharic texts always associate with the Deviless Lilith.

Like Hosea, modern kabbalah studies may be viewed as having been situated, from their inception, in this liminal palace. Gershom Scholem was fascinated from the outset by the importance of the Other Side for understanding kabbalah, a fascination that persisted throughout his life. From his early research into the "Castilian Gnostics,"[28] to his enduring passion for Sabbateanism in all its permutations, to his meticulous research into the genealogy of particular demonic personalities,[29] Scholem implicitly positioned the field squarely within the "first palace." Or, to put it more Zoharically, much of modern kabbalah studies may be viewed as having been always already inscribed in the text of the "first palace" – a text that would thus have adumbrated the modern field's possibilities and limitations and prefigured its triumphs and dangers.

A vantage point from something like the "first palace" – the point of contact between two opposed realms – also deeply informs one strand of the Scholem tradition's most well-known characterizations of kabbalah's place within Judaism. Scholem writes that the "original religious impulse in Judaism" was a "reaction to mythology," an attempt to "open up a region … from which mythology would be excluded," a "tendency to liquidate myth."[30] Kabbalah, with its elaborate mythology, thus represents the "vengeance of myth against

28 Scholem used the notion of the "Gnostics of Castile" as a way of describing a group that includes Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, Moshe of Burgos, and Todros Abulafia. See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 55–56. Some scholars have criticized Scholem's notion that 12th and 13th century kabbalah can be understood as a Gnostic incursion into Judaism. See, e.g., Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 30–33. Others have questioned the coherence and value of a general category of "Gnosticism" for describing a vast number of heterogeneous phenomena in late Antiquity. See, e.g., King, *What is Gnosticism?, passim; Williams, Rethinking 'Gnosticism': An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category, passim*. I do not take a position on this debate among historians of late antiquity, but generally place "Gnosticism" within scare-quotes to indicate this controversy. I limit my use of Scholem's "Castilian Gnostics" to providing a convenient label for the specific group of figures Scholem has in mind. I limit my use of the word "Gnosticism" to my discussions of the Scholem traditions' grand historical narratives, which recent scholarship has compelled us to critically examine.

29 See, e.g., Scholem, *Shedim, Ruḥot u-Neshamot*, 9–102.

30 Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 88.

its conquerors."[31] Indeed, throughout the "wide and scattered provinces of Kabbalism, the revenge of myth upon its conqueror is clear for all to see."[32] Scholem here envisions a perennial, epic combat between myth and anti-myth that constitutes the very history of Judaism itself.

The role of the demonic within Judaism is one of the central stakes in this combat. The mythological dimension of kabbalah is by no means limited to the demonic. There is, however, something mythological *par excellence* in texts that portray the demonic as a reality, rather than as an absence (as in medieval philosophical rationalism) or a subjective projection (as in modern psychological rationalism). Scholem quotes Hermann Cohen, whose rationalistic approach serves as the perfect foil for his own, for the notion that "a power of evil exists only in myth."[33] Transvaluing Cohen's intent, we could say, in Zoharic language, *dayka!* [דייקא] – precisely! Isaiah Tishby, one of Scholem's most important disciples, declares that the divine/demonic relationship is the "cornerstone of the conflict that opposes the mythological tendency and the theological imperative" in kabbalah.[34] The conflict between mythology and theology that Tishby sees as key to differentiation among various trends in kabbalah is deeply related to the tensions in the dual perspective afforded from within the "first palace." The Zoharic understanding of the first divine command to Hosea, that he must descend to the demonic, is thus one that will be followed seven centuries later by Scholem and his followers as they established the academic field.

More recent scholars, notably Yehuda Liebes and Moshe Idel, have cast doubt on the historical accuracy of Scholem's epic tale of the perennial war between myth and anti-myth within Judaism.[35] Their work has taught us to reject the notion that anti-mythological Judaism was normative before the kabbalistic flourishing in the 12th and 13th centuries, and to view Scholem's image of an explosive return of repressed myth as ignoring all the continuities with older Jewish mythologies, both proximate and ancient. Nonetheless, Scholem's story retains its narrative power, precisely *as a myth*. In fact, given the vivid, mythic resonances of Scholem's imagery, he may have even intended it as such.

Scholem's narrative of conflict between two tendencies within Judaism, like that between Tishby's two tendencies within kabbalah, replays, in a

31 *Ibid*., 99.

32 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 35.

33 *Ibid*., 36.

34 Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra ve-ha-Kelipah be-Kabbalat Ha-Ari* 47: סלע המחלוקת בין הנטיה המיתית והדרישה התיאולוגית.

35 See, e.g., Idel, Kabbalah: New Perspectives, 112–136; Liebes, 'Ha-Mythos Ha-Kabbali be-fi Orfeus'; Liebes, 'De Natura Dei – Al Ha-Mitos Ha-Yehudi ve-Gilgulo'.

historiographical key, the myth of the "first palace." The "first palace" text does not simply represent one side or the other in the rivalry between competing cosmologies. Rather, it is a literary artifact that thematizes their relationship, indeed constructs their relationship, both ontologically and existentially. The putatively opposed tendencies within kabbalah are the very material out of which this Zoharic text constructs its mythical portrayal. The "first palace" text thus suggests that we read the Zoharic literature in a different way than as a record of conflicting tendencies that exist independently of them.

Nonetheless, the notion of tensions between opposed stances toward myth within Judaism has deeply influenced the Scholem tradition's analysis of kabbalistic writing. Scholem portrayed such writing as filled with tension between "inexhaustible symbolic images" and "speculative justification and conceptual interpretation" of those images.[36] In Tishby's pithy and punning formulation, these two "faces" of kabbalistic writing are those of *hagshamah* [הגשמה, loosely, "corporealization"] and *hafshatah* [הפשטה, "abstraction"]: "visionary-mythical images and narratives," on the one hand, "speculative-philosophical concepts and reasoning," on the other.[37] From this perspective, individual kabbalistic texts replay the broader conflict between kabbalah as a whole and the anti-mythological Judaism Scholem viewed as its rival. The "source of the countless inner contradictions" in kabbalistic symbols would stem from the tension between their mythical content and the language of pre-kabbalistic normative Judaism which kabbalists continued to employ.[38] From an even broader historical perspective, Scholem declared that it was the age-old "tension" between "gnosis and Platonism" that was continually "repeated in the heart of Judaism" in the opposition between kabbalah and its opponents as well as within kabbalah itself[39] – the term "gnosis" associated loosely with mythology and "Platonism" with the aspiration for harmonization with philosophical theology.

The notion that a kabbalistic text is a terrain of struggle between "gnosis and Platonism" – either as a reflection of the conflict between these vast historical movements or of a split within an individual author's subjectivity – shapes such analysts' treatment of particular symbols and passages and their explanation of textual paradoxes and contradictions. At a methodological level, such an approach entails the construction of rival models of coherent concepts and/or images, followed by the interpretation of particular Zoharic passages as

36 Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 96.

37 Tishby, *Netive Emunah u-Minut*, 23: פנים של הגשמה בציורים ובעלילות חזותיים-מיתיים ופנים של הפשטה במושגים ובהגיונות עיוניים-פילוסופיים.

38 *Ibid*.

39 *Ibid*. 97. See also Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 45.

reflecting the dominance of one or the other of such models. Due to the quintessentially mythical quality of the demonic, it is especially in relation to the themes of this book that the usefulness for textual analysis of Scholem's notion of "tensions" and "inner contradictions" between "gnosis and Platonism" must be critically re-examined. And, again and again, we shall find that close attention to the literary features of Zoharic texts shows that the Zoharic and other kabbalistic writers created literary artifacts that did not simply reflect these tensions, or the predominance of one or the other metaphysical position, but constructed poetic mythologies out of them. One way of understanding this book, in short, is that it is an exploration of the infinite possibilities of the "first palace."

It is, of course, true that the kabbalistic writers of the 13th century, like those of later periods, often diverged fiercely in their relationship to the demonic. Scholem, Liebes, and others have highlighted the way that, at least in the early period of divergences between Catalonian and Castilian kabbalists, the question of the demonic was a key marker of difference.[40] We find this phenomenon expressed in a pair of statements from two related circles to which kabbalistic thinking about the demonic owes its key formulations, the group Scholem calls the "Castilian Gnostics" and those Liebes calls the "circle of the Zohar."[41] These two texts, as Liebes has pointed out,[42] contain similar language praising those who place engagement with the demonic "left side" at the center of their concerns. They also both raise issues concerning the relationship between language and being, rhetoric and ontology, which are central to my analysis.

The first of these texts is from the "Castilian Gnostic" Moshe of Burgos (ca. 1235–1300):

> בענייני סתרי האצילות השמאלי אשר הוא מציאות עולם אחר כללי, נפרד במהות עצמו ... מעטים הם היודעים ומבינים עיקר מציאות סדר האצילות [הזה] ... כי ענין מציאות זר ומופלא כזה, אינו מושג מבלי סוד קבלה עליונה ... זה השמאל הוא בדמיון ימין ... ודמיון מציאות השמאל הוא מציאות מופלג בפני עצמו נפלא וזר...[43]
>
> In the matters of the secrets of the left emanation, which is the existence of an other, comprehensive world, separate in its own substance: ... Few are those who know and understand the essence of the existence of [this]

40 Liebes, *Ha-Mashiaḥ shel Ha-Zohar*, 35–38.

41 On the "circle of the Zohar" [חוג הזהר], see generally, Liebes, 'Ketsad Nitḥaber Sefer Ha-Zohar'.

42 Liebes, *Ha-Mashiaḥ*, 36–37.

43 Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 208 & 210.

> order of emanation … For the matter of this strange and mysterious existence cannot be grasped without the secret of a superior tradition.… This Left is in the likeness of the Right.… And the likeness of the existence of the Left is an existence distinct in itself, wondrous [*nifla*] and strange.

Aside from its proclamation of the esotericism and superiority of knowledge of the demonic (the "Left"), this excerpt implicitly broaches the relationship between ontology and rhetoric central to this book. The passage asserts that the "left emanation" is a "comprehensive other world," an "existence" whose "essence" is known only to the few. It couples this ontological affirmation of the demonic realm with a trope of similitude fraught with epistemological implications: "this Left is in the likeness of the Right." The Right can serve as a trope by which the structure of the Left can be known. The text highlights the epistemological necessity of the trope by the additional assertion that the Left is "alien and wondrous [*nifla*]," the latter a term whose root meaning denotes something hidden or separate. The passage thus asserts the absolute difference between Left and Right, implying their incommensurability, and, at the same time, declares a relationship of similarity between them, the possibility of taking one as a trope, a turn, to the other. Yet, the passage also implicitly raises the difficulty of any representation of something that is thoroughly Other, thoroughly "alien and hidden" – a challenge to a smooth association between ontology and rhetoric.

A closely related Zoharic passage makes this issue even more explicit, while transporting us deep into Zoharic mythology.

> אמר רבי שמעון, עובדא דבראשית חבריא לעאן ביה וידעין ביה, אבל זעירין אינון דידעין לרמזא עובדא דבראשית ברזא דתנין הגדול, ועל דא תנינן דכל עלמא לא משתלשלא אלא על סנפירוי דדא[44]

> Rabbi Shim'on said, The Companions study the Work of Creation and know something of it, but few are those who know how to allude to the Work of Creation through the mystery of the Great Dragon. And on this [*ve-al da*], we have learned that the whole world unfolds only on the fins of this [*al … de-da*].

The passage declares that the knowledge of the Work of Creation – a term for esoteric study of divine acts dating to at least Talmudic times – can only be

44 *Zohar* II, 34b. A midrashic source of this statement may be found in *Seder Rabah di-Bereshit* in *Bate Midrashot* I, 28: "And the entire world stands on the fin of Leviathan" [וכל העולם כולו עומד על סנפיר אחד של לויתן].

superficial unless achieved through engagement with the demonic, whose ultimate personification is the Great Dragon. Allusion, some kind of tropic evocation, by means of the demonic Dragon is necessary for a full knowledge of the Work of Creation. Moreover, this assertion of a rhetorical relationship between the demonic and the divine Creation is then followed by an ontological assertion: the "whole world only unfolds on the fins of this," i.e., of the Great Dragon.

To be sure, one may be tempted to read this last line as merely suggestive, with the "fins of the Great Dragon" intended only metaphorically. Nonetheless, the excerpt resounds with a corporeal, mythological meaning: the assertion of an inextricable link, as much ontological as epistemological, between the divine in its highest creative moment and the demon-ridden depths, personified by the "Great Dragon." While this reading may sound radically heterodox to Zoharic novices, it is supported both by the context of the passage and by the midrashic sources upon which this image is based.[45] The close repetition of the same demonstrative, "this" [*da*], at the end of the excerpt to refer both to the proposition about knowledge and to "the fins of the Great Dragon" reinforce the close connection between rhetoric and ontology. The divine Creation rests "*on* the fins of *this*," that is, of the Great Dragon, but this ontological relationship is said to be "*on this*," that is, "on" the rhetorical and epistemological imperative to allude to Creation through the "mystery of the Great Dragon." It may be that, in context, "on" is used first in the sense of "about" and then "upon," but this order reverses the expectation that speaking about a matter is based on the being of that matter. Here, by contrast, the ontological assertion about the "fins of the Dragon" seems to depend on the rhetorical relationship of "allusion." The passage thus asserts an inextricable relationship between divine and demonic, as well as the primacy of rhetoric in the construction of that relationship.

With this paradoxical ontological and epistemological association between demonic depth and divine height, we come upon a remarkable affinity between the most esoteric dimensions of 13th century kabbalah and key features of the cultural matrix out of which Scholem – and thus modern kabbalah studies – emerged.[46] At both the personal and intellectual levels, Scholem must be

45 In addition to the *Seder Rabah di-Bereshit*, see also *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, 23a-b (ch. 8): "On the fifth day he caused the water to spawn Leviathan, the extending serpent, whose dwelling-place is the lower waters. And between his two fins, the central bar of the earth stands" [בחמישי השריץ מן המים לויתן נחש בריח מדורו במים התחתונים ובין שני סנפיריו הבריח התיכון של ארץ עומד].

46 I am using "cultural Modernism" here in a specific historical sense to refer to the wave of transformations of European high culture that swept across a wide range of domains approximately between the 1880s and the 1930s. The nature, extent, chronology, and

seen against the backdrop of that artistic/theoretical/political/religious crucible of the early 20th century West known as cultural-modernism. A central feature of cultural-modernism was its "primitivist" quest for the renewal of creativity by drawing on terrifying, yet fascinating forces, imagined as residing in a range of "Others": the exotic, mysterious and remote worlds of non-Europeans, European peasants, and the depths of the unconscious.[47] Cultural-modernists viewed such forces as indispensable sources of vitality for cultural renewal, capable of providing the energy to unblock a Western culture they viewed as ossified and decadent. At the same time, however, most Western cultural-modernists also viewed these forces as dangerous, excessive, and destabilizing, in need of discipline and form. Except in its most radical variants, therefore, modernism's "primitivism" was always accompanied by an emphasis on advanced virtuosity in specific artistic, cultural or intellectual media. Cultural-modernist masterpieces, accordingly, often emerged out of a paradoxical "alliance" between "primitive" forces and advanced techniques of high culture – for example, in the form of an "alliance between primitivism and abstraction."[48] Picasso's well-known painting, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), is an iconic example of this "alliance."

Paul Tillich (1886–1965), the influential German Protestant theologian, just slightly older than Scholem, made explicit the link between the religious and artistic ferment of early 20th century Europe. Writing in the midst of the upheavals of post-World War I Berlin, Tillich stressed the link between the "primitives" of artistic modernism's imagination and the "demonic" of the religious imagination.[49] He also proclaimed that the "higher … forms of religion" emerged from the "demonic depths."[50]

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geography of the transformations in each domain differed widely, a complexity I need not discuss here.

47 The literature on Modernist primitivism is vast. See, e.g., Middleton, 'The Rise of Primitivism and its Relevance to the Poetry of Expressionism and Dada', 185–203; Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, *passim*. Scholem's early advocacy of re-conceptualizing the Jews as "orientals" as part of a critique of European culture participated in this general cultural movement. See Lazier, 'Writing the Judenzarathustra: Gershom Scholem's Response to Modernity, 1913–1917', 33–65.

48 Middleton, 'The Rise of Primitivism', 194: "The alliance of primitivism and abstraction is one of the most copiously documented facts of the [cultural-modernist] period." I have argued, in a long series of studies, for the usefulness of this "alliance" in understanding the transformation of international law after World War I. See, e.g., 'Modernism, Nationalism, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction', 351–380.

49 Tillich, 'The Demonic: A Contribution to the Interpretation of History', 85.

50 *Ibid.*, 107.

The paradoxical "alliance" emerged because cultural-modernists viewed the "primitive" forces as impossible to represent directly, especially by the figurative means of post-Renaissance European art, due to their explosive and protean nature. The avant-garde's stylistic experimentalism, breaking with traditional representational norms, was thus partly an affirmation of a disjunction between the ontological essence of the forces the artist sought to evoke and the artistic conventions, the rhetoric, of European art. Only a norm-breaking art could evoke convention-defying "primitive" forces. This conjunction of stylistic audacity and primordial forces is also, as we shall see, one of the key characteristics of Zoharic writing on the Other Side – a startling convergence of the effects of Zoharic fascination with the demonic and the cultural-modernist fascination with the "primitive."[51]

In a quintessential cultural-modernist gesture, Scholem explicitly cast his turn to the study of kabbalah as a revolt against 19th century bourgeois culture – particularly against that symptomatic artifact of 19th century bourgeois Jewish culture, the "Science of Judaism" [*Wissenschaft des Judentums*]. He also explicitly associated this revolt with a rejection of the bourgeois suppression of the demonic. In a 1945 lecture, in a passage highlighted by David Biale,[52] he eloquently summarized his position:

> Removing the irrational stinger and banishing demonic fervor from Jewish history through hyperbolic theologization and spiritualization: this, in essence, is the original sin [of the "Science of Judaism"]. …This terrifying giant – our history – is called to account … and this mighty creature, filled with explosive power, composed of vitality, evil, and perfection, lowers its stature, contracts itself, and proclaims that it is a nothing; the demonic giant is merely a simple fool who acts in the manner of a good citizen who only desires progress; and every proper bourgeois in Israel can greet him in the streets of the city, the clean city of the 19th century – and not be embarrassed by being publicly associated with him.[53]

Scholem's portrayal of the "terrifying giant" of Jewish history, and the "demonic fervor" animating it, is a paradigmatic instance of cultural-modernist ambivalence in relation to the "primitive." Scholem celebrates this demonic giant, and

51 Compare Amos Goldreich's important study comparing the writing of the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* with techniques of automatic writing in the early 20th century avant-garde. Goldreich, *Shem Ha-Kotev u-Ketivah Automatit be-Sifrut Ha-Zohar u-ve-Modernism*.

52 Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*, 3–4.

53 Scholem, 'Mi-Tokh Hirhurim al Ḥokhmat Yisra'el', 396.

has nothing but scorn for those who would reduce it to a "simple fool" out of assimilationist concern for bourgeois propriety. And yet, or precisely therefore, he also acknowledges the demonic giant's danger, in the same breath as its promise: "vitality, evil, and perfection."

This unexpected homology between the characteristic double gestures of cultural-modernism and thirteenth century kabbalah suggests one route towards understanding the kabbalistic demonic, a route that can vindicate some of the central impulses of the Scholem tradition, while building on some of the central critiques of that tradition and the new directions in research they have inspired. Tishby's portrayal of a dialectic between corporealization [*hagshamah*], closely related to myth and the demonic, and abstraction [*hafshatah*], with a greater affinity to theology, bears a significant resemblance to the paradoxical modernist "alliance." Tishby thought that these two "faces" of kabbalah had characterized kabbalah from its beginnings and that the kabbalistic tradition must be understood as containing both.[54] However, as I have begun to show in this section, Zoharic texts, as well as other kabbalistic texts, do not simply constitute a terrain where one or the other tendency might dominate. Rather, they must be read as textual artifacts which explicitly use divergent tendencies to construct new literary creations, and, thereby, new ontological structures – a complex literary "alliance" among heterogeneous elements and forces.

I turn, therefore, to more recent scholarship and the way this book responds to the new avenues it has opened up.

II Textual Proliferation and Stylistic Audacity

No sensitive reader of the Zoharic literature can fail to be struck by two of its most notable features: its seemingly endless power of proliferation and its conspicuous literariness, the latter including its stylistic audacities as well as the narratives that frame its sages' homilies. I believe that these features, central to this book, provide the internal textual motivations for two key directions in current Zohar scholarship: text-criticism and the literary turn in interpretation.

I use the phrase "Zoharic proliferation" to refer to a number of different, sometimes overlapping, phenomena. ***First – intra-Zoharic proliferation***: for most passages in the Zoharic literature, one can find parallel passages elsewhere in that literature, passages similar in theme and often in proof-texts,

54 Tishby, *Netive Emunah u-Minut*, 25.

though diverging from each other either subtly or dramatically. The continual rewriting suggested by this pervasive phenomenon supports the theses, currently under intensive scholarly examination, of multiple authors and a chronology of composition sufficiently long to enable such pervasive revisionism. ***Second – extra-Zoharic proliferation***: recent scholars have shown that at least some Zoharic texts were composed through rewriting much earlier texts, that some Zoharic-like texts were not included in the "*Sefer Ha-Zohar*," and that some Zoharic texts continued to be revised long after the 13th century. ***Third – internal Zoharic proliferation***: examination of micro-rhetorical features internal to Zoharic texts that propel them to multiply, including an insistence on repetitive constructions, seeming both to render arbitrary the closure of any particular passage and to open up the possibility of the writing of parallel passages. This third sense of proliferation illuminates the first two phenomena, foregrounding the internal textual features that provoke parallel passages and the rewriting of individual passages through the decades and generations. Revealing and exploring this internal drive to proliferation is one of the central concerns of this book.

The first two phenomena have been the focus of a key arena of Zohar scholarship over the past generation: a multi-layered effort of text-criticism, manuscript assemblage, and meticulous comparative work. This effort seeks to determine the chronology and processes whereby the array of texts, eventually published in the 16th century as *Sefer Ha-Zohar, Zohar Ḥadash*, and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, came to be constructed as unitary books. This work has upended some of the key assumptions of the Scholem tradition.[55] Scholem, early in his career, had rejected the traditionalist view that the entire Zoharic literature was authored by its central protagonist, Shim'on bar Yoḥai, the second century Palestinian sage. Scholem argued that the principal parts of the Zoharic literature (excluding the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* and *Ra'ya Mehemna*) were composed by the 13th century Spanish kabbalist Moshe de León. The new scholarly consensus, however, rejects the notion of *any* single author.

Yehuda Liebes and those inspired by his work tend to postulate a "circle of the Zohar," a group of writers, most of whose names are known to us from their other works, writing a vast body of stylistically and substantively related texts that came to be collected as *Sefer Ha-Zohar*. Others, notably Daniel Abrams, tend to reject the notion that one can assume the social existence of such a circle.[56] Such critics reject the notion that the Zohar can even be considered a

55 For some prominent (though far from identical) examples, see Liebes, 'Ketsad Niṭḥaber Sefer Ha-Zohar'; Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts*, esp. 224–428; Abrams, 'The "Zohar" as Palimpsest'; and Huss, *Ke-Zohar Ha-Raki'a*.

56 Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts*, 398–399.

"book" attributable to a unified group of authors or editors, at least prior to the 16th century. Moreover, other researchers, notably Ronit Meroz, have extended the origin of some Zoharic texts or fragments of texts as far back as the 11th century,[57] while others seek to demonstrate the continuing revision of Zoharic texts up to the time of their 16th century publication.[58] Hence the new convention, to which I largely adhere, of referring to the "Zoharic literature," rather than treating "the" Zohar as a single entity.

Nonetheless, along with many others, I think there are good reasons for reading the texts of the Zoharic literature together, both thematically and stylistically, even while rejecting any *a priori* assumptions about authorship or "book-ness." I substantially adopt the views of the preeminent kabbalah scholar Elliot Wolfson, who, while "readily acknowledg[ing] the likelihood that the zoharic text accrued over an extensive period of time and that, in great measure, the taxonomy of a 'book' applied to it is a later invention," declares:

> In my judgment, we can still profitably refer to these passages as expressive of a singular phenomenon classified as the zoharic kabbalah, even if this necessitates extending the boundaries of the text over several centuries to accommodate a principle of anthologizing that unifies through multiplicity.[59]

Wolfson also invokes the model of the structuralist analysis of myth, which bears considerable kinship to some of my guiding assumptions.[60] The structuralist notion of a productive *combinatoire* – the generation of variants of myths through divergent combinations of certain basic elements or mythemes, yielding often conflicting narratives and even morals – dramatically attenuates the importance of questions like authorship. From this perspective, a myth consists of all its variants, even if they appear on the surface to be incompatible and their authorship is spread out geographically and temporally.[61] For her part, Melila Hellner-Eshed suggests the analogy of a jazz ensemble, whose members produce individualized and contrasting riffs on shared musical themes.[62]

Text-critical work and interpretive work are currently proceeding in the field at the same time, sometimes by the same scholars. By examining the internal

57 Meroz, 'The Middle Eastern origins of Kabbalah', *passim*.
58 Huss, *Ke-Zohar Ha-Raki'a*, 84–139.
59 Wolfson, 'Zoharic Literature and Midrashic Temporality', 323–324.
60 Wolfson, *Language, Eros, and Being*, 48.
61 The classic description is in Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 206–231.
62 Hellner-Eshed, *Ve-Nahar Yotse Me-Eden*, 231 n. 81.

rhetorical impulse underlying Zoharic proliferation, this book implicitly seeks to contribute to efforts to bridge these two kinds of scholarship. While a variant of interpretive scholarship, its examination of the wellsprings of internal Zoharic proliferation illuminates one origin of the need for the text-critical enterprise.

The second striking feature of the Zoharic literature that has spurred recent scholarship is its literariness. Critics of the Scholem/Tishby tradition, with its focus on conceptual content, have argued that it gives insufficient attention to this conspicuous and patently deliberate aspect of Zoharic writing. As a result of this critique, exploration of the Zoharic literature as a literary phenomenon has been one of the most productive areas of scholarship over the past generation.[63] This explosion of scholarly creativity has been inspired by the work of leading figures in the field, such as Yehuda Liebes, Elliot Wolfson, Ronit Meroz, and many others.

In his seminal article, 'Zohar and Eros,' Liebes cautions against reducing Zoharic writing to its "doctrine" – thereby dramatically departing from, while acknowledging his debt to, the monumental work of Scholem and Tishby in teasing out that doctrine.[64] Playing on the meanings of the word "*zohar*" (radiance, luster, splendor), Liebes declares his dedication not "to the 'doctrine of the Zohar,' but to the '*zohar* in the doctrine' – the creativity, open hermeneutics, humor, sex, friendship…."[65] Indeed, he proclaims that the concept closest to the Zoharic meaning of "*zohar*" is "Eros."[66] Liebes and his disciples

63 This literature is now too large to cite in full here. Some of the key works are: Liebes, 'Ha-Mashiaḥ shel Ha-Zohar; Liebes, 'Zohar ve-Eros'; Boaz Huss, `Ḥakham Adif me-Navi', in *Ke-Zohar Ha-Raki'a*, 11–42; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination*, 190–295; Lévy-Valensi, *La poétique du Zohar*; Meroz, 'Zoharic Narratives and their Adaptations'; Wolski, 'Mystical Poetics: Narrative, Time and Exegesis in the Zohar'; Hellner-Eshed, *Ve-Nahar Yotse Me-Eden*; Fishbane, 'Representation and the Boundaries of Realism: Reading the Fantastic in Zoharic Fiction', Yisraeli, *Temple Portals: Studies in Aggadah and Midrash in the Zohar*.

64 Liebes, 'Zohar ve-Eros', *passim*. This essay begins with a critique of the monumental work by Tishby, *Mishnat Ha-Zohar* [henceforth cited as *MZ*]. Although this work has been translated as *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, a more straightforward translation would be "*The Doctrine of the Zohar*," and it is this sense that Liebes takes up in his essay. I note that Liebes' practice of adding to, or amending, his published essays in their on-line versions makes citing the latter often more appropriate.

65 Zohar ve-Eros', 2.

66 *Ibid*.

have particularly focused on the "frame stories," the narratives about the Zoharic sages that set the stage for, and are intertwined with, their substantive discourses.[67]

This emphasis on the literary features of Zoharic writing offers the promise of avoiding a number of the weaknesses of the Scholem tradition. Reading individual Zoharic passages as literary texts makes the heterogeneity and even contradictoriness of their phenomenal and conceptual elements appear as a literary technique, rather than a reflection of a conflict or compromise between pre-existing metaphysical or philosophical systems. "If the Zohar were a book of philosophy," writes Liebes, such contradictoriness "would be a grave defect." However, he continues, here we are concerned with "myth," which is created "from a flow of dimensions and contradictions." Zoharic writing does not present a "doctrine," but rather, a "rainbow of views and facets."[68]

The error of refusing to truly *read* a text, of viewing rhetorical structure as a mere vehicle for conceptual doctrine, is known to literary theory as the "heresy of paraphrase,"[69] a slogan coined by the "New Critic" Cleanth Brooks in his essays on poetry. Paraphrastic interpretation reduces a poem to its propositional content, refusing to take the poetic work seriously, indeed bypassing it altogether. For Brooks, by contrast, a poem is a multifaceted "structure of meanings," which "unites the like with unlike," and refuses to "reduce the contradictory attitudes to harmony by a process of subtraction." Rather, it achieves a "positive unity" that can best be described with terms like "ambiguity," "paradox," and a "complex of attitudes."[70] Even conceptual propositions which explicitly appear in a poem must not be read as the definitive view of the poem, but rather, as part of its dramatic unfolding, to be treated as one would the pronouncements of a particular character within a novel or a play. Liebes states much the same notion when he writes of Zoharic texts' self-awareness of their contradictoriness, sometimes expressed by putting different views in the mouths of different sages.[71] The intertwining and mirroring that the Liebes school often demonstrates between Zoharic "frame stories" and their substantive homilies provide instantiations of the dramatically achieved harmonies to which New Critics like Brooks called our attention.

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67 A vital, two-volume collection of such studies has just been published. Liebes, Benarroch, & Hellner-Eshed (eds.), *Ha-Sipur Ha-Zohari*.

68 'Zohar ve-Eros', 1.

69 See Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn*, 192–201.

70 *Ibid*., 195.

71 'Zohar ve-Eros', 1.

One Zoharic text portrays the folly of paraphrase in the allegory of the "mountain-dweller."[72] This foolish character, ignorant of the refinements of the city, consumes wheat in its raw state, disdaining the pleasures of bread, cakes, and royal confectioneries – and absurdly imagines himself superior because he possesses the "essence," the raw material of this rich diversity. The text declares that only one who partakes of the "enjoyment" of all these "delights" – and by analogy only one who revels in the rich literary delights of Zoharic writing – can understand their essence, the "wheat" or kabbalistic doctrine, which itself emerges in all its diverse "dimensions and contradictions," in Liebes' terms, only through the work of "mythopoiesis."[73]

Zoharic texts strategically and overtly juxtapose heterogeneous conceptual elements and incongruous phenomenal images, using them as raw material for novel literary creations. Such juxtapositions of seemingly incompatible elements occur even within short excerpts, indeed even within single images. This central feature of Zoharic texts means that we must reject reading them as simply reflecting one or another of pre-existing metaphysical models or even the tension between them, a pitfall to which, as I shall show, an analyst like Tishby often falls. Rather than reducing the heterogeneity of textual elements, we should foreground it, showing how it is central to the composition of Zoharic texts, indeed indispensable to the originality of their mythological content as well as literary style – and to the inextricability of the two.

At least two reservations must, however, be registered in relation to treating Zoharic texts as harmonious literary wholes, in which the conflicting elements are balanced in a "pattern of resolved stresses."[74] First, even beyond today's consensus rejection of a single Zoharic author, the text-critical enterprise sketched above should make one extremely reticent to presuppose a bounded unity even of individual passages. The coherence of any particular passage is something that has to be demonstrated through interpretation, rather than presumed by appealing to a unitary authorship or even editorship. That any such demonstration can only be more or less persuasive, supported by more or less contestable interpretive assumptions, simply means it partakes of the kind of reasoning common in the humanities, rather than in the exact sciences. Moreover, as I shall show, the drive to internal Zoharic proliferation suggests that there may be an intrinsically unfinished quality to many, if not most, Zoharic passages – a sense that they could go on indefinitely and that the

72 *Zohar* II, 176a–b.

73 'Zohar ve-Eros', 3.

74 Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn*, 203.

boundedness of their current state is more or less arbitrary, regardless of the circumstances of their authorship.

The second reservation directly concerns the subject matter of this book: for one of the central roles of the demonic in Zoharic texts is precisely to disrupt unity, to transgress boundaries, to contaminate purity, to destabilize the line between Self and Other. This subversive role of the demonic generates not only the ontological effects just sketched, but also textual effects, disrupting the unity of the passages in which it appears. This textually disruptive role of the demonic will be explored in great detail in this book.

While firmly located within the literary turn in Zohar studies, therefore, this book's level of analysis and theoretical background are rather different. Rather than looking at larger narrative structures, I focus on the micro-level rhetorical techniques through which Zoharic texts construct the divine/demonic relationship, including the detailed techniques of syntactical construction and the distinctively Zoharic formation and deployment of images. This approach requires no assumption about authorial or editorial control, nor even about the unity or completeness of individual passages. Rather, it demonstrates the ways specific textual techniques construct the relationships between divine and demonic beings – and also subvert those relationships. It explicates the rhetorical techniques that make Zoharic passages legible as literary artifacts, and also often destabilize their textual unity.

This book's distinctive approach to the literary features of Zoharic writing is complemented by its distinctive approach to Zoharic ontology, specifically that of the divine/demonic relationship. My main ontological focus concerns the formation of the two realms, especially the construction of divine and demonic *personae*, theogony and demonogony, the division of Self and Other – borrowing heavily from Kristeva's psychoanalytic understanding of the construction of subjectivity. And just as I have sought methods that obviate the need to presuppose the literary boundedness of Zoharic texts, so I have sought an ontological framework that will obviate the need to presuppose a bounded subject.

This goal requires a rethinking of the notion of "catharsis," which plays a key, yet under-examined, role in academic kabbalah scholarship. Following Scholem and Tishby, kabbalah scholarship has long used this notion to portray the formation of the divine subject. The image that implicitly subtends this notion in kabbalah scholarship is that of a pre-existing subject which seeks to "purify" itself. As I show in detail, however, Zoharic texts go to great descriptive and stylistic lengths to refuse the presupposition of such a subject. And if the subject does not pre-exist the process of separation from inassimilable

elements, then a paradoxical terminology may be required, one that portrays actions without subjects, rather than the historically freighted "catharsis."

My distinctive approach to the literariness of Zoharic writing also requires rethinking the relationship between rhetoric and ontology. A portrayal of processes of which the subject is an after-effect, rather than a presupposition, challenges conventional linguistic norms. This challenge includes, for example, the phenomenon that actions initiated before their actors have come into being are portrayed by verbs before their subjects can be named. Just as the distinctive Zoharic rhetoric yields an ontology, so does its distinctive ontology require a distinctive set of rhetorical techniques, defying conventional linguistic expectations.

I thus seek to look at the innermost workings of Zoharic texts, while avoiding any *a priori* assumption of either textual or ontological unity, let alone a unity of rhetorical technique and ontological content. Such unities may or may not be achieved, depending on, among other things, the extent of demonic disruption. Indeed, I show that a number of Zoharic texts thematize the opposite danger of ignoring rhetorical technique from that of the "heresy of paraphrase": that of simply submitting to the expectations set up by rhetorical techniques, a kind of seduction-by-rhetoric. Such texts show that the conflation of rhetorically created expectation and ontological truth can lead to the gravest kind of religious error: the confusion of the divine and the demonic.[75] Taken together, the danger of paraphrase and the danger of rhetorical seduction highlight the need for a subtle reflection on the relationship between rhetorical technique and ontological doctrine in the context of a literature that operates powerfully on both levels.

The approach taken here thus seeks to vindicate some of the crucial critiques of the Scholem tradition, while drawing on what I believe to be some of its deepest wellsprings.[76] Some of the most characteristic and profound dimensions of the Zoharic tradition emerge from the never definitively achieved drive to distinguish divine and demonic, generating endlessly proliferating discourses and ritual practices. Moreover, Zoharic texts, and much of kabbalistic writing generally, are replete with portrayals of the ways divine and demonic entities and *personae* continually enter into dangerous and scandalous relationships with each other. The vast discursive and ritual production generated

75 See my discussion of "Solomon's error" in Chapter 2.

76 My position has something in common with Mopsik in 'A Propos d'une polémique récente concernant l'oeuvre de G. Scholem', 13–25. Mopsik argues that the persuasive critique of Scholem's notion of a Gnostic incursion only deepens the paradox that Scholem cherished: the provocative relationship of halakhic Judaism to the latently antinomian mythology by which it has long been accompanied.

by these explosive and ceaseless dynamics between "high" and "low" would have particularly appealed to the cultural-modernist sensibility of a Scholem and must partly account for his fascination with Sabbateanism. I embrace the Scholem tradition's fascination with such phenomena, even while employing novel methods of explicating the stylistic and substantive dimensions of Zoharic writing. This book is concerned, in short, with seeking out the distinctive rhetorical techniques and ontological doctrines through which Zoharic texts bring heterogeneous elements – sublime and base, majestic and repulsive, divine and demonic – into juxtaposition, confrontation, embrace, and combat.

III The Rhetoric and Ontology of Ambivalence

Before introducing the specific rhetorical techniques and ontological doctrines at play in Zoharic texts, I make a brief excursus on my usage of the term "ambivalence," for it underlies much of what follows. Many of the familiar confrontations with the various kinds of Others I evoked in the Introduction can be understood as characterized by ambivalence. I use this term in two ways, though they are deeply intertwined in the Zoharic context. The more conventional usage is that of *subjective ambivalence*, the coexistence within a person of contradictory impulses, emotions, and instincts towards other persons and things, as well as toward him- or herself: love and hatred, desire and repulsion, tenderness and violence. One finds such subjective ambivalence in Zoharic discussions of alterity of all kinds, including gendered and national alterity, and certainly the otherness of the demonic. The "king and the bondwoman" passage discussed earlier illustrates several kinds of such ambivalence. The other, less familiar, usage is what I call *objective ambivalence*, a doubling within a word or an object that is relatively autonomous of anyone's attitude toward it. It is in this sense that Julia Kristeva, for example, writes of an "ambivalent word" as a "word with two significations."[77] Such words, and their equivalents in larger textual units, are objectively ambivalent at the rhetorical level. At the ontological level, the Zoharic cosmos, in which the divine is one "side," and the demonic is the "Other Side," may similarly be described as objectively ambivalent.

It is in the objective sense that I will predominately use the term ambivalence here. I immediately caution, however, that, in the Zoharic cosmos, the difference between subjective and objective ambivalence is considerably attenuated. Zoharic texts portray subjective emotions like love and anger as

77 Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel', 44.

participation by the subject in ontological forces, specifically the archetypes of Lovingkindness and Judgment embodied in the fourth and fifth Sefirot, *Ḥesed* and *Gevurah*. Even more strikingly, people who have entirely given themselves over to anger have ontologically transferred themselves from participation in the divine "side" to that of the demonic: such a person has "uprooted this supernal holiness from its place" in his soul, "to put in its place the Other Side."[78] One is forbidden even to look at such a person because the "alien God" now "tangibly dwells within him"[79] – and thus gazing upon him is not merely akin to apostasy, but, quite literally, idol-worship. When it comes to the issues that are at the center of this book – the multifaceted situatedness of divine, demonic, and human subjects in a divided cosmos – subjective and objective ambivalence thus become almost inextricable, or, more precisely, their dynamic relationship becomes the theme of mythological narrative.

Indeed, some have even interpreted Freud, from whose work the notion of ambivalence entered into wide usage, in this objective sense, even if against his own intentions. Freud's elaboration of the dynamics of ambivalence was always intimately bound up with his dualism, a key, persistent feature of his thought, though taking ever-changing forms.[80] His increasing turn to mythological imagery, most overtly in his embrace of Empedocles' opposition between "love and strife," cannot be dissociated from the final version of his instinctual dualism, the conflict between "Eros and destructiveness."[81] In these late formulations, dualism is ultimately located not in the psychological stances of the subject towards the object, but in the "forces" that precede or transcend the subject.[82] In the provocative interpretation of one commentator: against the "the radically demythologizing milieu and intent of Freud's psychoanalysis," he bequeaths us a vision of these forces as "silent, invisible Movers that take the place of the prior idols that psychoanalytic theory has dispatched," forces that "cannot be demythologized."[83] But whatever its shifting meanings in various versions of psychoanalysis, the dynamics of ambivalence can provide guidance through many of the mysteries of Zoharic texts on the divine/demonic relationship – in which the most radically other may prove to be the most intimate, the most denigrated fatefully linked to the most idealized, the most contaminated intermingled with the most holy in myriad ways.

78 *Zohar* II, 182a:
עקר קדושא דא עלאה מאתריה למשרי באתרא סטרא אחרא

79 *Zohar* II, 182a–b: ממש שארי בגויה ... אל זר

80 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 53; Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 292.

81 Freud, 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', 246.

82 Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy, 293.

83 King, 'Freud's Empedocles: The Future of a Dualism', 24.

In accordance with the framework I sketched in the Introduction, I look at the dynamics of ambivalence from two distinct perspectives, each with rhetorical and ontological dimensions: a) the ontology of *splitting*, constructed through techniques of rhetorical *parallelism*; and b) the ontological establishment of subjects through the two-step process of *abjection-and-crystallization*, constructed through *tropes of limitation* and *representation*. The two sets of rhetorical techniques and ontological constructions can be viewed as ways of constructing and managing ambivalence (in both of its senses), even while continually destabilizing them.

I now proceed to explain the basic terms of my rhetorical and ontological analysis. I somewhat foreground the ontological dimension, because introducing its key features requires a substantial discussion of non-Zoharic texts; by contrast, the rhetorical analysis can only be fully explained in conjunction with the close readings of particular Zoharic texts that form the subsequent three chapters.

A *The Ontology of Splitting and the Rhetoric of Parallelism*

Psychologically oriented critics of religion often advance the mechanisms of "splitting" to explain the opposition between God and the Devil, usually in reductionist fashion; it is important, therefore, to distinguish the usage I will make of this term from its more conventional sense. Splitting, in psychoanalysis, portrays a set of techniques for the management of acute subjective ambivalence. Such ambivalence produces an unbearable tension in which incompatible affects or valorizations are projected onto the same object and/or coexist within the same subject. Splitting seeks to manage this tension through a variety of techniques for effecting a divide between the wholly good and the wholly bad, including projection and introjection, idealization and denial.[84]

Such mechanisms not only serve to protect a cherished object from negative valorizations, but also serve to protect the internal coherence of the subject from intolerable contradictions. On the one hand, the object is split into positive and negative versions, polar opposites issuing from an unsustainably fraught unity. On the other hand, the subject is split between its acceptable facets, embraced as the true self, and its inassimilable facets, cast into the unconscious, the internal space of alterity.

To move from a reductionist view of splitting, treating the resulting dualism as a subjective illusion, to a cosmological view, treating dualism as a portrayal of reality, one need only take one step: that of putting into doubt the existence of a standpoint outside of it. If splitting is generalized, if coherent objects and

84 Kristeva, *Melanie Klein*, 107.

subjects are all an effect of its operations, then we would be living within cosmological dualism, rather than dismissively diagnosing it from the outside. The prevalence of splitting in human experience suggests that such generalization is a phenomenological possibility. As I shall show, Zoharic texts work both inside and outside this possibility, both inhabiting a cosmos thoroughly structured by dualism and yet revealing the mechanisms of splitting by which this cosmos comes to be.

However ubiquitous and productive of subjects and objects, splitting is also destabilizing. It tends to produce opposites which nonetheless bear an uncanny resemblance to each other, presumably due to their common origin.[85] It is thus an extremely fragile technique. The opposed pairs, both internal and external, constantly threaten to flip into one another, producing existential uncertainty and even ontological indeterminacy. The precariousness of splitting impels the need for its continual re-enactment, and, ultimately, to a proliferation of increasingly menacing, and yet nearly identical, doubles.

The pertinence of these dynamics to the demonic was already suggested by Freud, who repeatedly proposed splitting as the psychological mechanism that generates the Devil. Significantly, he offers at least two distinct versions of this mechanism, one on the level of the object, the other of the subject. The first concerns the splitting of the image of the father into good and bad variants, the other concerns the splitting of the self.[86] In the first version, Freud argues that "God and the Devil were originally identical – were a single figure which was later split into two figures with opposite attributes."[87] This single figure was modeled on, or was a daunting projection of, the human father. The benefit gained by its splitting into two opposed variants was the management of the "ambivalence which governs the relation of the individual to his personal father."[88] In the second version, by contrast, Freud attributes the origin of the Devil to a splitting of the ego, an attempt by the individual to safeguard the coherence of his self-image against its fragmentation by unruly desires: "the devil is certainly nothing else than the personification of the repressed unconscious

85 The classic text is Freud, 'The 'Uncanny', 217–256. The analysis of the literary, cultural, and psychoanalytical implications of "the double" is vast. Freud drew on the work of Rank, *The Double. A Psychoanalytic Study*. The theme, pervasive in both Western and non-Western cultures, was particularly prominent in European Romantic literature, from Dostoevsky to Maupassant. Among the writers that have influenced my own understanding of this theme, beyond Freud, Klein, and Rank, are the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the philosophers Jacques Derrida and Sarah Kofman.

86 Rizzuto, 'Freud, God, the Devil and the Theory of Object Representation', 168.

87 Freud, 'A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis', 85.

88 *Ibid*.

instinctual life."[89] In this version, the Devil is a crystallization of elements that the subject finds incompatible with a coherent self and that become dissociated from, and antagonistic to, that self. In rather more complex form, both of these versions will be important to this book. I emphasize, though, that I will adapt them for ontological, rather than merely psychological, portrayals – or, more precisely, if, as these Freudian passages can be read as hinting, both the object and the subject are products of splitting, the latter must be situated at a level that precedes them both.

A clear illustration of the ontology of splitting, and its construction by a distinctive rhetorical technique, is the pervasiveness in kabbalistic texts of verbal and phenomenal mirroring between divine and demonic realms, entities, and *personae*. Such texts often associate such mirroring with the verse-fragment translated by the KJV as "God also hath set the one over against the other" [זה לעמת זה עשה האלהים] (Ecc. 7:14). The kabbalistic usage of this proof-text, as it crystallized in the 13th century, was appropriated and adapted from a long tradition extending from the Talmud[90] to the *Sefer Yetsirah*[91] to the *Sefer Ha-Bahir*.[92]

A review of Zoharic texts yields a wide range of terms shared by the divine and demonic realms: each has ten sefirot, seven palaces, and so on.[93] Indeed, a more Zoharic translation for the Ecclesiastes verse would be "'this' confronted

89 Freud, 'Character and Anal Erotism', 173. See generally de Urtubey, *Freud et le diable*, *passim*.

90 *bḤagigah*, 15a:
שאל אחר את רבי מאיר לאחר שיצא לתרבות רעה אמר ליה מאי דכתיב גם את זה לעומת זה עשה האלהים אמר לו כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא ברא כנגדו ברא הרים ברא גבעות ברא ימים ברא נהרות אמר לו רבי עקיבא רבך לא אמר כך אלא ברא צדיקים ברא רשעים ברא גן עדן ברא גיהנם
Aḥer, after he had taken the evil path, asked Rabbi Me'ir: "what is the meaning of that which is written, 'Also this confronted with this hath made the Elohim'? He replied: "For everything that the blessed Holy One created, he created a counterpart. He created mountains, he created valleys; he created seas, he created rivers." Rabbi Akiva said to him: "Not thus did your master speak. Rather, He created righteous people, he created wicked people; he created the Garden of Eden, He created Hell."

91 *Sefer Yetsirah Ha-Shalem*, 145:
גם כל חפץ זה לעומת זה ברא האלהים, טוב לעומת רע.
Also, in relation to every object, "this confronted with this hath made the Elohim" – good confronted with evil.

92 *Sefer Ha-Bahir*, 7:
ומאי גם את זה לעומת זה עשה האלהים (קהלת ז' יד), ברא בהו ושם מקומו בשלום וברא תהו ושם מקומו ברע
And what is "Also this confronted with this hath made the Elohim" (Ecc. 7:14)? He created *Bohu* and posited its place in peace; and he created *Tohu* and posited its place in evil.

93 See Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim*, Pt. 2, 55a; Tishby, *MZ,* I, 288.

with 'this' hath made the Elohim," since this would retain the verbal repetition of the Hebrew [this ... this; זה ... זה] key to the kabbalistic designation of radically opposed entities with identical, or nearly identical, terms.[94] I refer to such identical, yet opposed, terms as "antithetical homonyms." Antithetical homonymy is an instance of *rhetorical parallelism*, of which more complex forms will be analyzed in Chapter 2.

The employment of antithetical homonyms, which first appears in 13th century texts, acquires ever-increasing importance over the course of kabbalistic history. This insistence on antithetical homonymy is remarkable, given its potential for indeterminacy and misprision. It renders the radical distinction that must be drawn between the adversarial realms – demanded by the gravest religious, ethical, and cognitive imperatives – both highly urgent and deeply problematic. As I shall show, the fear of misprision, of taking one realm for the other, which reaches its apex in the Sabbatean controversies, already forms a key theme in the Zoharic and immediate post-Zoharic literature.[95]

Three 13th century examples of this rhetorical technique can serve to highlight its importance. First, Zoharic texts interpret the biblical usage of the demonstrative pronoun "these" [אלה], an abstract signifier for the designation of proximate objects, to refer both to the demonic couple of Sama'el and Lilith and to the six Sefirot that together compose the blessed Holy One – and, in some places, the seven Sefirot that compose the blessed Holy One and his female consort, the Shekhinah.[96] As the 16th century Safed kabbalist Moshe Cordovero writes with reference to the Zohar: "just as there are 'these' on the side of the demonic,[97] so there are 'these' on the side of holiness"[98] – potentially introducing an element of lethal indeterminacy into any gesture of designation. A second example concerns the term at the core of this book, the "Other," highlighting its intrinsically perspectival quality. In the *Book of the Left Column*,

94 My translation also suggests that the second part of the clause "God hath made" should be Zoharically read as "hath made the Elohim," with "the Elohim" as the object of the verb – for this would accord with the Zoharic notion that the divine name "Elohim," associated with the side of judgment, the ultimate source of the demonic and even one name for it (in the expression "*Elohim Aḥerim*," "Other Elohim"), may be a product of this division – a notion closer to the themes of Part Two.

95 For a warning, from within Sabbateanism, about the dangers of cognitive and religious error due to homology between the divine and the demonic, see Cardoso, 'Al Shene ha-Meshiḥim di-Kedushah u-Shene Ha-Meshiḥim di-Kelipah', 288–289.

96 Compare *Zohar* II, 236b (demonic interpretation) and *Zohar* I, 2a (divine interpretation).

97 The term Cordovero uses here is *kelipah*, literally, "husk" or "shell," one of the general terms for the demonic, which I discuss in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

98 *Pardes*, II, 5c:

וכמו שיש אלה בצד הקליפה כן יש אלה בצד הקדושה

Moshe of Burgos tells us that the word "Other" [אחר] can refer either to good or evil, depending on the context.[99] In the Zoharic literature, at least one passage uses the term "Other Side," *Sitra Aḥra*, the key name of the demonic realm, to designate the divine realm.[100] A third example, again going to the heart of the distinction between divine and demonic, concerns the word "Left," which can refer either to the demonic realm, as we have seen, or to the dimension of the divine characterized by judgment, especially associated with the fourth Sefirah, *Gevurah*, Might. As Cordovero tells us, "by the 'left side,' the Zohar refers sometimes to the contaminated, and sometimes to the holy – and one needs to distinguish according to the context."[101] In short, we find in 13th century texts that the words for both the proximate ["these" אלה] and the remote ["Other" אחר], are doubled signifiers, rendering a gesture in either direction indeterminate in relation to the divine/demonic distinction – an indeterminacy also found in another word that generally designates the demonic side ("left").

Moshe of Burgos, moreover, succinctly demonstrates the ominous side of correspondences between the two realms in his discussion of the first of the ten demonic Sefirot. He provides two opposed, yet punningly related, traditions concerning the name for this Sefirah, which corresponds to *Keter* [Crown] in the divine realm. According to the first, its name is *Te'omi'el* [תאומיאל], the "twin God" or "twin of God" – "teaching" that it and *Keter* are "twins in rank" [תאומיות במעלתן].[102] On the other hand, another tradition informs us that its name is the nearly identically pronounced *Tomi'el* [תומיאל], which may be translated as "the termination – or death – of God."[103] The text tells us that this second name signifies that this demonic Sefirah and *Keter* are "not equal in rank and are improper for each other" [אינן שוות במעלתן ואינן מתאימות].[104] Blending these two statements can produce a paradoxical metaphysical pun about the relationship between the divine and the demonic: *ma'alot te'omiyot she-enan mat'imot* [מעלות תאומיות שאינן מתאימות]: "twin levels that are improper for each other," indeed, are the "death" of each other.

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99 Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 223.

100 *Zohar* I, 55a. I note that this passage concerns Abel, as does the example given by Moshe of Burgos.

101 *Pardes*, II, 42b:
פעמים בזוהר קורא סטרא דשמאלא אל הטמא, ופעמים אל הטהור. וצריך להבחין מתוך הענין

102 See Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 211.

103 After the model of "עד תם כל הדור", "until all the generation was consumed" (Numbers 32:13). Cordovero also interprets the name in this sense. *Pardes*, II, 55a. In the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 108b, these names are used for two lower unholy sefirot, corresponding to the holy sefirot of *Netsaḥ* and *Hod*.

104 Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 212.

The precariousness of the distinction between divine and demonic is reflected in the oscillations in their relative power. Some kabbalistic texts tell us that the demonic was created for holy purposes, above all to punish the wicked, and thus subordinated to the divine.[105] However, this putative instrument of divine will comes to rebel against its subordination – a rebellion, seemingly both inevitable and inexplicable, that destabilizes the authority of the divine itself. Often, this rebellion is associated with the verse-fragments, "A slave who becomes king … and a bondwoman who supplants her mistress" [תחת עבד כי ימלוך … ושפחה כי תירש גבירתה] (Prov. 30:22–23).[106]

The projection of a normatively inferior realm that rhetorically and/or ontologically mirrors the holy realm, but that also menaces, destabilizes, and may even come to dominate it, strongly resembles the power dynamics of "mimicry" described by the literary theorist Homi Bhabha, whose work is guided by psychoanalytic writing on ambivalence. Bhabha elaborates this concept in portraying attempts by colonizers to recreate the colonized in their own cultural image. Bhabha argues that two characteristic limits become manifest in such projects. First, in order for the condition of the colonized to serve as a continuing legitimation of the colonizer's power, a difference with the colonizer must always be maintained – i.e., the colonized must be set up to fail in its mimicry in order to justify its subordination. Second, however, the colonized's mimic presence destabilizes the colonizer's own identity, parodying, and thereby undermining, its authority and integrity. The colonized's failure to completely assimilate to the colonized's culture, a failure that legitimizes the colonizer's power, also undermines that power. The troubling presence of the subordinated "double" thus comes to undermine the self-certainty, even the identity, of the "original." Bhabha asserts that the colonial cultural project thereby often results in the simultaneous production of both "resemblance and menace."[107] The colonized Other oscillates between "mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite" and "menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite."[108]

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105 *Zohar* I, 146b–47a (*Sitre Torah*). This theme is a minor theme in the Zoharic literature and appears more prominently in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*. E.g., *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 10b, 12a, 73a.

106 I here bypass the KJV translation for a rendering more in keeping with the Zoharic usage. See *Zohar* I:122b, III:69a, III:226b.

107 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 86.

108 *Ibid*., 91. As I note above, many kabbalistic texts portray the demonic as originating in a force that was designed to serve holy ends but then became improperly independent and began to work against its true master. See, e.g., Gikatilla, *Sod Ha-Naḥash u-Mishpato*, *passim*. In a closely analogous vein, Bhabha quotes Sir Edward Cust who, in 1939, attacked the British habit of endowing "every colony with a mimic representation of the British Constitution." Cust declared that "the creature so endowed has sometimes forgotten its

Perhaps the clearest instance in the Zoharic literature of these dynamics of mimicry in divine/demonic relations is the formulation that the demonic is to the divine "in the manner of a monkey beside human beings" [כגוונא דקופא אצל בני נשא].[109] This phrase may suggest the subordination of the demonic and its failure to achieve full resemblance to the divine, but it also evokes the destabilizing power of parody.[110] Indeed, often this mimicry comes even more menacingly close than Bhabha's "difference that is almost nothing."

I refer again to the widespread kabbalistic use of a single term to designate both divine and demonic entities. Zoharic texts highlight the fact that such disturbing homonymy can even implicate the highest divine names, such as *El* [אל].[111] Moshe Cordovero discusses this phenomenon, shortly after citing the Zohar's "monkey" image, in a manner that suggests the "difference that is almost nothing" involved in demonic mimicry: "And it is no wonder that you find the name *El* in relation to the *kelipot*, for just as there is the name *El* on the holy side, so is there the *El Aḥer* [Other God].[112]

Although Cordovero assures us that this homonymy is "no wonder," a Zoharic passage shows us that this homonymy can lead to the gravest form of

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real insignificance and under the fancied importance of speakers and maces, and all the paraphernalia and ceremonies of the imperial legislature, has dared to defy the mother country." *Location*, 85. Cust may as well have been describing the parallelism established between the divine and the demonic, and the penchant of the latter for rejecting the notion that it should be subservient to the former. He could, indeed, have used one of the kabbalists' favorite scriptural citations for this process: "a slave who becomes king … and a bondwoman who supplants her mistress" (Prov. 30:22–23).

109 See, e.g., *Zohar* II, 148b, III, 189a. The former passage identifies the holy female with the letter "ה" and the unholy female with the letter "ק" – with the key difference between the two the elongation of the left leg, a fitting sign in kabbalistic imagery for its demonic nature, as well as an exemplification of the Bhabha phrase, "almost the same but not quite." This formulation of the relationship between divine and demonic as human to monkey is repeated by Cordovero in *Pardes*, II, 55a and 56b–c. In the second of these passages, Cordovero explicitly emphasizes the parodic element of the monkey's mimicry. The image is of Talmudic provenance, though it is there used to describe the relationship between higher and lower beings, such as angels and humans, rather than between divine and demonic beings. *bBava Batra* 48a.

110 See, e.g., *Zohar* I, 253b (*Sitre Torah*). In this passage, the letter "ק," is compared to "a monkey which, before a human being, cannot stand" [קופא קמיה בני נשא לית ליה קיומא]. Nonetheless, this entity which "cannot stand" serves as one the demonic instruments that brings about the "fall" of Adam and Eve, precisely through the "evil art" of linguistic "reversal." [לאהפכא אתוון באומונותא בישא … עד דנפלו אדם ואתתיה].

111 Among the many instances of this usage, see *Zohar* III, 193b–194a.

112 *Pardes*, II, 55a:
ואין תימה מה שנמצא שם אל בדמות הקליפות כי כמו שיש שם אל בצד הקדושה כן יש א"ל אחר

religious error. Thus, Balaam described himself as one who "hears the words of *El*" [שומע אמרי אל] (Numbers 24:4), intentionally deceiving some into viewing him as a holy prophet, while secretly intending to refer to the demonic "*El*."[113] Verbal "resemblance," or even indistinguishability, becomes religious "menace" – the "difference that is almost total," or rather that should be total, "but not quite," a silent margin that can spell the difference between divine and demonic. Antithetical homonymy – one of the key rhetorical techniques that construct the ontological splitting pervasive in kabbalistic discussions of the demonic – thus proves to be a fragile and dangerous technique of managing ambivalence, threatening at least the subjective distinguishability of the divine/demonic divide, and perhaps, as we shall see, even posing an ontological threat to that divide.

Ontological splitting and rhetorical parallelism establish an objectively ambivalent cosmos of divine and demonic realms, and seek to manage subjective ambivalence toward it. Yet, such splitting is never definitive. The two opposed realms continually threaten to encroach upon each other or to be mistaken for one another, requiring perpetual re-enactments of the splitting. This never-ending need for re-enactment may account for the fact that the rhetorical technique of antithetical homonymy spread to ever-more terms as kabbalistic history unfolded. As we will see, an examination of splitting, as well as other forms of rhetorical parallelism, shows that it is the very same mechanisms that construct alterity, and seek to manage it, that also destabilize it.

B *The Ontology of Abjection and Crystallization; The Rhetoric of Irony and Prosopopeia*

1 Splitting and Intimacy

Ontological splitting and rhetorical parallelism particularly characterize Zoharic texts that portray the Other Side as a mighty, antagonistic realm, a formidable rival to the divine realm to which it bears such a troubling resemblance. But Zoharic and other 13th century texts also construct far more intimate and dynamic relationships between the two realms. The portrayals of these relationships recount both their emergence from a primordial undifferentiation and their ongoing encounters in mutual desire and reciprocal sustenance.

Passages that bring together these two constructions – a cosmos absolutely split between two incommensurable realms, on the one hand, one in which the two perpetually engender, interact with, and depend on each other, on the other – feature the most provocative, even baffling, images, defying

113 *Zohar* III, 193b–194a.

phenomenal and linguistic norms. While each of these two constructions will serve as the the respective foci of Chapters 2 and 3, it is important to keep in mind their frequent coexistence in Zoharic and related texts. I offer here two 13th century images that starkly juxtapose these constructions.

The first, a Zoharic image, presents the mighty demonic realm, the ten Sefirot of the Other Side, as "clinging to the slime [*zohama*, זוהמא] of the fingernail" of the Shekhinah.[114] This portrayal is not merely theologically scandalous (which would not be surprising or unusual in Zoharic writing), but sutures together utterly heterogeneous images – not to mention a rather precarious, or rather impossible, physical condition, if one takes its phenomenal evocation seriously. How can that most flimsy and insubstantial stuff, fingernail slime, support the mighty and highly organized demonic realm, an "entire other world"?[115]

A second image comes from the work of Joseph of Hamadan, a contemporary of the authors of the Zohar, perhaps one of their number, in a characteristically scandalous passage. This kabbalist portrays demonic beings as nurtured from the excretory orifice of the divine phallus, just as divine beings are nurtured from its seminal orifice.[116] Here the sustenance of the demonic consists literally of divine refuse. This image is even more brazenly shocking from a theological perspective. It is also at least equally baffling as the Zoharic image, again if one takes its phenomenal evocation seriously.

Both images portray an intimate, dependent relationship between the divine and the Other Side. The medium of that relationship in both images issues from the divine and yet is inassimilable to it: slime, waste products, or, in Kristeva's terms, "the abject." The extreme paradoxicality of both images constitutes an implicit refusal of any logically or phenomenally coherent account of the intimacy of absolute adversaries, let alone an explanation that would be even minimally acceptable at a theological level.

Scholarly attempts to explain the paradox emerging from such images, the portrayal of Other Side as at once an independent, adversarial realm *and yet* as intimately bound to the divine, often serve only to heighten its baffling quality. For Isaiah Tishby, Zoharic portrayals of the dependence of the demonic on the divine – especially of the demonic as somehow emerging from the divine – should be seen as attempts to mitigate a theologically unacceptable dualism.[117]

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114 *Zohar* III, 70a: אחידן בזוהמא דטופרא. See also *Zohar* II, 207b–208b and Dorit Cohen-Alloro, 'Me-Ḥokhmeta Ila'ah Le-Ḥokhmeta De-Tarfe De-Ilana: Ha-Kishuf Be-Sefer Ha-Zohar', 31–66.

115 עולם אחר כללי: Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 208.

116 *Sefer Tashak*, 267–268 & 278–279. See my discussion of this passage in Chapter 3.

117 Tishby, *MZ*, I, 292.

I would argue, however, that this interpretation overlooks the shocking quality of relationships of intimacy between the two realms, and may even be seen as a form of psychological denial in the face of their enormity. It fails to acknowledge the horror of such relationships (including monstrous births, perverse sexuality, and parasitical nurturance) and the theological scandals they imply (scandals only magnified by the paltriness of the attempts to rationalize them). Rather than mitigating such scandals, portrayals of intimate relationships between the two realms point to a more primordial, more enduring, and hence more unsettling link than splitting. The incongruous images combining splitting and intimacy, like the Zoharic and Joseph of Hamadan images just mentioned, seem designed to jolt readers into comparing their internally discordant portrayals of divine/demonic relations. They also seem unavoidably destined to give rise to incompatible commentaries, such as Tishby's and my own – not to mention those of the generations of kabbalists who have sought to decipher them.

The ambivalence underlying splitting often seems far more straightforward than that marking the relationships of intimacy. At this deeper level, Zoharic texts portray the disjunctive processes through which various kinds of inchoate refuse emerge, seemingly impossibly, from the divine, or even proto-divine, and subsequently crystallize, just as impossibly, into a structured and powerful demonic realm. Such passages implicitly suggest a level of intimacy between divine and demonic that precedes these processes, a mysterious intimacy that can scarcely be named. Dynamic relationships of intimacy then persist after the crystallization of the demonic, relationships of desire and nurturance. This deeper level thus not only concerns "temporally" prior, even primordial, processes, but also the generation of ongoing desire and need. And all this intimacy transpires between entities, *personae*, and entire realms that are nonetheless designated as absolute antagonists!

2 Catharsis and Abjection

Tishby and other followers of Scholem discuss the emission of refuse from the divine as a process of "*catharsis*."[118] As I suggested above, there has always been some vagueness in the use of this notion in academic kabbalah scholarship. The Scholem tradition has tended to employ it in the form of an unreflective amalgam of a range of meanings bequeathed by Plato, Aristotle, Freud, and others – as well as by the ambiguities in those writers' works and the divergent interpretations of generations of commentators. While this is not the place to discuss that history in depth, the kinship between the range of meanings

118 Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra*, 42–43; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 267.

of catharsis in the Western tradition and a corresponding range in kabbalah scholarship compels a brief excursus.

Some of the key historical meanings include the Platonic literal or figurative detachment of the soul from the body,[119] the medical expulsion of toxicities from the body, and perfection of the body through physical training.[120] The latter two, in the *Sophist*, also have their analogues at the level of the soul – on the one hand, ridding the person of such vices as cowardice, intemperance, and injustice, and, on the other hand, curing ignorance through instruction.[121] Aristotle, for his part, employed the term to refer to the effect produced by the theatrical representation of highly charged dramatic situations, a usage that gave rise to centuries of still-unresolved debate. One commentator divides the various participants in this debate into those who see catharsis as more of a *purgation*, the expulsion of "undesirable or excessive emotion," and those who see it as more of a *purification*, in the sense of the positive transformation of potentially valuable emotions.[122] These two broad categories may be roughly associated with the second and third meanings of catharsis in the *Sophist*. Commentators have even debated whether Aristotle's notion of the rectification achieved through dramatic representation concerns the subjectivity of the audience or rather the objective situation enacted on the stage[123] – or, alternatively, whether the term has both "internal and external" references,[124] or even was chosen deliberately for its ambiguity, its capacity for bearing a range of meanings.[125] Finally, Freud's notion of catharsis builds on, while thoroughly transforming, a number of these positions: it refers to the discharge of something painful to the subject, something that was once part of the subject but has become dissociated from it through repression. This discharge occurs through a re-enactment, produced not on the stage as a public spectacle, but out of the interiority of the subject in the privacy of the analytical situation.[126]

Each of these distinct notions of catharsis has a correlate in kabbalah scholarship, and, far more obliquely, in the kabbalistic texts themselves. Rather than go through those correlates in detail here, I note two key questions about the

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119 E.g., Plato, *Phaedo*, 67c–68b, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 50.

120 For the last two of these, see Plato, *Sophist*, 226d–231b, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 970–971.

121 *Ibid.*

122 Keesey, 'On Some Recent Interpretations of Catharsis', 193.

123 Keesey, 'On Some Recent', 197–199, summarizes the latter position, that of G.F. Else, and that of its critics. See also Golden, 'The Clarification Theory of Katharsis', 437–452.

124 Paskow, 'What Is Aesthetic Catharsis?', 64.

125 Sparshott, 'The Riddle of Katharsis', 26.

126 For a comparison of the Aristotelian and Freudian notions, see Rieff, *Freud, the Mind of the Moralist*, 347–348.

meaning of catharsis that emerge from this brief review. First, does the appearance of the impurity and its rectification take place in a space which is primarily external or internal to the subject? One can associate the former position with an "instrumental" understanding of kabbalistic catharsis, God's intentional production of demonically harsh forces as a tool to punish evildoers. One can associate the latter position with the diametrically opposed notion that wrestling with impurity is a perennial struggle *within* divine subjectivity, a struggle for self-mastery – or even, the notion I develop below, that this struggle is a pre-condition for the construction of a coherent divine subjectivity, a notion that may demand that we move beyond the historical limits of "catharsis."[127] Second, if one adopts the latter position, the internal struggle within the subject, is the impurity that constitutes the target of the catharsis an integral part of the subject, one which requires transformative "purification," or an alien body which needs to be ruthlessly "purged"? One can associate the first of these positions with texts that envision the ultimate integration of the Other Side into the divine, the second with texts that envision its ultimate destruction.

In relation to divine catharsis, it is not self-evident whether purgation or purification is more theologically problematic. Is it more scandalous to imagine that the divine is united with an alien element that needs to be purged or that there are elements of the divine itself which are defective and need to be perfected? Moreover, however these options are evaluated, it seems shocking that divine catharsis would be something that needs to be re-enacted repeatedly throughout cosmic history – indeed, that such repetitions would *constitute that history* – rather than being achieved in one gesture. As though the notion that God must purge Himself of impurity were not scandalous enough, He proves to be incapable of achieving it fully despite aeons of efforts!

Furthermore, all the meanings of catharsis cited above seem ill-equipped to account for the distinctive Zoharic narratives of the ongoing relationships between the divine and the demonic: in which the impurities purged in the process of catharsis come to form a mighty realm, the match in power and structure of the subject that purges them, presenting ceaseless challenges, menaces, and temptations to that subject. Nor can they account for the persistence in the kabbalistic tradition of acute ambivalence in relation to the ultimate fate of the Other Side. As Scholem affirms, the antithetical notions that the Other Side is destined to be annihilated and that it is to be integrated into the divine realm are both equally "plausible" within the kabbalistic tradition.[128]

127 Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra*, 42–43.

128 See Scholem, *On the Mystical Structure of the Godhead*, 77.

Such antithetical forecasts may coexist within a single work or even a single passage.

The upshot of this excursus on "catharsis" is that we need a perspective that could, at a minimum, provide meaning to the following: a) the presence of an element within the divine that needs to be "purged" or "purified" in any of the senses noted above; b) the need for endlessly repeated acts of purgation/purification; c) the crystallization of the expelled elements of inchoate refuse into a mighty and antagonistic other realm; and d) the heterogeneous portrayals of the fate of the demonic. Just as it is necessary to reject an interpretation of Zoharic writing as simply reflecting competing "Gnostic" and Neoplatonic notions, so must one reject a reading which simply chooses among historically available notions of catharsis. We must look, instead, for a distinctive Zoharic pattern that could respond to the desiderata I have just listed.

My quest for such a perspective has led me to the work of Julia Kristeva, specifically to her portrayal of the emergence of bounded subjectivity as dependent on, and subsequent to, the "abjection" of inassimilable alterity.[129] The insistent link in kabbalistic texts between the purgation, constitution, and perfection of the divine, on the one hand, and the constitution, maintenance, and nurturance of the demonic from the refuse of the divine, on the other hand – as well as the persistent lethal threat and perverse temptation posed by the demonic to the divine – suggests that Kristeva's "abjection" can provide a guiding thread through the labyrinth of Zoharic portrayals of the demonic.

Kristeva's portrayal of abjection as a precondition of the formation of subjectivity highlights the latter's belated and precarious quality, its initiation at a stage in which subject and object are not differentiated, its dependence on the exclusion of an alterity from which it cannot definitively separate itself and yet which it can never definitively incorporate – and consequently the irreducibility of ambivalence of the subject towards its "abject." This portrayal requires depictions of the seemingly impossible initiation of projects for separation before the very subject and object of the separation have come into being, as well as the perpetual renewal of such projects due to their pyrrhic quality – features that may often only be expressed in literary texts that stretch to their limits, or even defy, both grammar and semantics. It thus has an intrinsic paradoxicality which can go a long way to illuminating many of the baffling formulations and seeming contradictoriness of Zoharic texts without recourse to notions of a struggle between macro-historical movements or a single author's divided heart. In short, though developed through psychoanalytic reflections on the formation of human subjectivity, it is remarkably well-suited for exploring the

129 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur, passim*, esp. 9–67.

generation of the cosmic structures and the divine and demonic *personae* that constitute the main ontological focus of the Zoharic literature, as well as the stylistic audacities that are its rhetorical hallmark. A somewhat substantial excursus on Kristeva's account is necessary, therefore, to set the stage for what follows.

Kristeva portrays the emergence of subjectivity out of a primordial state that precedes both the subject and its objects. The literal referent of such an image would be the fused state of mother and child. Its strict description, however, would avoid such language as too dyadic, as assuming the existence of two distinct subjects, whereas Kristeva's goal is to portray their emergence. A paradoxical, even mysterious, formulation such as "the archaism of the preobjectal relationship" would thus be better suited to articulate the primordial state.[130]

From this primordial state, subjectivity begins to emerge by an arduous process of separation of a proto-subject from its proto-object. This proto-object is that from which the nascent subject must be separated in order to achieve a separate identity – a process necessarily involving "the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be."[131] It comprises the subject's "earliest attempts to release the hold of the maternal entity even before existing outside of her .... a violent, clumsy breaking away, forever stalked by the risk of falling back under the sway of a power as sheltering as it is smothering."[132]

That from which the proto-subject separates itself, consequently, does not appear either as a neutral or unified "object," for it poses the threat, or even reality, of disintegration, the collapse of the fragile, nascent subject. It appears, therefore, as inchoate stuff, repulsive miasma: the "abject." The emergence of the subject with a bounded identity must be preceded by the "abjection" of inassimilable elements, expelled to the nascent subject's borderline, even constituting that borderline. These abjected elements originate within the "archaism" of the undifferentiated state preceding subject and object, but must be violently detached and repelled – "abjected" – in order for the subject to establish itself as an autonomous, bounded being.

The abject confronting the nascent subject is thus a source of terror, threatening the subject with collapse back into the state of undifferentiation from which it emerged. The emergence of the subject is indissociable from the emergence of this terrifying abject. This terror is heightened, rather than mitigated,

130 *Ibid.*, 17.
131 *Ibid.*
132 *Ibid.*, 20.

by the abject's inchoate state and by the fact that the nascent subject and the abject emerge from the same primordial source:

> I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* through the same movement by means of which "I" purport to posit *myself*.... In this trajectory where "I" emerge, I give birth to myself in the violence of the sob, of vomit.[133]

The abjected elements that are expelled "outside" the subject, as well as the subject itself, originate in a primordial undifferentiated space in which neither "inside" nor "outside" yet exist. Given this primordial kinship, the subject can no more definitively separate itself from the abject than it can completely assimilate it. The abject, therefore, haunts the subject as a perpetual source of anxiety about its identity and integrity. It also poses a persistent temptation for the subject, beckoning it to return to a primordial state "as sheltering as it is smothering," the undifferentiated abyss in which the subject loses its bounded identity.

Experiences that evoke the abject, particularly those that put clearly defined boundaries into question, can severely shake the subject's precarious sense of its own bounded identity. Such experiences include not only the "absence of *propreté*" (a polysemous French term that Kristeva uses to signify cleanliness, propriety, and the domain of the self), but anything that "disturbs an identity, a system, an order."[134] At its most primal, the experience of abjection can be provoked by rot, feces, refuse, all that physical *stuff* that has no boundaries and thereby threatens to erode the boundaries of the *propre*. On the social level, it can be evoked by everything that "does not respect limits, places, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the hybrid. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the rapist without shame, the killer who purports to save."[135]

Horrifyingly and inexplicably, the inchoate elements, those the subject must expel to its outer borders in order to achieve a bounded identity, eventually crystallize and confront the subject as a determinate and antagonistic object. We have encountered this transition from inchoate refuse to a crystallized adversary in other forms: in Freud's depiction of repressed instincts that crystallize into the Devil, as well as in the Zoharic "fingernail slime" of the divine that serves as the basis for the entire realm of the Other Side, and we shall see it numerous times in Zoharic texts in Chapter 3.

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133 *Ibid.*, 11.
134 *Ibid.*, 12.
135 *Ibid.*

This monstrous object, a crystallization of the abject, poses a new and distinct threat to the subject's identity. The transformation of the terrifying "abject" into an antagonistic "object" is as paradoxical as it is frightening: the transmogrification of the abjected elements of the (proto-)Self into the absolute Other. That which begins as part of the undifferentiated archaic state becomes an inchoate abject issuing from the proto-subject; then is pushed to the borderline of the subject in order that a bounded identity can be established; and, finally, becomes a powerful Other that poses a mortal threat to the Self. We will see all these transitions in Zoharic texts: from abjected refuse (especially the *zohama*, the slime), to a menacing, but indispensable, borderline (the *kelipah*, the shell or husk), to the demonic as a mighty Other that confronts, and mirrors, the divine Self (the ten demonic Sefirot and the male/female diabolical *personae*). The inchoate thus ultimately becomes a lethal adversary – or, to cite a Zoharic play on words: the *pesolet* [פסולת; refuse] becomes a *pesel* [פסל; an idol]. This latter term, in Zoharic mythology, does not signify an inert statue, but rather, an antagonistic diabolical *persona*.[136]

It is within this paradoxical framework that Kristeva locates all those cultural and religious attempts to codify, and defend against, the abject – codifications that take this transformation of the "abject" into an "object" as the theme of elaborate discursive classifications and ritual practices. Kristeva offers the biblical rules of impurity, including both dietary prohibitions and impurities arising from sex and death, as key examples. For Kristeva, the law of "biblical impurity is a 'logification' of that which derogates from the symbolic order" – that is, the abject. The aim of this "logification" is to prevent the abject from "actualizing itself as demonic evil."[137] Kristeva's language here converges remarkably with that of Zoharic texts.

Kristeva's portrayal of abjection also shows the ultimate impossibility of any definitive "logification" of this kind. The terror of abjection – as well as the temptation it poses – re-surfaces whenever the necessarily incomplete exclusion of the abject breaks through the fabric of its "logification" by the symbolic order. The abject is that which is "rejected, yet from which one cannot separate oneself, that from which one cannot protect oneself as from an object … it beckons to us and ends by swallowing us up."[138] It should be clear by now, therefore, why any definitive "catharsis" of the abject – in either the "perfection" or "purgation" sense – is as impossible as it is urgent.

136 *Zohar* II, 91a.
137 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 110.
138 *Ibid.*, 12.

The Other that emerges from the archaic undifferentiation from which the Self also emerges increasingly comes to resemble it, forming a split world of menacing doubles: "Defilement now comes to be that which damages symbolic univocality, that is, simulacra, *ersatzes*, doubles, idols."[139] Kristeva's pronouncement here again recalls the Zoharic *pesolet/pesel* pun cited above, as well as providing the back-story to the emergence of antithetical homonyms as a pervasive kabbalistic rhetorical technique to construct the divine/demonic relationship. Such doubles – crystallized out of that which had been abjected and has returned as a formidable adversary – are a precise instantiation of what Freud called the "uncanny": "everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."[140] From undifferentiation, to abjection, to the uncanny; from primordial unity, to inchoate refuse, to demonic doubling; from undifferentiated proximity, to a borderline, to menacing remoteness; from an intimacy that pre-exists identity, to a subject and its refuse, to a Self and its hostile Other: these paradoxical processes make Kristeva's portrayal of abjection so productive for grappling with the kabbalistic demonic in all of its varied appearances. They also make it clear why all attempts at codifying and conjuring away the abject/demonic are fated to be pyrrhic quests, whether they aim at assimilation or destruction of its threatening, yet intimate, alterity.

Kristeva argues that the confrontation with abjection goes to the heart of religion and, indeed, "constitutes" its history, in a manner closely related to the history-constitutive role of the struggles of the divine with the Other Side in kabbalah:

> *To each abjection, its sacred* – Abjection accompanies all religious constructions, and it reappears at the moment of their collapse.... We can distinguish a variety of structures of abjection, which in turn determine the types of the sacred.... The diverse modes of the purification of the abject, the diverse catharses, constitute the history of religions....[141]

The weakening, or collapse, of traditional codifications of the abject results in the latter's re-emergence, threatening the bounded coherence of subjectivity, as well as of religious systems. Such moments give rise either to new systematic "logifications" of the abject, or to more daring attempts to give it symbolic expression in "un-logified" form. For Kristeva, the most daring of such attempts

139 *Ibid.*, 123.
140 Freud, 'The Uncanny', 140. Freud is here quoting Schopenhauer.
141 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 17.

can be found in the avant-garde writing of the late 19th and early 20th century, a response to the weakening of inherited cultural codes. We might also, a bit speculatively, attribute the upsurge of fascination with the demonic in emerging kabbalistic circles in the 12th and 13th centuries to the weakening of traditional codifications, under the impact of the ongoing philosophical critique of the tradition initiated in the immediately preceding generations. And we can also situate the early 20th century interest in this dimension of Jewish religious history, on the part of Scholem and others, within the general cultural-modernist encounter with the abject described by Kristeva.

It follows from Kristeva's portrayal that all constructions of subjectivity are precarious, due to the fact that they depend on the abjection of elements from which the subject both *must*, and *cannot*, fully separate itself. In relation to the Zoharic literature, this precarity illuminates: the textual coexistence of the contradictory motifs of the assimilation and destruction of the demonic; the endlessly repeated efforts to achieve one or the other; and the impossibility of either achievement except in some messianic future. The dovetailing of Kristeva's portrayal of the constitution of subjectivity with these crucial features of the Zoharic literature make that portrayal so productive for reading Zoharic depictions of divine and demonic *personae*, as well as of human subjectivity. The proliferation, over the generations, of kabbalistic discursive and ritual practices aimed at either assimilating or destroying the demonic can be apprehended as attempts at grappling with the abject in the face of its ever-renewed resurfacing, bringing with it persistent anxiety about the collapse or corruption of human and divine subjects. Just as there is no subject – human or divine – who can fully say, with Prospero, "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine," so there is no subject who can fully separate itself from that "thing of darkness." The abject/demonic Other both is *and* is not a part of the human/divine Self, as well as both subordinate *and* not subordinate to it.

In a passage that uncannily seems to echo certain kabbalistic texts, especially those that evoke the "slave who becomes king … and the bondwoman who supplants her mistress," Kristeva writes:

> Within abjection, there is one of those violent, obscure revolts of being against that which menaces it and which seems to come from an exorbitant outside or inside, cast aside from the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It is there, so close, but inassimilable … Nonetheless, from its exile, the abject does not cease to defy its master.[142]

142 *Ibid.*, 9–10.

The numerous variations in Zoharic texts on the genealogy, nurturance, seductiveness, mimicry, and power of the demonic can be seen as attempts to wrestle with this irreducible, indeterminate, and ubiquitous threat that "emanates from an exorbitant outside or inside": from a not-yet-demarcated place, or non-place, that precedes the distinction between inside and outside. Kristeva's work also thereby illuminates why many 13th century kabbalists understood their most profound teachings to be those concerning the "emanation" (Kristeva's term here)/"*atsilut*" (the Hebrew kabbalistic term most often translated as "emanation") of the "abject"/"left side." Or, to use the Zoharic image, it illuminates why "few are those who can evoke the Work of Creation through the mystery of the Great Dragon," as well as why "the entire world," including divine *personae*, "only unfolds" upon this dragon's "fins."[143]

Kristeva's portrayal of subjectivity thus provides a powerful framework for reading the dynamic unfolding of divine/demonic relationships in Zoharic and related texts: from the expulsion of primordial refuse from the sphere of primordial undifferentiation; to the consolidation of divine structures and *personae* facilitated by this expulsion and the simultaneous crystallization of the refuse into diabolical structures and *personae*; to the ongoing and dangerous divine/demonic relationships of desire, nurturance, and impersonation. I caution, however, that, although Kristeva's portrayal of abjection will loom heavily in the background of my analysis, I will not simply apply it to the kabbalistic materials. Indeed, one of the appeals of Kristeva's portrayal is that it challenges univocal narratives, explanations, and even normative grammatical structures, since it demands portrayal of actions and desires prior to the full formation of the subjects and objects that could be their agents or targets. The proliferation of heterogeneous and incompatible portrayals of abjection is intrinsic to the theory itself. This feature makes it productive both for understanding the cultural-modernist avant-garde (Kristeva's chief concern) and 13th century kabbalah (my chief concern).

3 Tropes of Transition

I turn to a brief introduction of the rhetorical techniques that construct the Zoharic portrayals of abjection-and-crystallization. Texts about the emergence, and continual re-emergence, of the demonic at all cosmic levels employ a variety of such techniques, particularly what I call "tropes of transition" – a term chosen to evoke the literal sense of "trope" as a "turn." These images portray the startling, seemingly impossible transitions described in this section: from undifferentiation to inchoate refuse, from inchoate refuse to consolidation of

143 *Zohar* II, 34b.

a mighty adversary. These tropes may be systematized in terms of a two-step process to which I refer as "tropes of limitation" and "tropes of representation," borrowing from the work of Harold Bloom.[144]

Such texts first advance a "trope of limitation": a turn from an image of undifferentiated plenitude to one of abjection, usually associated with the emission of some viscous refuse or unstable ephemera, but at times with the mere spectacle of the divine consorting with debased partners. Such incongruous transitions are forms of irony: a unity that proves to conceal a fragmentation, an omnipotence that pathetically fails to achieve its goal, a holiness whose first effect is unholiness, a majesty lusting after dishonor, a subjectivity dissolving in incoherence.

Such a trope of limitation is then followed by a "trope of representation," in which an evanescent or repulsive byproduct is succeeded by the crystallization of distinct divine and demonic structures and *personae*. Such tropes are *prosopopeia*, a trope that personifies, "makes a face" or a "*persona*" (the Latin equivalent of *prosopon*); and *morpho-poeisis*, a trope that "makes a form" (like prosopopeia, but where the forms in question are not "faces").[145] Prosopopeia is a particularly apt term for kabbalistic discourse, much of which is preoccupied with, in Lurianic terminology, "*tikun ha-partsufim*" (the "repair," "adornment" or preparation" of the *personae*).[146] "*Tikun ha-partsufim*" is itself almost a direct translation of the term prosopopeia. I recall here the discussion in the Introduction of my choice of the word *personae* to designate the divine and demonic figures in the Zoharic literature – figures to which later kabbalistic literature refers as *partsufim*, the Aramaicized variant of the Greek *prosopa*. In the Zoharic corpus, particularly in the treatises called the *Idrot* [Assemblies], this *tikun* is largely an affair of poetic description.

144 See, e.g., Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, 88. One commentator explains these as follows: tropes of limitation are "figures that undermine the poetical sufficiency of extant visions – literal or fictional – by exposing their referents to be more or less or other than they seem"; tropes of representation are "figures that replace extant visions with visions of new objects, whether parts of previously extant (but no longer literal) wholes, or wholes of previously extant (but no longer independent) parts." Faubion, *Modern Greek Lessons: A Primer in Historical Constructivism*, xxii.

145 On "morphopoiesis," see Tamisari, "The Meaning of the Steps is in Between: Dancing and the Curse of Compliments', 274–286. Tamisari defines "morphopoiesis" as "speaking forms into place." It provides a useful rhetorical term when "prosopopeia" is not strictly applicable.

146 Literally: the "repair," "adornment" or "preparation" of the "faces." Tikun has a broad semantic range in Zoharic writing. It is generally the case that the text intends to signify the entire range, even if it emphasizes one of the meanings.

This two-stage process is intrinsically subject to reversibility. The undermining of divine action by the possibility of failure or dishonor, and consequently of divine form by dissolution, forever haunts the poetic face-making or form-making that itself succeeded a prior dissolution. The result is a perpetual circuit of coherence and incoherence, subjectivity and its disintegration, life and death. These continual transitions between opposites generate much of the paradoxical style of Zoharic texts on the divine/demonic relationship, including the frequent departures from syntactical and grammatical norms, as well as the juxtaposition of heterogeneous, often incompatible, images – the latter a textual practice that might elsewhere be stigmatized as the use of "mixed metaphors," but that constitutes the very core of the Zoharic idiom.

As I noted in the Introduction, each of the next two chapters focuses on one of the two primary sets of rhetorical techniques and ontological constructions outlined here. Chapter 2 primarily focuses on Zohar texts marked by rhetorical parallelism and ontological splitting; Chapter 3 primarily focuses on Zoharic texts marked by tropes of transition and abjection-and-crystallization. There will, of necessity, be some overlap between the two chapters, for Zoharic textuality, in its proliferating and audacious dynamism, swamps all efforts at tidy containment within categories external to it.

CHAPTER 2

A Divided Cosmos

I Introduction: Ontological Splitting, Rhetorical Parallelism and Tropic Doubling

This chapter focuses on the rhetorical techniques by which Zoharic texts construct a cosmos ontologically split between a divine "side," and a demonic "Other Side." As I have explained, I will not seek in Zoharic texts more or less adequate *expressions* of pre-existing or coherent metaphysical models, or even a record of conflict between such models. Rather, attention to Zoharic rhetoric reveals a distinctive Zoharic ontology, a distinctive construction, and destabilization, of a divided cosmos.

This approach demands a close examination of rhetorical technique at a "micro" level in two principal ways. First, without initial reference to semantic content, I examine the structure of small textual units, the equivalents of clauses, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs (even though Zoharic texts do not mark these units as such). Drawing on classical rhetoric, I call these structures "constructional schemes" – focusing particularly on schemes of rhetorical parallelism. Second, I examine the way Zoharic texts paradoxically employ individual images to evoke both divine and demonic entities, the distinctive Zoharic use of "tropes." Most Zoharic passages use both of these quite distinct sets of rhetorical techniques, separately and in tandem, to construct the cosmic split between divine and demonic.

After Freud, as I suggested in Chapter 1, splitting has become a common way of understanding any dualistic mythology, especially if it is composed of absolutely good gods and absolutely evil devils. All too often, this interpretation has a patronizing, psychologically reductionist character, strongly implying one could rid the world of such mythologies by exposing the mechanisms of individual psychology that give rise to them. Although the main aim of this chapter is to set forth the complexities of the ontology of the "two-sided" Zoharic cosmos and the rhetorical techniques by which it is constructed, a more implicit goal is to put into question such reductionist views. An analysis of Zoharic rhetoric and ontology reveals a dynamic and destabilizing portrayal of the divided universe that the conventional notion of splitting as a mere defense mechanism cannot accommodate. Epistemological and even ontological indeterminacy concerning the affiliation of individual entities and *personae* with a specific cosmic "side" abound in this portrayal. Most importantly,

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the presumption of the psychologically reductionist view of splitting – that there is a unitary psyche that pre-exists the various splits which it then orchestrates – is fundamentally brought into question by a rhetoric and ontology in which the poles of the splits only emerge through the various processes of splitting. This belatedness of bounded identity concerns both the objects that are split and the subject to which psychological reductionism would attribute the activity of splitting. My focus on the construction of a mythical cosmos of divine and demonic personae make this optic particularly apt.

Before engaging in that analysis, and in order to elucidate its distinctiveness, as well as that of a literary approach to Zoharic texts more generally, I turn to a critical examination of the exposition by Isaiah Tishby of the Zoharic demonic, perhaps the most detailed such analysis in the Scholem tradition.

II Modeling the Other Side: Geography, Essence, Structure

In *Mishnat Ha-Zohar* (*The Doctrine of the Zohar*), Isaiah Tishby structures his overview of the vast Zoharic literature portraying the divine/demonic relationship by means of a putative opposition between a "dualistic tendency" and "restrictions on dualism."[147] At the level of the history of ideas, Tishby links these two "tendencies" in Zoharic writing with, respectively, the "optimistic" vision he attributes to Neoplatonism and the "pessimistic" vision he attributes to "Gnosticism."[148] At the hermeneutic level, Tishby uses this dichotomy to interpret the relationship among Zoharic passages that present dramatically contrasting images of the Other Side. At the compositional level, Tishby asserts that the "internal contradictions" in Zoharic portrayals of the Other Side are products of a "conceptual struggle": on the one hand, "the clear tendency of the author to see evil as an independent power at war with divinity"; on the other hand, the "faithfulness to the teaching of Judaism" that "overpowered" him and caused him to "recoil from drawing extreme dualistic conclusions."[149]

147 Tishby, *MZ*, I, 288 [מגמה דואליסטית ... וסייגי השניות]. The overview of Tishby that follows is based on *ibid*., 285–288. I note that I will be quoting this work in its Hebrew version, rather than its English translation, the *Wisdom of the Zohar* (see bibliography). Crucial differences in terminology, including the title, determined this decision.

148 I recall the debate in recent scholarship, which I noted in footnote 12, about whether "Gnosticism" is a useful historical category. I repeat that I do not intend here to take a position in this debate. I use this term not to adopt it as a category of my own analysis, but as part of my critical discussion of Scholem and Tishby.

149 *Ibid*., 288 [סתירות פנימיות .. התרוצצות רעיונית ... נטייתו הברורה של המחבר לראות הרע ככוח עצמאי הנלחם באלהות .. תקפה עליו נאמנתו לתורת היהדות ונרתע מלהסיק מסקנות דואליסטיות קיצוניות].

Tishby's comparison of divine/demonic relations in the two putative Zoharic "tendencies" may be divided along three key axes: *geography*, *structure,* and *essence*. Though he does not use these precise terms, Tishby implicitly argues that the Zoharic literature presents competing images of the relationship of the Other Side to the Side of Holiness on each of these axes.

The competing *geographical images* concern the site of the Other Side, its location in relation to the divine realm. According to one set of images, the demonic resides, in normal times, in absolute separation from the divine, in the "crevice of the great abyss" [נוקבא דתהומא רבא, *nukva di-Tehoma raba*].[150] The denizens of this abyss can approach the divine realm only in times of the Other Side's lamentable ascendancy, brought about particularly by human sin. According to a second set of images, the Other Side normally resides in the closest proximity to some aspect of the divine realm, often the Shekhinah, associated with Sefirah of *Malkhut* [Royalty], the last of the ten divine Sefirot. The demonic is only banished to remote regions when it violates its proper role vis-à-vis the divine.

Tishby correlates these two rival *geographical* images of the Other Side with two rival understandings of its *essence*: the remote Other Side with the "dualistic tendency" in the Zoharic literature, its more "pessimistic," "Gnostic" side, in which the Other Side is absolutely opposed to the divine; the proximate Other Side with the more "optimistic," "Neoplatonic" vision, in which the Other Side is, in principle, a servant, ally, or component of the divine.

Tishby also correlates the competing notions of the geographical relationship between the divine and the demonic with competing *structural* images of the Other Side. One set of structural images stresses the "complete parallelism"[151] between the divine and demonic realms, a structural relationship I prefer to call "homology," to avoid confusion with rhetorical parallelism. Tishby highlights a number of Zoharic homologies between the divine and demonic realms: each contains ten Sefirot,[152] seven "breaths" (הבלים, corresponding to the seven lower Sefirot), three "knots" (קשרים, corresponding, in the divine realm, to the left, right, and central columns of the Sefirotic tree),[153] seven palaces [*Hekhalot*, היכלות],[154] a "king and priest" (associated, in the divine realm, with the Sefirot of *Binah* and *Ḥesed*), male and female *personae*, and so on.[155] By

150 *Ibid*., 300. This phrase appears numerous times in the Zoharic literature, e.g., II, 163b & 173b.

151 *Ibid*., 289 [הקבלה שלימה].

152 *Zohar* III, 70a.

153 *Zohar* II, 38a.

154 *Zohar* II, 263a.

155 Tishby, *MZ*, I, 288.

contrast, a second kind of imagery is unconcerned with such correspondences. This second strand tends to stress the term *kelipah* (literally, "husk," "peel," or "shell") as its most general term for the demonic. Such passages portray a *concentric* image of the structural relationship of the demonic and divine realms: the demonic as a series of layers – four (or sometimes three), rather than ten – wrapped around the divine.[156] Although the term *kelipah* may be used, especially in later strata of the Zohar, as a general synonym for the demonic, even interchangeably with the Other Side, the concentricity strand in Zoharic texts highlights the phenomenal associations of the word *kelipah*.[157]

Tishby strongly correlates the structural relationship of homology between the divine and demonic realms with specific alternatives along the other axes I have identified. First, he associates the geographical image of the Other Side as radically distant from the divine realm with the structural image of homology. He specifically makes a correlation between the remote Other Side and the homology between ten divine and ten demonic Sefirot,[158] and his argument strongly implies the same correlation between geographical remoteness and the other homologous images as well. Second, in relation to the essence of the Other Side, Tishby associates homology between the divine and demonic realms with dualism, arguing that it implies direct conflict – the notion of the "'this' confronted with 'this'" [זה לעומת זה] of Ecclesiastes 7:14.[159] This association between homology and dualism also comports with the paradoxical relationship I identified in the Introduction between "resemblance" and "menace."

The structural conception of concentricity, by contrast, envisions the Other Side as a series of *kelipot* wrapped around the "*mo'aḥ*," [מח, or Aramaic *moḥa,* מוחא], the "kernel," the "essence" – or even, the "brain" or, more figuratively, "consciousness"[160] – a term used to designate the divine realm. This structure

156 Professor Ada Rapoport-Albert has pointed out to me the striking similarity between these two visions of the *Sitra Aḥra* and two kabbalistic visions of the relationship between the levels within the holy dimension, which the Lurianic tradition calls the contrast between "circles" and "straightness" (עגולים ויושר). See generally Pachter, 'Igulim ve-Yosher: le-Toldoteha shel Ide'ah', 69–83. However, while Lurianic kabbalah is replete with homologies between the divine and demonic realms, it does not, to my knowledge, transpose the contrast between "circles" and "straightness" to the demonic realm.

157 See *Ra'ya Mehemena*, *Zohar* III, 227a–b, where the organic metaphor is taken very concretely, dividing the four *kelipot* in accordance with the different parts of a nut and a strand of wheat.

158 Tishby, *MZ*, I, 300.

159 *Ibid*., 301.

160 I borrow this translation of "*mo'aḥ*" from Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, 123 & 138. Wolfson uses it to render the Lurianic term "*moḥin*."

consists of four (or, sometimes, three) *kelipot* surrounding the *mo'aḥ* of holiness. This phenomenal image entails geographical contiguity between the divine and the demonic. The first *kelipah, nogah* ("brightness," נוגה), is thus usually portrayed as beginning right at the border of the holy *mo'aḥ*. It partakes of aspects of both divine and demonic, and, Tishby writes, forms a "kind of bridge" between the two realms.[161] A passage in the Zohar Ḥadash even states that it is "joined" or "clings" to the *mo'aḥ* (מתאחד במוחא).[162] Indeed, the number of *kelipot* identified in this concentric model – three or four – seems to depend on whether *nogah* is even included in the ranks of the *kelipot* or whether its proximity to the *mo'aḥ* means that it is not truly a *kelipah*, an indeterminacy I explore below. In any case, though both of Tishby's models posit a split between divine and demonic, he argues that that split is far less sharp in the concentricity model, with the indeterminate placement of *nogah* serving to attenuate the boundaries between the realms.

Tishby consistently maintains that structural concentricity (to use my term) represents a "restriction" on the bolder dualism of the rival model of homology. For Tishby, the fact that there are four (or three) *kelipot*, rather than ten demonic Sefirot rivaling those of the divine realm, is only one indication of a deeper difference between the two structural conceptions concerning the essence of the Other Side: that the *kelipah/mo'aḥ* structure portrays it as less "Other" precisely because of its lesser degree of resemblance to the holy dimension. To use Bhabha's terms, this lesser degree of "resemblance" poses less "menace," less direct rivalry. Structural concentricity thus lends itself more to a view of the *kelipot* as subsidiary to the divine, its servant, ally, or even a component of it.

Tishby seeks to highlight these differences between homology and concentricity by contrasting the first level of the Other Side in each of the two structural conceptions. In a key Zoharic passage describing the ten-Sefirot demonic structure, the first level is the darkest and most frightening, associated with the emergence of Sama'el and Lilith, the principal male and female

161 Tishby, *MZ*, 301 [מעין גשר].

162 *Zohar Ḥadash* 38a–b:

כל אלין קליפין למוחא דסחרן דא לגו מן דא ,ודא לגו מן דא. וההוא אש איהו דקא אחיד בגויה ההוא נגה, דכתיב ונגה לו סביב. האי איהו לגו מן כולא, ודא איהו דקא מתאחד במוחא.

All these are *kelipot* for the *moḥa* that they surround; this within this; and this within this. And this fire is that which joins within itself this brightness [*nogah*], as it is written, 'and a brightness was about it' [Ezekiel 1:4]. This is the innermost of all and this is that which clings to the *moḥa*.

diabolical *personae*, here called "Shadow" and "Death."[163] In the four-*kelipot* structure, by contrast, the first level is that of *nogah*, the "innermost" of all the *kelipot*. *Nogah*, Tishby's "bridge" between the realms, not only contains within itself both good and evil but may, as we shall see, accomplish both divine and demonic tasks. A comparison of these two "first levels" of the Other Side thus suggests a form of "splitting" that divides the demonic itself into a bad and a less bad, even good, form.

To summarize: Tishby implicitly argues for a correlation between rival positions concerning divine/demonic relations along three axes: essence (dualism *versus* "restricted dualism"), geography (remoteness *versus* proximity), and structure (homology *versus* concentricity). He thus posits two coherent visions of divine/demonic relations: structural homology, geographical remoteness, and essential dualism, on the one hand; structural concentricity, geographical proximity, and a substantially diminished dualism, at times even approaching alliance, on the other. Indeed, the contrast drawn by Tishby is so stark that we might be tempted to conclude that, rather than a "mental struggle" engaged in by the "author of the Zohar," we simply have two radically different traditions, authors or groups of authors, which have been placed together at some point by the compilers of the "*Sefer Ha-Zohar*."[164]

I argue, however, that Tishby's overarching conceptual edifice is deeply inadequate as a hermeneutic framework, an inadequacy particularly surprising given Tishby's virtuosity as a textual interpreter throughout *Mishnat Ha-Zohar* and elsewhere. At the simplest level, one could easily show that many of the vast number of Zoharic passages on divine/demonic relations contain elements that belong to both of Tishby's ideal-types. Far from lining up putatively kindred stances on essence, geography, and structure to form a coherent image of divine/demonic relations in the way that Tishby's exposition would lead one to expect, such passages present a variety of configurations that defy the coherence of the models. More importantly, the juxtaposition in many passages of elements that Tishby would associate with divergent models appears neither to be a haphazard yoking together of different perspectives nor a strained product of an arduous "mental struggle." Rather, heterogeneous images are thoroughly woven into the passages' literary texture – indeed, as I shall show, their heterogeneity is often crucial to the power of such passages.

163 *Zohar* II, 242b.

164 On the problematic quality of the Zohar as a "book," see Introduction.

III Reading the Other Side: Paradoxical Textuality

I turn to two Zoharic passages that strikingly exemplify the ways Zoharic writers weave together seemingly incompatible elements to form distinctive literary artifacts. If read from Tishby's perspective, these passages would appear to express hopelessly unresolved conflicts between thoroughly conflicting conceptions. The approach that I am urging, by contrast, rejects the notion that we should attribute to such texts a drive to express a conceptual or phenomenal consistency. On the contrary, by reading them as literary artifacts which conspicuously juxtapose heterogeneous elements, we can attend to their construction of a paradoxical ontology, often through audacious employment of identifiable rhetorical techniques. These two passages may be called the "fingernail slime" passage, a short, yet highly fraught text, and a much longer passage, comprised of two distinct and seemingly incompatible units, the "benign *kelipah*" and "Lilith-*kelipah*" texts.

The first passage, though cited by Tishby as a prime instance of divine/demonic proximity, also portrays the Other Side in accordance with the ten-Sefirot structure: a juxtaposition of structural homology with geographical proximity, an anomaly within Tishby's framework. Note that this text, which I briefly quoted in Chapter 1, refers to the Shekhinah as "*Ḥokhmah*" [Wisdom], one of the alternative names for the tenth sefirah, *Malkhut* [Royalty], with which she is pervasively associated.[165]

> ת"ח קב"ה אפיק עשר כתרין עטרין לעילא קדישין דמתעטרא בהו ומתלבשא בהו והוא אינון ואינון הוא כשלהובא אחידא בגומרא ולית תמן פרודא. לקביל דנא אית עשר כתרין דלא קדישין לתתא ואינון אחידן בזוהמא דטופרא דחד עטרא קדישא דאקרי חכמה ועל דא אקרון חכמות.[166]

> Come and see. The blessed Holy One brought forth ten crowns, holy diadems, above, with which He crowns Himself and enclothes Himself. And they are He, and He is they, like a flame joined to a burning coal, and there is no separation there. Parallel to this are ten crowns, which are not holy, below, and they are joined to the slime of the finger-nail of a holy diadem, which is called *Ḥokhmah* [Wisdom – here, the *Shekhinah*]. And, therefore, they are called *Ḥokhmot* [Wisdoms].

165 *Ḥokhmah* is usually identified with the second Sefirah. When it is associated with the tenth Sefirah, it is sometimes called *Ḥokhmah Tata'ah*, the "Lower Wisdom."

166 *Zohar* III, 70a.

Only an extended explication can bring out the multiple layers and intricate composition of this richly compact text. The paradoxes and incongruities proliferating in its few lines demonstrate the need to approach Zoharic texts as constructive literary artifacts rather than as expressions of coherent metaphysical or phenomenal models.

The text juxtaposes strikingly similar portrayals of two relationships: that of the key male divine *persona*, the blessed Holy One, to the holy Sefirot, and that of his female counterpart, the Shekhinah, to the demonic Sefirot. It foregrounds the homology between the divine and demonic realms, explicitly proclaiming the two as "parallel" and using the same term, "ten crowns," to designate their respective Sefirot. Nevertheless, while stressing divine/demonic homology, the text also portrays the ten demonic Sefirot as geographically proximate to the divine Shekhinah, a geographical stance incompatible in Tishby's framework with structural homology. The text underscores the intimacy between the Shekhinah and the demonic sefirot by using two versions of a single term, *Ḥokhmot*/*Ḥokhmah* [Wisdoms/Wisdom], to describe them – a modified form of antithetical homonymy.

Moreover, the text portrays the proximity between the Shekhinah and the demonic Sefirot in a manner that establishes another homology, that of this proximity with the proximity of the blessed Holy One to the holy Sefirot. Referring to the relationship of the blessed Holy One to the divine Sefirot, the text declares: "and they are He, and He is they, like a flame joined [*da-aḥida*] to a burning coal" [והוא אינון ואינון הוא, כשלהובא דאחידא בגומרא]. Referring to the relationship of the demonic Sefirot to the Shekhinah, it proclaims: "and they are joined [*aḥidan*] to the slime of the finger-nail of a holy diadem" [ואינון אחידן בזוהמא דטופרא דחד עטרא קדישא].

The rhetorical parallelism between these two "joinings" compels our attention to their similarities and differences. The repetition of the verb, "joined," equates the two relationships; the remainder of the portrayals closely contrasts them. On the exclusively divine side, the relationship is beautiful, experientially familiar, and explicitly designated as an analogy ("like a flame joined to a coal"); on the hybrid divine/demonic side, the relationship is repulsive, experientially impossible, and presented as a literal description ("joined to the slime of the fingernail of a holy diadem"). The text thus obliges us to ponder the relationship between two "joinings," that which unifies the divine realm, on the one hand, and that which unifies the divine to the demonic realm, on the other. It also calls upon us to ponder the scandalous, and unpleasantly described, proximity of the Shekhinah to the homologous "ten crowns" of the demonic realm. Though the assertion of simple identity between the blessed

Holy One and the holy Sefirot is absent from the description of the relationship of the Shekhinah to the demonic Sefirot, the use of the same verb to describe the two relationships ("joined", *ahida/ahidan*) demands that the reader question whether, and in what manner, they are different.

The force of this entire array of provocative challenges depends precisely on the layered deployments of rhetorical parallelisms and heterogeneous images. The complex cohabitation within the text of features that would be incompatible within Tishby's framework is, in fact, indispensable to its literary power, as it is of much of Zoharic writing. We may even surmise that the very point of this kind of text is to startle the reader into deep reflection by means of its provocative incongruities.

I also note that the text's parallel portrayals present closely related, yet also distinct challenges from a theological perspective. The unity of the blessed Holy One with the holy Sefirot presents a kind of mystery of unity and multiplicity familiar from a number of religious traditions; the unity of the divine Shekhinah with the demonic Sefirot also presents a unity/multiplicity mystery, but in the form of a theological scandal.

A text that constructs a cosmos split between divine and demonic through such paradoxical and heterogeneous techniques is neither "dualistic" nor "anti-dualistic," nor does it show a "mental struggle" between such conceptions. "Dualism" and "anti-dualism," homology and concentricity, remoteness and proximity: as a philosophical statement, this text would simply be a mass of contradictions; as a virtuoso literary text it is an intricately fraught configuration, constructing a distinctive ontology. What would seem like incoherently arranged fragments of incompatible metaphysical and phenomenal models in a philosophical text become the raw material for an intricately composed, forcefully provocative literary artifact. Such a text defies paraphrase. Its poetic mythology is irreducible.

I cited this passage in Chapter 1 for the way it encapsulates one of the general puzzles underlying the organization of this book: the relationship between Zoharic portrayals of the Other Side that underscore its power and structure (the primary concern of Chapter 2) and those that narrate its emergence and re-emergence through abjection, that is, from the inassimilable aspects of the (proto-)divine (the primary concern of Chapter 3). The short "fingernail slime" passage comprises both of these portrayals, precisely by means of its defiance of Tishby's framework through its juxtaposition of structural homology and geographical proximity. It highlights the puzzling relationship between these portrayals by setting forth a homology between the relationship of a divine figure to divine Sefirot and of a divine figure to demonic Sefirot – and locating

the latter in the refuse, the filth, of the divine. The refuse of the divine (its "slime") provides an ontological toehold, as it were, for the rival, homologous demonic realm.

I turn to the second passage, composed of the "benign *kelipah*" and "Lilith-*kelipah*" texts. This passage shows that juxtapositions of seemingly contradictory motifs are no less striking when we come to passages that foreground the "concentric" portrayal of the Other Side. The "benign *kelipah*" text is an elaborate development of the concentricity image, a seeming proof-text for Tishby's understanding of *kelipah-mo'aḥ* imagery as a "restriction on dualism." It is, however, immediately preceded by a text portraying a thoroughly evil, personified female *kelipah* – a detailed evocation of Lilith (even if she is not named). These two texts are presented, in both the printed editions and manuscripts, as continuous, forming one passage.[167] The baffling relationship between these two continuous yet opposed texts raises in acute form the problematic quality of Tishby's models. I emphasize that, for these purposes, it does not matter whether these two texts were written by one author, or by different authors and only placed in succession by a later editorial decision. It is precisely the micro-rhetorical similarities and differences with which I will be concerned, not the texts' reflection of a unitary or conflicted vision of either the author(s) or editor(s).

The "benign *kelipah*" text constructs the relationship between *kelipah* and *mo'aḥ* as complementary, as protective covering to protected core, and their nature as *kelipah* or *mo'aḥ* as relational rather than essential.

> מריש רזא דנקודה עלאה עד סופא דכל דרגין, כלא איהו דא לגו מן דא, ודא לגו מן דא, עד דאשתכח דהאי קליפה להאי והאי להאי. נקודה קדמאה הוה נהירו פנימאה, דלית ליה שעורא למנדע זכיכו ודקיקו ונקיו דיליה עד דאתפשט פשיטו מיניה וההוא פשיטו דההיא נקודה אתעביד חד היכלא לאתלבשא ההיא נקודה ... ההוא היכלא אתפשט פשיטו אור קדמאה וההוא פשיטו דההוא אור קדמאה איהו לבושא להההוא היכלא דאיהו נהירו דקיק וזכיך פנימאה יתיר, מכאן ולהלאה אתפשט דא בדא ואתל־בש דא בדא, עד דאשתכח דא לבושא לדא, ודא לדא, דא מוחא ודא קליפה, ואע"ג דדא לבושא, אתעביד איהו מוחא לדרגא אחרא.[168]

167 This continuity appears in the Mantua, Cremona, and Vilna editions. It also appears in the entire range of manuscripts utilized by Matt in his preparation of his critical edition for the *Pritzker Edition*. Private correspondence with Daniel C. Matt, September 4, 2017.

168 *Zohar* I, 19b–20a.

> From the head of the mystery of the supernal point to the end of all rungs: all is *this* within *this* and *this* within *this* [*da le-go min da ve-da le-go min da*], so that *this* is the shell of *this*, and *this* of *this* [*de-hai kelipah le-hai, ve-hai le-hai*].
>
> The primordial point is the internal illumination – for there is no measure by which to know its purity, fineness, and cleanness. Until an expansion expanded from it – and this expansion of that point became a palace, to enclothe that point…. That palace expanded an expansion: primordial light. And that expansion of primordial light is a garment for the palace, which is a fine, pure illumination, the innermost. From here on, *this* expands into *this*, *this* is enclothed in *this*, so that one finds *this* a garment for *this*, and *this* for *this*. *This*, the kernel [*moḥa*]; *this*, the shell [*kelipah*]. Although *this* is a garment, it becomes the kernel [*moḥa*] of another layer.

The passage thus portrays the unfolding and multiplication of the Sefirot (the "rungs") as a result of the "expansion" of each level. This "expansion" crystallizes so as to become that level's covering, its "garment," and, from the fourth Sefirah downwards, its *kelipah*. This process marks the divine unfolding from its highest level to its lowest level, the "end of all rungs."

The first enclothing of one level by the next lower level occurs when the "primordial point," presumably the Sefirah of *Ḥokhmah*, "expands." This "expansion" becomes a "palace," presumably the Sefirah of *Binah*, which then enclothes it. The text does not mention the term "*kelipah*" in relation to this first enclothing. Nor does it use it for the next "expansion," the "primordial light" (presumably the fourth Sefirah, *Ḥesed*), which serves as the "garment" for the "palace." The term "*kelipah*" only appears as a general statement of what occurs after the appearance of the "primordial light." "From here on," the text informs us, each level is a "garment" for its predecessor, a term the text then presents, in rhythmic cadences, as synonymous with *kelipah*: "*this* a garment for *this*, and *this* for *this*. *This*, the kernel [*moḥa*]; *this*, the shell [*kelipah*]." This relationship of *moḥa* to *kelipah* characterizes all subsequent "expansions" and enclothings, so that what appears as a *kelipah* on one level will appear as a *moḥa* from the perspective of the subsequent level.

The text thus constructs the difference between "*kelipah*" and "*moḥa*" as merely relational rather than essential. That which appears as "*kelipah*" on a higher level may appear as "*moḥa*" on a lower level; that which appears as "*moḥa*" on a lower level may appear as *kelipah* on a higher level. This portrayal is very far removed from one of absolute divine/demonic alterity.

Indeed, the text implies the non-threatening quality of *all kelipot*, in at least three ways: by explicitly proclaiming the relativity of the "*kelipah*" designation; by describing the generation of the *kelipot* in terms identical to the generation of the incontestably holy *Binah* out of *Ḥokhmah* – as an "expansion" and an "enclothing"; and by rhythmically gliding, without marking the transition, from the term "garment" to "*kelipah*." If one read this text in isolation, one would reject the notion of a realm that is irremediably split from the divine. The text accentuates the merely relative difference between *kelipah* and *mo'aḥ* with its incessant repetition of the same demonstrative pronouns ("this," denoted by both "*da*" and "*hai*") to designate both – a use of repetition diametrically opposed to the antithetical homonyms discussed in the Introduction. Thus far, this text confirms Tishby's framework: a consistent coordination of structural concentricity, geographical proximity, and, on the question of essence, an antidualism so strong that one cannot even speak of two essences.[169]

However, immediately preceding this text, and apparently continuously with it, the passage portrays the first *kelipah* as a personified, diabolical entity, specifically as one possessing the archetypal features of Lilith – killing children, seducing men, and so on. In fact, this entire text may be described as a kabbalistic reworking of all the basic elements of the Lilith myth, restating the classic Pseudo-Ben Sira narrative in a Zoharic key.

Beyond mere textual contiguity, the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text clearly emerges from the same rhetorical matrix as the "benign *kelipah*" text – and it is their commonalities that serve to highlight their differences. The "Lilith-*kelipah*" text opens at a stage of cosmic unfolding identifiable as a specific moment in the "benign *kelipah*" text, but with a radically different aftermath.

> דבתר דאתגניז נהירו אור קדמאה, אתברי קליפה למוחא, וההיא קליפה אתפשט, ואפיק קליפה אחרא כיון דנפקת, סלקא ונחתא ...[170]
>
> After the illumination of the primordial light was hidden, a *kelipah* was created for the *moḥa*. That *kelipah* expanded, generating another *kelipah*. One she issued forth, she ascended and descended ...

169 See *Zohar* II, 108b for a view diametrically opposed to this relativistic understanding of *kelipah* and *mo'aḥ*:

כל קליפה מסטרא אחרא הוי, ומוחא מן מוחא

Every *kelipah* is from the *Sitra Aḥra*, and every *moḥa* from *moḥa*

170 *Zohar* I, 19b.

The "Lilith-*kelipah*" text thus begins at the moment in the "benign *kelipah*" text just after the emanation of the "primordial light," presumably the fourth Sefirah (*Ḥesed*). It is at this moment that the "benign *kelipah*" text shifts from its detailed portrayal of cosmic unfolding, to the general "from here on," and proceeds to poetically convey the identity of "garments" and "*kelipot*" on all levels. The "Lilith-*kelipah*" text, by contrast, picks up the story at that moment and diverts it in a very different direction. The text portrays the development subsequent to the "primordial light" with the same verb ("expanded," אתפשט) as the "benign *kelipah*" text uses for the emanation of such clearly holy Sefirot as Binah. However, when the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text picks up the story, it portrays something that disrupts, or corrupts, the process. In the smoothly unfolding "benign *kelipah*" text, each *moḥa* is surrounded by a garment/*kelipah* that will serve in turn as a *moḥa* for the level beneath it; in the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text, by contrast, the *kelipah* "generates another *kelipah* [*kelipah aḥra*]," which is essentially, rather than merely relatively, a *kelipah*. In fact, it might be better to translate the phrase *kelipah aḥra* [קליפה אחרא] as "an Other *Kelipah*," on the model of the "Other Side." This "Other *Kelipah*," disrupts the seamless story of the generation of kernels and shells, each of whose nature is merely relational. Moreover, this "Other *Kelipah*" becomes immediately personified (as "she", i.e., Lilith) and is essentially evil.

It is thus the generation of an *essentially* "Other" *kelipah*, rather than one that is merely *relatively* a *kelipah*, that produces the female devil. One may describe this as a malignant metastasis of a healthy process: a good *kelipah* horrifyingly generating a bad *kelipah*, Lilith. The rhetorical force of such a metastasis is accentuated by the rhythmically and ontologically peaceful unfolding of the immediately subsequent "benign *kelipah*" text. The personification of this "Other *Kelipah*," the movement from the perverse phenomenon of a *kelipah*-generating-a-*kelipah* to the prosopopeia by which this malignant *kelipah* becomes the monstrous *persona* of Lilith, is also crucial for the crystallization of an essentially evil realm, as we shall see at length in Chapter 3.

The contrast with the calm, rhythmic unfolding of the "benign *kelipah*" text is dramatically highlighted by the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text's narration of the wild oscillations in Lilith's geographical relationship to the holy realm. An examination of the dynamics of the geographical axis in the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text adds not only further layers of complexity to my thus far relatively static comparison of the two texts, but also links the passage as a whole to issues of abjection and identity-formation – themes I only fully explore in Chapter 3. Immediately after emerging as the "Other *Kelipah*," Lilith seeks out the "small faces" [אנפי זוטרי], presumably the cherubim, and desires to "cleave to them"

and "be portrayed in them" [בעאת לאתדבקא בהו ולאצטיירא בגווייהו].[171] She seeks, in other words, to parasitically take on their form – rhetorically, a kind of rapacious auto-prosopopeia. For this interference with "the small faces," God "separated her from there, bringing her down below" [אפרש לה קב"ה מתמן ונחית לה לתתא].[172]

When the first human beings were created, Lilith finds unbearable the sight of the union of Adam and Eve, the "complete image" [דיוקנא שלים],[173] prompting her to fly away. This apparently refers to a second attempt to interfere with subject-formation, this time on the human level – for by interfering with the union of Adam and Eve, she would have prevented the formation of the "complete image," that union of male and female which, in the Zoharic cosmos, is indispensable for the full formation of subjectivity, divine, demonic, or human. She then again returns to perform mischief with the "small faces" – an act for which God "casts her into the nether regions of the sea" [ואטיל לה בשפולי ימא].[174] This phrase is closely related to the "crevice of the great abyss" [נוקבא דתהומא רבא], in which, Tishby tells, us the geographically remote Other Side normally resides.[175] From the perspective of Tishby's framework, although this remote location for the Other Side accords with the dualist position concerning its essence, and seems fitting for Lilith, it clashes with the concentric structure with which this text begins. The banishment of the personified *kelipah* defies the semantic content of the word and its ontological status as a covering, not to mention radically opposing the dynamic, protean relativity of *kelipah* and *moḥa* in the immediately subsequent "benign *kelipah*" text.

After Adam's sin, God allows Lilith to emerge from this exile and she acquires power over children, "the small faces of humanity" [אפי זוטרי דבני נשא].[176] Finally, after the birth of Cain, she succeeds in mating with Adam and brings forth improper subjects, "spirits and flying demons" [רוחין וטיסין] – or, in rhetorical terms, achieving her goal of monstrous prosopopeia.[177]

In this text, the characteristic activity of Lilith, the "Other Kelipah," is thus an interference with the proper "expansion" of beings, divine, angelic, and human. This interference may be described more abstractly in terms of the

171 *Zohar* I, 19b. Cf. *bḤagigah*, 13b.
172 *Ibid.*
173 *Ibid.*
174 *Ibid.*
175 Tishby, *MZ*, 300. This phrase appears numerous times in the Zoharic literature, including II, 163b & 173b.
176 *Zohar* I, 19b.
177 *Ibid.*

unfolding of the Sefirot – a perversion of the expansion of the divine light – or in more corporeal terms as the disruption of the proper generation of "faces," both angelic and human. In both sets of images, the Lilith-*kelipah* seeks to appropriate and divert the vitality and, indeed, the identity of holy entities at the very moment of their formation. The expulsion of Lilith, the "Other *Kelipah*," is an essential prerequisite for the proper unfolding of the formation of *personae* at all levels of the cosmos. The banishment to geographical remoteness of this originally proximate figure occurs at a subsequent phase of the drama of creation and as a necessary step in its unfolding.

Finally, while I only fully explore this theme in the next chapter, this dimension provides an insight into why the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text precedes the "benign *kelipah*" text (again, regardless of whether this was an authorial or editorial decision). As we might expect in accordance with an account of identity formation through abjection, it is only after expulsion of inassimilable elements, as described in the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text, that one can present a smoothly unfolding identity, as in the "benign *kelipah*" text. The smooth, organic development of the "benign *kelipah*" text only becomes possible after the violent expulsion of the thoroughly malevolent Lilith-*kelipah* in the preceding text.

Nevertheless, Lilith's banishment, like all attempts to definitively separate divine and demonic, is unstable. The first opportunity for escape from her abject refuge comes with the first sin, that of Adam and Eve. The text inversely links Lilith's banishment to that of Adam and Eve from the Garden. Just as the text links the stability of human identity formation to the abjection of Lilith, so it links the disruption of identity formation to the partial suspension of her banishment. After the relaxation of her expulsion, not only does she acquire power over human children, she eventually succeeds in mating with human beings, definitively achieving the intermixture of the holy and the unholy.

The text's tropes confirm the instability of Lilith's geographical position. After her release from her banishment to the depths of the sea, Lilith's new residence is by the side of a powerful biblical image of eternal volatility, the "flaming sword which turned every way" [להט החרב המתהפכת] (Genesis 3:24) barring the way back to the Garden of Eden: she "dwells there by that 'flaming sword,' for she emerged from the side of that flame" [ויתבא תמן לגבי ההוא להט החרב, בגין דהיא נפקת מסטרא דההוא להט].[178] The episodic strengthening of that flame, presumably by human sin, allows Lilith to roam the world to engage in her identity-disrupting mischief.

This flaming sword may evoke a number of different Sefirotic connotations in Zoharic texts. If one interprets it here consistently with the rest of

178 *Zohar* I, 19b.

the passage, one might surmise that the "sword" refers to the fifth Sefirah, *Gevurah* [Might], and the "flame" to the "strong judgment" that represents a hypertrophy of Might, of which Lilith and the Other Side generally are a further metastasis.[179] However, a more common Zoharic reference of this image is to *Malkhut* [Royalty], the Shekhinah, which "at times turns to mercy and at times to judgment."[180] That this connotation of the "fiery sword" may be intended here is supported by another passage, closely related to the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text, which declares that Lilith "hangs from" or "depends on" [תליא] the Shekhinah to whom she "cleaves" [אתדבק].[181] The uncertainty of Lilith's location in her banishment is a further sign of the instability of that banishment.

The "cleaving" of Lilith to the Shekhinah in this related passage recalls the cleaving of the ten demonic Sefirot to the "slime of the fingernail" of the Shekhinah in the passage I discussed above. Cleaving to fingernail slime or to a fiery, ever-turning sword are both images of divine/demonic links whose fundamental characteristics are neither remoteness nor proximity, but instability. Both the "fingernail slime" and the "Lilith-*kelipah*" passages, though with very different configurations of the geographical and structural alternatives, express the central paradox of the relationship of the divine realm and the Other Side: on the one hand, the constitution of both realms as a result of abjection, on the other hand, the immense power possessed by the Other Side despite its emergence as subsidiary to the holy side, as a crystallization of its refuse or its malignant metastasis.

To summarize: reading the "Lilith-*kelipah*" and "benign *kelipah*" texts together (whether or not they were written together), we find different employments of similar rhetorical techniques that construct different ontologies of concentricity. The concentricity image is itself split, doubled into a healthy

179 This interpretation would also make this image consistent with another key portrayal of the emergence of the *Sitra Aḥra*, in *Zohar* I, 148a.

180 For the Shekhinah as the "ever-turning sword," see *Zohar* II, 27b (*Tosefta*).

181 *Zohar* I, 33b. The passage depends on a word-play that involves a re-vowelization of the Hebrew world for luminaries [*me'orot* מארת] as curses [*me'erot* מארת], in Genesis 1,14, "Let there be luminaries" [יהי מארת]:

רבי יוסי אמר יהי מארת, לתתא איהי דבה תליא אסכרה לרביי עלמא, ואיהי תליא בהאי מארת, נהורא זוטרא מכל נהורין, וזמנין דאתחשכא דלא מקבלא נהורא.... וביה תליין לתתא כל אינון זיינין אחרנין, בגין זעירו דנהורא ... כלא ביה תליא, לאכללא לילית בעלמא ...

Rabbi Yose said, "let there be curses [מארת *me'erot*]", below, she [i.e., Lilith] upon whom depends diphtheria for the world's children, and she depends on this light [מארת *me'orot*], smallest light of all lights [i.e., the Shekhinah], and sometimes it is darkened, for it receives no light.... And all those other species below [i.e., demonic forces] depend upon it because of the diminution of light ... everything depends on this, to incorporate Lilith in the world.

and malignant form, one in which Tishby's three axes line up (the "benign *kelipah*" text) and one in which they do not (the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text). The provocation that leaps out from reading these two texts in succession is due precisely to the similarity of their rhetorical and ontological starting points. One could even say that the relationship between "resemblance" and "menace" is replayed in the relationship between these two versions of the concentricity structure itself.

The doubling of the process of concentric unfolding yields a seemingly "anti-dualist" form, in which merely relative *kelipot* are generated, and a seemingly "dualist" form, the product of some disruption or metastasis in which essentially evil *kelipot* are generated. One might, of course, attribute these differences to the relative dominance of Neoplatonic *versus* "Gnostic" sources within each of the texts, or, perhaps, to the Zoharic literature's Catalonian and Castilian precursors. Close attention to the rhetorical techniques of the two texts, their common elements and contrasting combinations, however, suggests a very different approach to reading. The power of the juxtaposition of the two texts – whether it was an authorial or editorial decision – lies in their construction of two contrasting ontologies from a common rhetorical matrix. As with the "fingernail slime" passage, I believe that it is the contemplation of the startling contrast between these heterogeneous portrayals that is one of the main goals – or at least effects – of this juxtaposition.

Two general conclusions may be drawn from the preceding discussion. The first concerns the manner of approaching heterogeneous images in Zoharic texts. Rather than seeking to uncover rival coherent models underlying these images, I affirm the need to first read each passage for its rhetorical techniques, while refraining for as long as possible from determining its ontological outcome. Such a reading can reveal whether the force and meaning of a passage might stem precisely from the way it juxtaposes heterogeneous or seemingly incompatible images. This approach can obviate the urgency of choosing among a number of unsatisfying alternatives: harmonizing the text's conspicuous incongruities, interpreting the text as a single author's struggle to choose between opposing models, or inferring that the text must be a patchwork stemming from multiple authorship.

The privilege my approach accords to very close readings of the text follows the imperative proclaimed by Liebes to attend to Zoharic literariness, though at a more detailed rhetorical level. It embraces textual heterogeneities as meaning-producing provocations and even leaves open the possibility that jarring, unresolved juxtapositions may have escaped the control of authors, editors, or commentators. This approach to reading tends to highlight the instability of resolutions of conflicting forces (rhetorical or ontological) and interpretive indeterminacy as key features of Zoharic textuality.

A second conclusion concerns the relationship between this way of reading and latent Zoharic ontologies, particularly concerning subject-formation. Although my emphasis on rhetorical analysis stresses the need for an at least provisional agnosticism about overall models, it also demands attention to the way rhetorical techniques construct ontologies, particularly that of the "split cosmos," the main concern of this chapter, and subject-formation through "abjection-and-crystallization," the primary focus of the next chapter. I caution again, however, that rhetoric and ontology are sometimes related in a counter-intuitive way, confounding the reader's expectations.

In the following sections, I attend to two different kinds of rhetorical techniques Zoharic texts use to construct the complex and unstable splitting outlined above. At times, the ontological effect is achieved through the phenomenal content of images – for example, a creature that is physically divided between its demonic and divine parts. At other times, however, it is achieved primarily through the construction of the phrases, sentences, or paragraphs in which they appear. In other words, I focus not only on tropes, such as metaphor and metonymy, but also on what rhetoricians calls the "constructional schemes" in which such images appear.[182] This detailed inquiry into the way Zoharic writing constructs the Other Side is imperative in the context of a work so attentive to language both stylistically and thematically.

IV The Rhetorical Construction of Splitting 1: the Seductions of Schemes

A *An Introduction to Anaphora: "There Is … and … There Is"*

Attending to schemes entails a focus not on the selection of images, but on the "ways in which words, phrases, clauses, and larger units are grammatically

182 The classic distinction between tropes and "schemes" or "figures" was given by Quintillian:

> 4. …A trope, then, is an expression turned from its natural and principal signification to another, for the purpose of adorning style, or, as most of the grammarians define it, "an expression altered from the sense in which it is proper to one in which it is not proper." …
>
> 5. In tropes, accordingly, some words are substituted for others, as in metaphor, metonymy, antonomasia, metalepsis, synecdoche, catachresis, allegory, and, generally, in hyperbole ….
>
> 10. … The other, which is properly termed a figure, is any deviation, either in thought or expression, from the ordinary and simple method of speaking, just as our bodies assume different postures when we sit, lie, or look back.

Quintilian, *Institutes*, 145. A more recent scholar defines such "figures" as "constructional schemes" which consist in the "ways in which words, phrases, clauses, and larger units are grammatically balanced." Turco, *The New Book of Forms*, 63.

balanced"[183] – a focus on compositional structure in a manner that is autonomous, in whole or in part, of semantic content. I begin my detailed analysis of the rhetorical construction of splitting, provisionally subordinating semantic content, in order to stress the literariness of Zoharic writing. Nonetheless, as I argued above, this emphasis also ultimately compels a thorough rethinking of Zoharic doctrine.

It is important to note that any particular constructional scheme can function in the service of more than one meaning, a feature that may be called the "polysemous" or "poly-functional" nature of such schemes.[184] While even casual readers of poetry are familiar with the polysemousness of individual tropes, a feature certainly characteristic of Zoharic tropes, the Zoharic employment of schemes equally has this "polysemous" quality.

I will particularly focus on one constructional scheme that Zoharic texts frequently employ to signify the divine/demonic relationship. I refer to the phrase, "there is … and there is …." [*it … ve-it*; איתּ … ואיתּ] where the same noun recurs after each "there is" – but where the first occurrence refers to a divine entity or *persona* and the second to its demonic counterpart. Such schemes may consist of an exact repetition of a brief phrase, as in the statement that "there is a 'field', and there is a 'field'" (*it sadeh ve-it sadeh*; איתּ שדה ואיתּ שדה)[185] – in which the first "field" is associated with the Shekhinah and the second with her diabolical female counterpart, usually known as Lilith. They may also take more elaborate forms, some of which I will analyze below. This scheme splits the image between its divine and demonic forms – an effect that comes primarily, at times exclusively, from the construction of the phrase, rather than from the content of the repeated word. This scheme thus yields antithetical homonyms – and its ubiquity in Zoharic writing extends this homonymy to an ever-increasing number of terms.

The scheme "there is … there is …" is an instance of rhetorical "parallelism" (though I emphasize that we must take that word here as a description of a constructional scheme, rather than as an ontological description as in Tishby's use of the term "parallelism"). Specifically, the "there is … there is …" construction is an instance of the establishment of rhetorical parallelism by means of *anaphora*, the production of a textual effect through repetition of the first word or phrase in contiguous sentences or clauses.[186] It is generally deployed in conjunction with a number of other techniques, including what

183 Turco, *The New Book*, 63.

184 Vickers, 'Repetition and Emphasis in Rhetoric: Theory and Practice', 91–92.

185 *Zohar* I, 122a.

186 For the definitions in this paragraph, see Vickers, 'Repetition', 93 & 100.

rhetoricians call *isocolon* (in which successive clauses are of equal length) and *parison* (in which successive clauses are of equal or corresponding structure). Zoharic texts employ other ways of constructing rhetorical parallelism, but, for reasons that should become clear, I will focus on those constructed through the use of anaphora and its auxiliary schemes.

The anaphora, "there is … there is …," is commonly used in the Jewish textual tradition where it is employed in polysemous ways. In Talmudic and midrashic literature, both in Hebrew and Aramaic, its uses range from asserting legal distinctions[187] to presenting opposing views[188] to moral contrasts.[189] There are also a few occurrences of repetition of "there is" in the Bible itself, which, though few in number, give a further sense of its range. Such verses use this scheme to add emphasis,[190] to present a moral and factual contrast,[191] and to produce a cumulative effect of compatible, though different, notions.[192] Moreover, the Bible frequently employs rhetorical parallelism, using various forms of repetitive structures – anaphora, isocolon and parison, or mere repetition of successive words (*epizeuxis*). As one scholar points out, such constructions may import diverse meanings, including those in which parallel phrases are synonymous, antithetical, synthetic (in which a successive phrase or phrases are consequences or corollaries of a predecessor phrase), and climactic (in which successive phrases represent amplifications of their predecessors).[193]

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187 See, e.g., *bBava Kama*, 45b.

188 See, e.g., *bBekhorot*, 42b.

189 See, e.g., *bPesaḥim*, 50a.

190 II Kings 10:15:

ויאמר אליו היש את לבבך ישר כאשר לבבי עם לבבך ויאמר יהונדב יש ויש

And he saluted him, and said to him, Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? And Jehonadab answered, It is [*yesh va-yesh*].

Note that the emphasis added by the repetition in the Hebrew is absent from the translation. This is often the case with constructional schemes, a phenomenon that highlights their significance for textuality. This kind of simple repetition is more properly called *epizeuxis* rather than anaphora.

191 Ecclesiastes 7:15:

יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו

… sthere is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.

192 Jeremiah 31:16–17:

… כי יש שכר לפעלתך נאם יהוה ושבו מארץ אויב ויש תקוה לאחריתך נאם יהוה ושבו בנים לגבולם

… for thy work shall be rewarded [*ki yesh sakhar*], saith YHVH; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope [*ve-yesh tikvah*] in thine end, saith YHVH, that thy children shall come again to their own border.

Again, the anaphora disappears in the KJV translation.

193 Turco, *The New Book*, 10–11.

These kinds of techniques and meanings, as well as some of the specific biblical passages characterized by parallelism, play an important role in the Zoharic literature. This role is particularly prominent in the context of divine/demonic relations – of which one example would be the discussion of the familiar verses from Ecclesiastes, "a time to … and a time to …".[194] Precisely because this constructional scheme is both commonly and diversely employed in the Jewish textual tradition, its distinctive and insistent role in Zoharic writing demands reflection. By first examining the way this scheme functions, we can better analyze how Zoharic passages produce their textual effects, without prejudging their ontological visions. As I have argued generally in relation to rhetorical analysis, explication of Zoharic ontology must attend to its construction by this rhetorical scheme – including the effects of the sometimes playful, sometimes destabilizing, role of its polysemousness.

I caution that Zoharic texts often use anaphora in contexts other than divine/demonic relations. I note a brief example of such a text, whose use of anaphora nonetheless shares some features with those with which I will be primarily concerned. This passage employs anaphora to construct, with ever-increasing intensity, those who pursue theosophical knowledge. The anaphora here consists of the repeated use of the word "those":

> אינון רדפי קשוט, אינון דתבעו רזא דמהימנותא אינון דאתדבקו בקשורא מהימנא, אינון דידעין אורחוי דמלכא עלאה, קריבו שמעו.[195]
>
> *Those* pursuers of truth ; *those* who seeks the mystery of faith; *those* who cleave to the faithful bond; *those* who know the ways of the Supernal King: come near and listen!

The repetition of "*those*" links, even identifies, the subjects of the successive verbs. Zoharic adepts may assign specific ways in which the successive phrases signify different, ever-intensifying levels of esoteric knowledge. The sense

194 Ecclesiastes 3:1–8. See *Zohar* II, 155b.
אית עת ואית עת, (קהלת ג ח) עת לאהב ועת לשנא, עת איהו לעילא, דההוא עת רזא דמהימנותא איהי …, ועל דא עת לאהב, דא איהי דאתחייב בר נש לאהב. ואית עת אחרא דאיהי רזא דאלהי"ם אחרים, ואתחייב בר נש למשני לה, ולא יתמשך לביה אבתריה, ועל דא עת לשנא
There is a time, and *there is a time*. "A time to love, and a time to hate" (Ecclesiastes 3:8). A *time* there is above, for that *time* is the mystery of faith … … And, therefore, "a time to love": this is the one whom a person must love. And there is another *time*, who is mystery of "other gods", whom a person must hate … And, therefore, "a time to hate."

195 Zohar II, 12b (*Matnitin*).

of intensification, however, primarily results from the poetic effect of the anaphora, rather than the specific content of the phrases. Indeed, the reader gets the sense that these phrases could have proliferated far beyond the four repetitions, constructing an infinitely intensifying quest for theosophical secrets. The trance-like effect of the potentially proliferating phrases commands the attention of its addressees, perhaps even conjures them up through this rhythmic apostrophe which, indeed, culminates in: "come near and listen!".

Some of the features of anaphora in this passage – particularly the primacy of the poetic effect of the anaphora rather than semantic content, the sense of potentially indefinite proliferation, the trance-like effect of the repetition, and its seeming ontological climax – characterize the Zoharic uses of anaphora in its construction of divine/demonic relations. However, the latter uses also have very distinctive features, most evidently their concentration on the rhetorical parallelism, "there is … there is …," to construct ontological homologies of opposed entities, *personae*, even entire cosmic realms. Moreover, these passages often consist of a juxtaposition of several different uses of anaphora, integrating the divine/demonic parallels and homologies in other key cosmic differences.

I will particularly focus on three such juxtapositions. First, and most importantly here, anaphora is used to establish rhetorical parallelism between the divine and the demonic – often, as in the "field" example, through establishing antithetical homonymy between two specific, identically named, divine and demonic entities or *personae*. A second usage creates rhetorical parallelism between upper- and lower-level cosmic structures. This usage can function to contrast either the upper and lower levels of the divine – or demonic – realm as a whole[196] or two specific higher and lower *Sefirot*.[197] A third usage creates rhetorical parallelism between two entities at the same level of either the divine or demonic realms – *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness] and *Gevurah* [Might], right and left, male and female.[198]

Passages characterized by this scheme in the divine/demonic context, as in the very different context noted above, often produce their effects largely through the sheer poetic sensuousness of the repeated anaphora. The text gives the impression that it could keep multiplying the anaphora to include more and more facets, more and more terms – with the specific elements far less important than the repetitive cadence of the anaphora. Such texts seem to be trying to induce in the reader, through a rhythmic chant, a vision of an

196 E.g., *Zohar* II, 23a.

197 E.g., *Zohar* III, 137b.

198 For an example that combines the two in the demonic realm, see, e.g., *Zohar* III, 207a.

intricately textured cosmos, layered with overlapping homologies. I turn to a detailed analysis of several such passages, exploring their rhetoric and resulting ontology, showing how anaphora both constructs and destabilizes ontological splitting. My translations closely track the Aramaic, avoiding as much as possible any restructuring and paraphrase for the sake of English felicity, in order to foreground the constructional scheme and its poetic and, ultimately, ontological effects.

B *Constructing and Destabilizing through Anaphora: Splitting the Waters, the Letters, the Directions*

The first passage I consider provides a brief and clear illustration of this technique:

> בגין דאית מין מתוקין ואית מין מרירן, אית מין צלילן ואית מין עכירן, אית מין שלם ואית מין קטטו, ועל דא המה מי מריבה ..[199]
>
> For *there are waters* sweet and *there are waters* bitter; *there are waters* clear and *there are waters* turbid; *there are waters* of peace and *there are waters* of strife. And, therefore, "these are the Waters of Quarrel ..." [Numbers 20, 13].

The repeating anaphora, "*there are waters* ... *there are waters*," constructs an ontology of a split cosmos, with the contours of that cosmos left indeterminate. There seems to be no reason why the repetitive contrasts of "waters" could not be multiplied indefinitely. This brief text thus suggests both the close connection between rhetoric and ontology – the anaphora "*there are* ... *there are*" consists, indeed, of an ontological assertion! – but also the non-transparency of their relationship. The sense that one could keep multiplying the various "waters" indefinitely strongly suggests the irrelevance of the identification of individual occurrences with specific Sefirot or even with more general levels of the divine and demonic realms.

To be sure, some traditionalist commentators have attempted to make such identifications, interpreting, for example, the three parallel pairs of "waters" in this passage as referring to the left, right, and center of each of the two realms.[200] Yet such interpretations do not seem compelled or even motivated by the content of the text, let alone its poetic cadence. Their forced quality serves

199 *Zohar* I, 66a.

200 Both the *Sulam*, I, 51 and the *Matok Midevash*, II, 81 interpret these three kinds of "water" as the left, right, and center columns of the holy and demonic dimensions.

primarily to highlight one of the many ways Zoharic poetic imperatives often swamp such hermeneutic aspirations. In the face of the poetic rhythm of the repeated anaphora in this passage, which seems capable of indefinite extension, such prosaic efforts impoverish, rather than deepen, an appreciation of Zoharic textuality.

Nevertheless, in relation to other passages, such efforts to distinguish the references of the successive phrases may make more interpretive sense. The following passage, working through a juxtaposition of several distinct, anaphorically established parallelisms, and containing both upper/lower and divine/demonic parallelism, provides an example:

> בגין דאית אתוון רברבין ואית אתוון זעירין, אתוון רברבין לעילא ואתוון זעירין לתתא וכלא לתתא כגוונא דלעילא, בגין דאית שמהן עלאין קדישין דקיימין ברעו דרוחא ולבא בלא מלולא כלל, ואית שמהן תתאין קדישין דקיימין במלה ובמשיכו דמחשבה ורעו עלייהו, ואית שמהן אחרנין לתתא דאינון מההוא סטרא אחרא דאיהי סטרא דמ־ סאבא ואלין לא קיימן אלא ברעו דעובדא לתתא לסלקא רעו דההוא עובדא דלתתא לגביה, בגין דאיהו סטרא אחרא לאו איהי אלא בעובדין דהאי עלמא לאסתאבא בהון כגוונא דבלעם ... וכל אינון דמתעסקי בההוא סטרא אחרא.[201]

> For *there are letters* greater and *there are letters* lesser. Letters greater above, and letters lesser below. And all below is as above. For *there are names*, holy, upper, that exist in the will of the spirit and the heart without any speech; and *there are names*, holy, lower that exist in the word and in the drawing upon them of thought and will; and *there are names* other, below, those that are from that Other Side, which is the contaminated side. And these only exist through the will to action below, to raise the will to action below up to it [i.e., to the Other Side] ... like Balaam ... and all those who occupy themselves with that Other Side.[202]

In this passage, two primary kinds of parallelism are at work: between the upper and lower divine ["*there are letters* ... and *there are letters*";] and between these two divine levels and the demonic realm ["for *there are names* ... and *there are names* ... and *there are names*"]. The two divine levels, the two kinds of "letters," can be read as the holy forces emanating, respectively, from the third *Sefirah, Binah* [Understanding], and the tenth *Sefirah, Malkhut* [Royalty] – both figured as female, often personified as the Supernal Mother and her daughter,

201 *Zohar* II, 180b.
202 *Zohar* II, 180b.

the *Shekhinah*.[203] The "lower" holy forces, those emanating from *Malkhut* [Royalty], vehicles of channeling vitality from the divine to the earthly level, are then, by means of anaphora, placed rhetorically parallel both to the holy forces above them and to the demonic forces below them. Moreover, in addition to the anaphora that juxtaposes the "greater" and "lesser" letters ["for *there are letters* greater and *there are letters* lesser"], the passage adds two overlapping anaphoras referring to three kinds of names: first, a juxtaposition of the upper and lower divine levels – "for *there are names* holy, upper … and *there are names*, holy, lower"; second, a juxtaposition of the divine and demonic realms – "and *there are names*, holy, lower … and *there are names*, other, below."

This complex set of rhetorical parallelisms is crucial to the force of the passage's ontological claims concerning the reciprocal flow of influence and power between the metaphysical and human levels. The divine "names," upper and lower, flow to human will, thought, and word; the demonic "names" are pressed into efficacious service by nefarious human action – emphasized by the reference to Balaam, an evil magician in rabbinic and kabbalistic tradition. The passage thus presents a tight correlation between rhetorical structure (parallelism between cosmic realms, levels, and dimensions) and ontological claim (efficacious channeling of energy among them). This correlation is particularly salient here, since the passage explicitly thematizes language ("letters" and "names") as a vehicle of efficacious action. This reflexive feature of the passage highlights the way Zoharic rhetorical structure is crucial to the persuasiveness of its ontological portrayals – and not only to the reader, but to cosmic reality itself.

The following passage provides an even more complex instance:

> אית ימינא לעילא, ואית ימינא לתתא, אית שמאלא לעילא, ואית שמאלא לתתא, אית ימינא לעילא בקדושה עלאה, ואית ימינא לתתא דאיהו בסטרא אחרא, אית שמאלא לעילא בקדושה עלאה, לאתערא רחימותא לאתקשרא סיהרא באתר קדישא לעילא לאתנהרא, ואית שמאלא לתתא דאפריש רחימותא דלעילא, ואפריש לה מלאנהרא בשמשא ולאתקרבא בהדיה, ודא הוא סטרא דחויא בישא דכד שמאלא דא דלתתא אתערת, כדין משיך לה לסיהרא ואפריש לה מלעילא, ואתחשכת נהורהא ואתדבקת בחויא בישא[204]
>
> *There is Right* above and *there is Right* below. *There is Left* above and *there is Left* below. *There is Right* above in supernal sanctity and *there is Right*

203 On the Sefirot of *Binah* [Understanding] and *Malkhut* [Royalty] as sources of "greater" and "lesser" emanations, see passages such as *Zohar* II, 174a and II, 205b.

204 *Zohar* I, 53a.

> below which is on the Other Side. *There is Left* above in supernal sanctity, which arouses love, to bind the Moon to a sacred site to illumine, and *there is Left* below, which separates love from above, and separates Her from illumining through the Sun and drawing near to Him. And this is the side of the evil Serpent, for when this lower Left arouses, then it draws away the Moon, and separates Her from above. And the light darkens and She cleaves to the Serpent.[205]

This passage's rhetorical parallels construct two cosmic divisions: between the divine and the demonic realms, here identified with upper and lower levels ["*there is* above … *there is* below"], and between right and left dimensions ["*there is* Right … *there is* Left"] within each realm. The passage also employs rhetorical parallelism to construct an opposition between theurgical actions of two antithetical forms of "the Left": the action of the holy left side to arouse love between the divine male and female (the "Sun" and the "Moon," common names for the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah), and the action of the demonic left side (the "Serpent") to separate them and draw the female to the demonic. Following Charles Mopsik, we can distinguish these actions as "theurgy" versus "theoclasty," i.e., construction versus destruction of the divine, or, perhaps more precisely, as "divine theurgy" versus "demonic theurgy."[206] The repeating cadences of the anaphora both construct the ontological and theurgical oppositions and create the persuasiveness for the reader, and perhaps for the cosmos, of the efficacity of the beneficent and maleficent theurgical actions.

In all three of these passages, the anaphoric rhythm takes on a rhetorical force that is relatively autonomous from semantic content. This force stems from the anaphora's repetition as it takes us from right to left, above to below, divine to demonic. In the second ("letters and names") and the third ("Right and Left") passages, rhetorical power seems to pass over into ontological efficacy, opening up theurgical access among the various planes.

Thus, in the second, "letters and names," passage, the overlapping rhetorical parallelisms induce the reader, and perhaps the cosmos, to be carried along from plane to plane to the point of assenting to the efficacy of Balaam's magic. The rhetorical parallelisms create the sense of ontological accessibility from the upper divine levels, to the lower divine levels, to the human level – and then, shifting from the divine to demonic realms, creating the sense of accessibility from the metaphysical demonic level to the human level of Balaam.

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205 *Zohar* I, 53a.

206 Mopsik, *Les Grands Textes de la Cabale,* 85 & 98.

The rhetorical production of ontological efficacy through overlapping parallelisms is even more salient in the third, "Right/Left," passage. In this passage, the rhetorically seductive power of the constructional scheme seems to be the basis of the erotically seductive power of the demonic. The hypnotic power of anaphoric repetition, the overlapping and even confusion of levels, dimensions, and realms it induces, appears to be the secret of the Serpent's success in luring the Shekhinah away from her proper consort. The complex juxtapositions of anaphoric parallelisms, leading hypnotically from level to level, dimension to dimension, and realm to realm, reversing their valences as the passage shifts from one plane to another, creating the danger of confusion and the lure of misprision, makes possible the ontological contamination of the divine. Nonetheless, as in the "names and letters" passage, it is also the juxtapositions of rhetorical parallelisms that make plausible the beneficent access among levels, such as those between the human, the lower divine, and the upper divine.

The demonic, however, destabilizes the constructive relation between rhetoric and ontology in deeper ways than the seductions of the Serpent. Consider its effects, for example, on the ontological vision most consistent with a pervasive use of anaphora: a cosmos of infinite correspondences, each facet reflected in all others. The second of these three passages expresses this vision in the formula, "everything below is in the manner of above." Numerous Zoharic texts use variants of such "as above, so below" formulae, evoking several distinct implications. These include: *the ontological*, a kind of Platonic idealism (everything below is based on a model above);[207] *the performative*, a theurgical imperative (the repair or even construction of the divine depends on human action);[208] and *the visionary* (the pre-lapsarian human being dwells in a place in which all facets of the universe are accessible to experience).[209] In passages such as the three under discussion here, the plausibility of all three kinds of implications, ontological, theurgical, and visionary, derives much of its force from the constructional scheme of anaphora-based parallelism.

Yet the move from the rhetorical scheme of parallelism to this ontological vision becomes profoundly troubling when we consider that the demonic realm

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207 E.g., *Zohar* I, 186b.

208 E.g., *Zohar* III, 113b.

In Neoplatonism, theurgy, the attracting of divine energy to the world, is not only consistent with, but based on, the ontological vision of correspondences between dimensions ("cosmic sympathy"). Kabbalistic theurgy is often based on a kind of reverse Platonism, in which the upper levels depend on the lower levels, including the human level, for their construction.

209 E.g., *Zohar* I, 38a (*Hekhalot di-Bereshit, Palaces of Genesis*).

is one of the facets brought into correspondence with all others. If everything below has its model above, this must also apply to evil; if actions below can theurgically effect the construction of the divine, so can they damage it and give ascendancy to the demonic;[210] if the pre-lapsarian Adam lives in a place where the divine is readily accessible to experience, the post-lapsarian human dwells in equal proximity to the divine and the demonic.[211]

The same rhetorical structures that create channels of ontological accessibility among all three levels (the upper and lower metaphysical levels and the human level) also create accessibility between the divine/demonic counterparts on each level. Just as the rhetorical parallelism linking the human, lower divine, and upper divine constructs a beneficent accessibility, so divine/demonic parallelism constructs a perverse accessibility. Such passages rhetorically construct the paradoxical conjunction of Bhabha's "resemblance" and "menace," of Moshe of Burgos' "twinning" and "death." The harmonious vision of infinite correspondences is, at the same time, a horror show of demonic contamination.

C *The Indeterminacy of Anaphora: the Uncertain "Ends" of Daniel and Jacob, the Protean "Thousand" of Solomon*

A key, even inevitable, consequence of the pervasive construction of the divine/demonic split through anaphora, and its attendant proliferation of antithetical homonyms, is interpretive indeterminacy. In a language increasingly marked by antithetical homonyms, it becomes ever-more difficult to determine the affiliation of any particular term with one or the other side of the divine/demonic split. I will discuss three Zoharic passages that explicitly thematize such interpretive indeterminacy, all passages in which anaphorically constructed parallelism plays a central role. The full significance of this indeterminacy is heightened when these passages are compared with related passages in Hebrew works by Moshe de León. My discussion of indeterminacy in these passages will deepen our sense of the complexity of the relationship of rhetoric and ontology, a key theme of this book.

The first passage, based on a midrashic homily, concerns the meaning of the word "end" [קץ; *kets*] as it appears in the last chapter of the book of Daniel. That chapter contains an enigmatic millennial vision, including a number of doublings and antitheses (12:2, 12:5 and 12:10), leaving Daniel baffled (12:8). A midrash interprets the chapter's last verse [12:13] as an abbreviation of a long

210 E.g., See *Zohar* III, 47a.

211 As in the "first palace" in which Hosea dwelled. See *Zohar* II, 245a.

dialogue between Daniel and God.[212] The verse proclaims to Daniel, translating in accordance with the midrashic reading, "And you, go to the end … to the end of *ha-yamin*" [ואתה לך לקץ … לקץ הימין]. The plain meaning of the last clause is clearly "the end of days," but it is spelled in quasi-Aramaic fashion [*ha-yamin* rather than *ha-yamim*] – which, if read hyper-literally as Hebrew, could mean "the end of the Right."

The midrash declares that the first clause of the verse ("go to your end") aroused an anxiety in Daniel as to what kind of "end" he would meet, a blessed or cursed fate. Even after receiving a favorable reply, he continued to worry about the timing of his reward: would it be at the final judgment day, the "End of Days" [אחרית הימים], or the time of the messianic salvation of the Jewish people [אחרית הימין – the "end of the Right"], interpreted as the end of the bondage of God's right hand during Israel's exile. The midrash declares that the unusual spelling of *yamin* shows that it would be the latter.

The Zoharic passage paraphrases this narrative but radically heightens the import of the reading of "*ha-yamin*" as "the right" by opposing it to "the left": "*there is end* to the right and *there is end* to the left" [אית קץ לימינא ואית קץ לשמאלא].[213] This anaphorically constructed parallelism transforms the term "end," already doubled in the midrash to designate two different "end-times," into an antithetical homonym, designating two antagonistic *personae*, divine and demonic. The passage identifies the demonic *persona* as the "Serpent … who comes from the side of the smelting of gold" [דא נחש … מסטרא דהתוכא דדהבא קאתי]: a characteristic Zoharic evocation of Sama'el, the male diabolical *persona*, whose emergence is often portrayed as a metastasis of the fifth Sefirah, *Gevurah* [Might], often associated with gold. The passage also identifies this *persona* with the Angel of Death. The passage does not name the corresponding divine *persona* on "the right," but we might infer its identity from common Zoharic associations. The Sefirah on the right that corresponds to *Gevurah* [Might] on the left is *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness]. A personification of this Sefirah would be a divine figure of pure mercy, usually associated with the name "*El*" and an apotheotic form of Abraham. The Zoharic interpretation of Daniel's uncertainty, aroused by the anaphorically constructed indeterminacy in the meaning of the term "end," takes on a truly terrifying cast: for Daniel

212 *Ekhah Rabati* in *Midrash Rabah*, III, 97b (2:6).

213 *Zohar* I, 63a. The passage conflates two questions posed by Daniel. The first concerned whether his fate lay with the righteous or the wicked, the second apparently concerned the time of this fate – at the "end of days" or at the "end of the right" [באחרית הימים או באחרית הימין].

now turns out to be in doubt as to whether he is being associated with a divine figure of mercy or a demonic Serpent of death, a god or a devil.

A second passage, also focused on the indeterminacy in the meaning of the term "end," gives this uncertainty an even more ominous turn. This passage draws on both the Daniel midrash and a midrash concerning Jacob on his deathbed. This latter midrash portrays Jacob attempting to reveal to his sons the "end of *ha-yamin*," again with the plain meaning referring to the "end of days," but spelled by the midrash in accordance with the Daniel form [קץ הימין; *kets ha-yamin*]. Jacob, however, was unable to do so because the "Shekhinah departed from him."[214] Responding to Jacob's fear that this departure was due to a defect in his progeny, the sons recited the *Sh'ma*, which, they proclaimed, signified that "just as there is in your heart only One, so there is in our hearts only One."[215]

The Zoharic text closely follows this midrash but reinterprets the meaning of the word "One" in two ways. It first views "One" as referring to the divine side in opposition to the demonic side:

> כדין אינון אמרי כמא דלית בלבך אלא אחד וגו', לית לן דביקו בסטרא אחרא כלל דהא פרישא הוה מערסך ואנחנא ביחודא חדא ולא הוינן כלל מסטרא אחרא לא ברעו ולא במחשבה[216]
>
> Then they replied, 'Just as there is only One in your heart, [so there is only One in our heart]. We have no attachment to the Other Side at all, for it was removed from your bed. And we are in one unification. And we are not at all from the Other Side, neither in desire nor in thought.

Shortly afterward, the passage interrupts its Jacob narrative with another anaphorically established contrast between the two kinds of "end," constructing an ontological divine/demonic split between antagonistic *personae*:

> ואיהו בעא לגלאה לון ההוא קץ כמא דאוקימנא דאית קץ ואית קץ, אית קץ הימין ואית קץ הימים. קץ הימין דא רזא מלכו דשמיא, קץ הימים דא מלכו חייבא רזא דסטרא אחרא[217]

214 Ashkenazi, *Yalkut Shim'oni*, 72d: ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה.
215 *Ibid.*: כשם שאין בלבבך אלא אחד כך אין בלבנו אלא אחד.
216 *Zohar* II, 134a.
217 *Zohar* II, 134a–b.

> He [Jacob] wished to reveal to them that end [*kets*], as we have established: for *there is end*, and *there is end. There is end of the right* [*kets ha-yamin*] and *there is end of days* [*kets ha-yamim*]. End of the right [*Kets ha-yamin*] is mystery of the kingdom of heaven. End of days [*Kets ha-yamim*] is the wicked kingdom, mystery of the Other Side.

In this passage, the two kinds of "end" are again transformed from their midrashic sense of alternative fates for an individual or nation into a contrast between opposed mythical *personae*. Specifically, the last two sentences (in my translation) employ the common Zoharic appellations for the corresponding divine and demonic female *personae*: on the one hand, the "kingdom of heaven," presumably the Sefirah of *Malkhut* [Royalty], the Shekhinah, and, on the other hand, the "wicked kingdom, mystery of the Other Side," presumably Lilith, the demonic counterpart to *Malkhut* [Royalty], the Shekhinah.

According to both the midrashic and Zoharic accounts, Jacob was unable to reveal the "end" because the "Shekhinah departed from him." In the midrash, this departure signifies a lapse in his prophetic powers, provoking his anxiety about his progeny. The Zoharic text, however, implies that Jacob's lapse was caused by the indeterminacy of the import of the "end," its oscillation between divine and demonic meanings. This indeterminacy, constructed in the Zoharic text by the anaphora, "there is … there is," leads Jacob into the domain of the demonic: with the departure of the Shekhinah, the "kingdom of heaven," he implicitly moves under the jurisdiction of the "wicked kingdom," Lilith. The declaration by Jacob's sons that these two kinds of "end" must be radically separated is an attempt to undo the damage caused by Jacob's errancy.

Like other passages discussed in this chapter, this text combines this divine/demonic parallelism with that between the upper and lower levels of the divine.

> אינון אמרו כמא דלית בלבך אלא אחד דאנת ברזא דעלמא עלאה ואיהו אחד, אוף אנן דהוינן ברזא דעלמא תתאה איהו אחד ועל דא אדכרו תרי לבבות[218]

> These [Jacob's sons] said, 'Just as there is only one in your heart, for you are within the mystery of the upper world, which is one, so too we, who are within the mystery of the lower world, which is one.' Therefore, two hearts are mentioned.

218 *Zohar* II, 134b.

As in the "letters and names" passage, the two divine levels are the "upper world," presumably *Binah* [Understanding], and the "lower world," presumably *Malkhut* [Royalty]. Though not employing the "there is … there is …" anaphora, this part of the passage establishes the relationship between the two levels through closely parallel phrases – and thereby introduces a second set of meanings for the word "One," the upper and lower human and divine.

The passage thus coordinates two parallelisms, divine/demonic and upper/lower divine, with radically different stances in relation to each. The midrashic declaration by Jacob's sons, affirming their shared faith in one God, gives way to a Zoharic statement about the relationship between the two parallelisms: first, it declares that the divine/demonic parallel, "kingdom of heaven"/"wicked kingdom" must be radically separated; second, it declares the beneficent parallelism of two holy unities, that of Jacob with the "upper world," *Binah* [Understanding], and of his sons with the "lower world," *Malkhut* [Royalty]. The proper arrangement of these two parallelisms, one in a state of separation, the other in alignment, is effected by the resolution of the indeterminacy created by the anaphora, "*there is end … there is end*." This proper arrangement of the parallelisms will ultimately prepare the way for still another unity – that between the divine bride (*Malkhut,* as empowered through her unity with her forces embodied in the sons) and her consort, the divine bridegroom (the blessed Holy One, often identified with Jacob, prepared for divine marriage by his relationship to his "Mother," *Binah*).[219] By the end of the passage, the multiplicity of parallel unifications of "Ones" has taken us far from the simple affirmation of divine unity in the midrash.

Yet this passage takes on its full significance only by comparison with a closely related passage in a Hebrew work of Moshe de León (1240–1305), a Spanish kabbalist widely viewed as one of the authors and/or editors of parts of the Zoharic literature, even if his precise role remains a subject of research and debate. In the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal* [*Book of the Balance*], de León refers to both the Daniel and Jacob midrashim and describes the relationship of the two kinds of "end" as that of *kelipah* [shell or husk] and *mo'aḥ* [kernel or essence]. The *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, however, takes a rather more complex stance to the relationship of the two kinds of "end" than the unequivocal call for their radical separation proclaimed by Jacob's sons in the Zoharic text.

The *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, in a seeming self-contradiction, pronounces both an imperative to separate the two realms *and* a prohibition on their separation. On the one hand, the "end [*kets*] of all flesh will be distanced from the sweet milk,

219 *Zohar* II, 134a. On the preparation of the divine bridegroom by his mother, see also, e.g., *Zohar* II, 84a.

and the holy people should make for themselves an extraordinary distance" from it.[220] On the other hand, Jacob "sought to break the *kelipot* and to reveal the *mo'aḥ* within … and since they [i.e., the *kelipot*] are needed for the world, the Shekhinah departed from him."[221] These two imperatives seem incompatible, and, indeed, the tension between the two subsists throughout the discussion. One might seek to harmonize the two kinds of statements by reading the text as affirming that the two realms must be integrated, but only in the proper way – presumably through the subordination of the evil realm to the needs of the good. Under any interpretation, however, the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal* takes a quite different stance than the Zoharic text's imperative of absolute separation between the divine and the demonic variants of "end" – two quite different stances in relation to the indeterminacy created by the antithetical homonymy of the "end." (It should go without saying, by now, that other Zoharic texts take equally or even far more complex stances on this same issue).

In the Zoharic passage, Jacob's sons properly separated the two kinds of "end," facilitating the union of higher and lower levels of the divine in and through the correspondence between Jacob's relationship to *Binah* and the sons' relationship to *Malkhut*. In the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal,* by contrast, it is Jacob's separation of the two kinds of "end" that brings about the rupture of his union with the Shekhinah and detracts from the requirements of the cosmos – though one must recall that the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal* also proclaims the need for separation, side-by-side with its proclamation that Jacob was wrong to effect it. The tension between these various imperatives, out of which these texts are woven, recalls the tension between the two stances towards the *kelipah* in the "benign *kelipah*" and "Lilith-*kelipah*" texts.

A more complex and potentially more dangerous indeterminacy comes to the fore in a Zoharic passage concerning two biblical usages of the term, "the thousand," [*ha-elef* האלף] and, implicitly, the mystery of Solomon's fall into idolatry.[222] Even more so than in the preceding discussion, passages from Moshe de León's works illuminate the stakes in the Zoharic passage. My discussion of these Zoharic and de León passages will show how such 13th century texts thematize the crucial, yet fraught, relationship between rhetoric and ontology that is central to this book. The distinctive danger that emerges from this relationship here is the opposite of the "heresy of paraphrase" which

220 Moshe de León, *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 147: וקץ כל בשר יתרחק מן החלב המתוק ויש לעם הקדוש לעשות [להם] הרחקה יתרה.

221 *Ibid.*, 159: בקש לשבר [הקליפות] ולגלות המוח אשר מבפנים … ומפני כי הם צורך העולם נסתלקה שכינה ממנו.

222 *Zohar* II, 227a–b.

I discussed in the Introduction. Rather, it is the danger of the seductions of rhetoric, particularly of the rhythms of anaphora: the desire for the Other that they arouse and the underestimation of the split between the antithetical homonyms that they induce.

This Zoharic passage discusses the question of whether "the thousand" should be interpreted as "holy" or as "profane" [חול] in the context of two verses, one from the Song of Songs (8:12) and one from Exodus (38:28). In a different manner than in the "end" passage, this discussion also echoes an uncertainty bequeathed from rabbinic literature, in the form of a Talmudic debate concerning the Song of Songs verse. The Talmudic debate, however, does not focus on the term "the thousand" but rather on the sacred or profane (i.e., divine or human) identity of the "Solomon" in the verse, "thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand [literally, "the thousand is yours (or, 'belongs to you') Solomon" [האלף לך שלמה] (Song of Songs 8:12).[223] The Zoharic passage compares the valence of "the thousand" in the Song of Songs verse with that in the Exodus verse, which concerns the building of the *mishkan*, the desert Sanctuary. Without explicitly mentioning the rabbinic debate, the passage transforms it in two ways: displacing (at least at first) the debate about the meaning of "Solomon" onto "the thousand" and displacing the debate from the Song of Songs verse, about which it assumes a consensus, onto the Exodus verse.

The Zoharic passage stages its doubt about the nature of "the thousand" in the form of a colloquy between Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yitsḥak. The latter expresses uncertainty, but proposes that "the thousand" is "profane" [*ḥol* חול] in both verses. Rabbi Elazar rejects this view, declaring that the word carries opposite valences in the two verses: profane in the Song of Songs, holy in Exodus. Moreover, the "profane" nature of the former "thousand" is not simply that of earthliness, as in the Talmudic discussion, but demonic, "from the contaminated Other Side" [מסטרא אחרא מסאבא].[224]

The passage goes on to proclaim that the divine and demonic realms must be separated, but then immediately issues an enigmatic qualification:

> בגין דבעינן לאפרשא בין קדש לחול, ורזא דקרא הכי הוא, (ויקרא י י) ולהבדיל בין הקדש ובין החול ובין הטמא ובין הטהור.ועכ"ד אע"ג דפרישו אית לקדש מן החול, חולקא חדא אית ליה בקדושא מסטרא דשמאלא, הדא הוא דכתיב האלף לך שלמה, דאינון אלף יומי החול, ואינון יומי דגלותא.[225]

223 See *bShavu'ot*, 35b.

224 *Zohar* II, 227a.

225 *Zohar* II, 227a–b.

> For it is necessary to separate the holy from the profane [חול *ḥol*]. And this is the mystery of the verse (Leviticus 10:10), "And that ye may put difference between holy and profane, and between contaminated and pure."[226] And nonetheless, even though the holy has a separation from the profane, it [the profane] has one portion in the holy from the left side. As it is written, "the thousand is yours (or, 'belongs to you') Solomon" [האלף לך שלמה] [Song 8:12],[227] these are the thousand profane days, and these are the days of exile.

In relation to the alternative between the two fates for the demonic that pervades the Zoharic literature, integration *versus* separation, this passage maintains the tension between them by juxtaposing them in an apparently unresolved manner. It presents an antithetical and asymmetrical parallelism between the two options, which fully appears only from a strictly literal translation: on the one hand, "the holy has a separation from the profane" [דפרישו אית לקדש מן החול]; on the other hand, the profane "has one portion in the holy" [חולקא חדא אית ליה בקדושא]. The Aramaic word I am translating here as "has" is the same word, "אית," "*it*," that appears in the pervasive Zoharic anaphora that establishes divine/demonic parallelism (in such contexts the appropriate translation is "there is"). The meaning of this "having," however, particularly in relation to the demonic "having one portion in the holy," is not evident from this text.

In designating the profane "thousand" as "days of exile," the passage seems to suggest that the demonic "having" of a "portion in the holy" is a relationship of capture, the capture of the earthly and/or divine "Israel." This passage could then be interpreted along the lines of other Zoharic passages that discuss the capture of the Shekhinah (often called the "Assembly of Israel," "*Kenesset Yisra'el*") by the demonic, commonly described as an assault from the "left side."[228] Alternatively, though less suited to the "exile" theme, it could be

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226 I note that I depart here from the KJV to translate *ḥol* as "profane," and "*tame*" and "*tahor*" in accordance with my usage throughout as "contaminated" and "pure," which I think conforms to the Zoharic understanding.

227 I depart from the KJV here to conform to the sense of the Zoharic interpretation.

228 See, in particular, *Zohar* I, 210a–b. As in the "ends" passage discussed above, this passage affirms the existence of two "ends": "end which is on the right, end on the left" [קץ איהו לימינא קץ לשמאלא]. It then laments the rule of the "left end" over the "right end" as a result of sin:

> דאתייהיב שלטנו להאי קץ דשמאלא ... דמלכו קדישא מלכות שמים אתכפיא, ומלכו חייבא אתגבר
>
> ... because rule was given to this end [*kets*] of the left ... for the Holy Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, has been subordinated and the Wicked Kingdom has overcome.
>
> *Zohar* I, 210b.

interpreted in conformity with those passages which describe the demonic as having an ontological foothold in the cosmos through its link to a small aspect of the Shekhinah (as in the "fingernail slime" passage).

The difficulty of deciding between these two interpretations may be related to the puzzling function in the passage of the verse-fragment, "the thousand is yours, Solomon." In its scriptural context, the plain meaning of the verse is that "the thousand," which the Zoharic text asserts is demonically "profane," *belongs to* Solomon, rather than vice versa, rendering the "exile" reference problematic. This puzzle, in turn, brings us back to the ambiguity of the repeated word, "has," "איתי," in the Zoharic text's paradoxical description of the relationship between the holy and the profane. It also implicitly brings back the Talmudic discussion, mostly elided in the Zoharic text, of the possible double meaning of the "Solomon" in the verse-fragment. When it cites the verse as a proof-text for the notion that the demonic "profane" "has a portion in the holy," the passage implies that this "Solomon" is "holy," some aspect of the divine. However, after a brief discussion of the earthly Israel's exile, the text declares that this "Solomon" is "profane," implicitly siding with one of the views in the Talmudic debate. One presumes that the passage intends the word "profane" here to designate a human, rather than divine, Solomon – but not, as in the preceding lines, in the sense of a demonic "profane." Nonetheless, this indeterminacy implicitly introduced into the word "profane" sets up a quandary with which commentators have wrestled.[229]

Immediately after its paradoxical statement about the relationship of the holy and the profane, the passage attempts to clarify matters by means of anaphoric pronouncements about the term "thousand":

> כמה דאית אלף יומין דקדושה הכי נמי אית אלף יומין לסטר אחרא .... ועל דא אית אלף ואית אלף[230]

> Just as *there are a thousand days* of holiness, so *there are a thousand days* on the Other Side ... and, therefore: *there is a thousand*, and, *there is a thousand*.

These confident pronouncements, however, may only serve to provide a rhetorical cause of the uncertainty about "the thousand": the pervasive antithetical homonymy established by the "there is ... there is" anaphora itself. These lines

229 See, e.g., Cordovero, *Or Yakar*, 11, 53a–b.
230 *Zohar* II, 227b.

make explicit the gravity of this uncertainty, for in the Zoharic idiom, which generally disregards the differences between multiples of ten, the parallelism between divine and demonic variants of a "thousand" clearly refers to the ten Sefirot of the two realms. Uncertainty about the divine or demonic affiliation of a "thousand" proves to be an uncertainty about the identity of the realms of the cosmos in which one is situated, the Side of Holiness or the Other Side. We will return to this gravest of all predicaments throughout this book, most extensively in the discussion of "impersonation" in Chapter 4.

Two Hebrew works of Moshe de León shed significant light on this passage by implying that the interpretive quandaries may originate not with its writer or readers, but with Solomon himself. In several of his works, de León interprets the Song of Songs verse-fragment as alluding to the deeper meaning of Solomon's relationship to his thousand wives and concubines – identified with the profane "thousand."[231] Thus, according to the *Shekel Ha-Kodesh* [*Holy Shekel*], Solomon took these wives because of his desire to fully know and complete (or "perfect") the Shekhinah, here called the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," by coming into relationship with its "evil side."[232] This "evil side" thus refers to the entire structure of the Other Side, in the person of Solomon's thousand foreign wives, the "domain of the Other God."[233] In Mopsik's gloss, they comprise the "exterior branches" of the "tree" of the Shekhinah.[234]

Solomon "intended to complete the interior" of the Shekhinah, "in the mystery of good and evil" [ונתכוון להשלים תוכן המדרגה הזאת בסוד הטוב והרע],[235] through integrating its two sides, subordinating the "evil side" to the "good side." Such integration would fulfill the proof-text offered by de León, "the queens

231 Moshe de León, *Sefer Shekel Ha-Kodesh*, 22–23; *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 149; *Sefer Ha-Rimon*, in Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de León's Sefer Ha-Rimmon*, 202.

232 *Sefer Shekel Ha-Kodesh,* 22–23 :
אמרו ודאי חכמת שלמה היא הנקראת עץ הדעת טוב ורע, והמלך שלמה אע"פ שהתחכם יותר משאר בני אדם רצה ונתכוון להשלים תוכן המדרגה הזאת בסוד הטוב והרע והיה לו לה־ חזיק תמיד בצד האחד אבל בזה אמרו שהיה לו להדבק תמיד בצד הטוב, וכוונתו היתה לכונן ולהתדבק בצד הטוב ובצד הרע ולדעת את שני הצדדין והכל לפי תשלום המדרגה הידועה
They said, certainly the Wisdom of Solomon is that which is called the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And King Solomon, even though he grew wiser than all other human beings, wanted and intended to perfect the interior of this level in the secret of good and evil. And it was incumbent upon him to hold fast to one side. And in relation to this they said they he should have cleaved always to the side of the good. And his intention was to prepare and to cleave to the side of good and to the side of evil, and to know both sides – all according to the completion of that well-known level.

233 בסבת אל אחר. Cf. *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 149.

234 Moshe de León, *Le Sicle du Sanctuaire,* 120 n. 179.

235 I am translating "תוכן" as interior. Mopsik, *Le Sicle*, 120, translates it as "meaning" or "import" ("*la teneur*").

and the concubines, and they praised her" [מלכות ופילגשים ויהללוה] (Song of Songs 6:9) – with the "queens and concubines" referring to the "evil side" and the "her" to the Shekhinah. Tragically, however, Solomon's quest ended in his fall: he "abandoned all that was above and cleaved to the nether region" [עזב כל מה שלמעלה ונתדבק למטה]. De León refers to this fall as Solomon's "error" [טעותו], a term, Mopsik declares, that seems deliberately chosen by de León over a term like "sin," due to Solomon's good intentions.[236] Solomon's desire for intimate knowledge, and ultimately the mythical embrace, of the Other fatally led him astray – or, more precisely, we should say that he *literally* embraced the Other in the person of his thousand wives, while his knowledge was still marked by "error," thereby preventing a full embrace between Self and Other.

This discussion in the *Shekel Ha-Kodesh* brings a new perspective on the Zoharic passage. Since the current state of scholarship does not permit us to define de León's precise role in the authorship or editorship of the Zoharic literature, there is no reason to presume an identical stance in the two texts. Nonetheless, in light of the *Shekel Ha-Kodesh* discussion, we can surmise that the uncertainties expressed by the Zoharic passage – the colloquy about the term "thousand," the ambiguity of the directionality of the "having" of this "thousand," the identity of "Solomon," the meaning of "profane" – correspond to a more dangerous uncertainty, that of Solomon, as well as the 13th century kabbalists who may have, at least partially, identified with his quest. Something akin to the "mistake" attributed to Solomon in the *Shekel Ha-Kodesh* – his overestimation of the ease with which the demonic could be fully known and properly integrated into the divine and his underestimation of its powerful seductiveness – may be read into the otherwise enigmatic transition in the Zoharic passage from the initial citation of the Song of Songs verse-fragment to the interpretation of "the thousand" as "days of exile." These uncertainties and dangers may suggest a sense among these 13th century kabbalists of the grave dangers lurking in their emphasis on engagement with the Other Side.

I would argue that the grave "mistake" of de León's Solomon and the association of the Zoharic Solomon with the demonic "days of exile" should be seen as an effect of the complex set of interpretive indeterminacies surrounding the Song of Songs verse, some inherited from rabbinic times, others surfacing in 13th century texts. In the Zoharic context, these indeterminacies should be seen as an effect of the anaphorically established divine/demonic parallelism and its distinctive byproduct, antithetical homonymy. The Zoharic rhetorical techniques thus provide something of a back-story for some longstanding interpretive and narrative puzzles concerning Solomon, going back not only to

236 *Ibid.*, 121 n. 82.

rabbinic literature but to the Bible itself. Above all: how could this "wisest of men," the builder of the Temple, have fallen so drastically at the end of his life, taking foreign wives in violation of divine prohibitions, and ultimately seduced into idolatry?[237]

Reading the de León and Zoharic texts together suggests that Solomon's fall, in the imagination of some 13th century kabbalists, was tightly linked to rhetorical seduction. In this reading, Solomon would have been led astray by the trance-like state induced by anaphoras such as "*there are a thousand …there are a thousand…. there is a thousand … there is a thousand*." Anaphora, like all constructional schemes, functions polysemously. It can set up an ontological expectation of a seamless set of correspondences among all dimensions of the cosmos, as well as of relatively easy access, on the level of knowledge and practice, from one dimension to the other. Yet it can also set up antithetical homonyms and an absolute ontological split between divine and demonic. Solomon, the "wisest of men," seduced by the rhetoric of anaphora with its allure of easy transitions between homonyms, thought that he had the cunning to bridge these two kinds of expectations and overcome the ontological split. This expectation of convergence between rhetoric and ontology, however, proved to be misleading, a danger particularly lurking in a polysemous scheme like anaphora.

Solomon's quest for knowledge and embrace of the Other would, indeed, be the ultimate *tikun*, as imagined in 13th century texts. Yet, this achievement proved to be too difficult even for Solomon, a failure for which I have offered here a new interpretation, based on a synthetic reading of the de León and Zoharic texts. Seduced by the rhetorical impression of seamlessness, Solomon confused the rhetorical for the ontological and committed a fatal "mistake": an over-estimation of his own ability to bridge these various divides. The easy rhetorical access created for Solomon by the anaphora ultimately brought about his ontological adherence to the "evil side."

De León's *Sefer Ha-Mishkal* has a very similar discussion of Solomon's ill-fated quest, intertwined with, among other things, its consideration of the term "end" I have analyzed above.[238] The *Sefer Ha-Mishkal* relates Solomon's quest to those of a number of other figures in the tradition, including Adam, Noah, and Elisha ben Avuyah (all of whom failed the ordeal) and Abraham (who succeeded).[239] The discussions of Adam, Noah, and Abraham have their close parallels in Zoharic passages, as does the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*'s extensive

237 1 Kings 11, 1–8.
238 *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 149.
239 *Ibid.*, 149–150.

discussion of the prophet Hosea who also sought to gain the same sort of knowledge and perform the same sort of *tikun* as Solomon.[240] The centrality of such quests, and the dangers and possibilities they embody, are at the core of the concerns of this book. Moreover, as I argued in the Introduction with reference to the Zoharic portrayal of Hosea, they are central to the legacy of the Scholem tradition in the academic study of kabbalah as a whole, to which we are all heirs.

D *Polysemic Schemes: Constructing the Proximate Heavens and the Distant Curtains*

While Zoharic rhetorical techniques construct Zoharic ontology, we have seen repeatedly that they do not do so in a linear or predictable fashion. On the contrary, the polysemous effect of such constructional schemes heightens both the urgency and precarity of the fateful struggles inherent in the Zoharic cosmos, the difficulties of drawing the crucial distinctions necessary for correct interpretation and practice, and the sublime opportunities and terrifying dangers facing both the readers of the Zoharic literature and the human and divine figures it portrays. Rhetorical parallelism, as we have seen, sets the stage for complex dramas of divine, demonic, and human quests for ontological unity and separation, as well as for the tragic misapprehensions and catastrophes that perennially beset such quests. The ever-present possibility of misprision is embedded deep in the techniques of Zoharic rhetoric, haunting all interpreters of Zoharic texts, be their concerns academic or religious. This lesson is one which Solomon ignored at his peril.

One Zoharic passage illustrates these complexities in a manner that also provides the occasion for a further reconsideration of Tishby's two models of the Other Side. In particular, I focus on the relationship between rhetorical parallelism and the two primary ontological structures outlined by Tishby, homology and concentricity. One might have expected that anaphorically established rhetorical parallelism should be read as suggesting structural homology – indeed, "parallelism" is the word Tishby uses to describe such homology. The Zoharic text I analyse in this section, however, not only employs rhetorical parallelism to construct concentric divine/demonic relationships, but engages in a subtle play with such expectations.

This text appears in a complex passage about the relationship of the soul to the various levels of the divine. The passage's principal imagery for these levels is that of "heavens," using the words *shamayim* [שמים] and *reki'in*

240 *Ibid.*, 149–151. Compare *Zohar* II, 245a.

[רקיעין] interchangeably.[241] Employing a "there are" anaphora to portray the relationship between upper and lower divine levels, the passage declares: "for *there are heavens* and *there are heavens*" [דאית שמים ואית שמים]. It then proclaims, based on Psalms 104:2, that the lower heavens are "ten curtains" [עשר יריעות] by means of which divine providence is exercised in the world.[242] The trope, "curtains," material which covers something else, constructs the relationship among divine levels as one of concentricity.

Several folios later, the passage explores the relationship between the lower divine heavens and their demonic counterparts.

> מהאי רקיעא נטלין כל אינון רקיעין דלתתא דלסטר קדושה, עד דמטו לאינון רקיעין אחרנין דלסטר אחרא, ואלין אקרון יריעות עזים,... בגין דאית יריעות ואית יריעות ... יריעות עזים אינון רקיעין אחרנין דסטרא אחרא ... ואלין רקיעין דלבר ... ואלין חפיין על אינון רקיעין דלגו, בקליפה על מוחא, רקיעין דלגו אינון ההוא קלישו דקסרא דקיימא על מוחא, ואלין אקרון שמים ליהו"ה[243]

> All heavens below on the side of holiness receive from this heaven,[244] until they arrive at those other heavens of the Other Side, called "goat curtains." ... For *there are curtains* and *there are curtains* ... Goat curtains are other heavens, of the Other Side ... and those are heavens of the outside ... and these cover those heavens of the inside, as *kelipah* on *moḥa*. The heavens of the inside are a thin membrane [*kelishu de-kisra*] that stands on a *moḥa*, and these are called "heavens for YHVH" [Psalms 115:16].[245]

The lower divine heavens and the demonic heavens, those of the "inside" and "outside," are both called "curtains." The passage stresses the demonic character of the "outside" curtains by identifying them with the biblical phrase "goat curtains" [יריעות עזים],[246] the goat a common trope for the demonic in Zoharic writing. These two sets of "curtains" are rhetorically set parallel to each other

241 The passage extends from *Zohar* II, 209a to II, 214b.

242 *Zohar* II, 209a.

243 *Zohar* II, 213a.

244 "This heaven" appears to be *Malkhut*, the Shekhinah, who bestows upon the "lower heavens" which conduct divine Providence to the world. They are closely identified with the Shekhinah, as the closing words of this excerpt indicate.

245 I note that I follow Matt in translating "*kelishu de-kisra*" as "thin membrane." Matt acknowledges that this reading is a bit speculative, but his arguments in its favor are strong. See Matt Translation, VI, 213, n. 316.

246 Exodus 26:7.

by means of anaphora ("*there are curtains* and *there are curtains*"), but their ontological relationship is one of concentricity: curtains surrounding curtains, "as *kelipah* to *moḥa*." The passage thus employs rhetorical parallelism to construct two relationships of concentricity – upper/lower divine and lower divine/demonic.

We have seen this tripartite structure (upper divine / lower divine / lower demonic) a number of times before, for example in the "letters and names" passage. In that passage, though, rhetorical parallelism operated to construct homologous, rather than concentric, relations between divine and demonic. Here, by contrast, concentricity is emphasized by the phenomenal image of curtains, and further underscored by the limitation of this imagery to the two lower levels. The passage does not refer to the uppermost divine level as a "curtain," for it is not a covering, but rather, that which is covered – specifically, a *moḥa* which is covered by holy curtains, the "heavens of the inside." The passage refers to these "inside heavens," whose character as coverings has been established by identifying them with "curtains," as a *kelishu* [קלישו], a thin membrane, that covers the *moḥa*. By contrast, it refers to the "heavens of the outside," identified with "the goat curtains," as a *kelipah* – with the *kelipah*/*kelishu* pair forming something of a Zoharic pun.

The passage thus employs two instances of anaphorically established rhetorical parallelisms, yielding the homonyms, "heavens/heavens," which may both be complementary (upper/lower divine) and antithetical (divine/demonic), as well as the antithetical homonyms "curtains/curtains" (divine/demonic). Its association of the two lower sets of "heavens" with "curtains" emphasizes the concentric structural relationship of the Other Side to the divine realm, as well as of the lower level of the divine realm to the upper level.[247] This clear combination of rhetorical parallelism and structural concentricity provides a further, rather stark, demonstration of the inadmissibility of a seamless movement from rhetorical impression to ontological status.[248]

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247 It is striking that a very similar portrayal of two sets of concentric entities that cover the Shekhinah is found in another passage whose basic imagery – that of "days" – seems far less congenial to the "covering" trope. At *Zohar* II, 204a, the text tells us that "there are days and there are days" (איתּ יומין ואיתּ יומין). In this passage, as in the "curtains" passage, these entities surround the Shekhinah (here called the "holy point," identified with the Sabbath). Like the "curtains," the "days" both protect and receive sustenance from the Shekhinah. And, like the "curtains," they are doubled by "profane days" which stand "outside," in the Other Side. Again, the "there is … there is…." anaphora is used in a context of concentricity, perhaps even more striking because of the incongruity of "days" as coverings for a central "point," and even more so as two concentric sets of coverings.

248 A number of features in this passage lend themselves to a comparison with the "benign *kelipah*" passage. In both passages, concentricity is characterized as "*kelipah*" at lower

I conclude this discussion of rhetorical parallelism with an explicit discussion of the phenomenon by Moshe de León. In the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal,* Moshe de León offers an explanation for the conjunction of rhetorical parallelism and ontological concentricity. Specifically, he addresses the employment of homonymy to designate two entities one of which is *mo'aḥ* and one of which is *kelipah* (though not in the context of the kind of constructional schemes I have been discussing in this chapter). Addressing the question of how the word "end" can be used to name both a *kelipah* and a *mo'aḥ*, de León focuses on the physical image of a nut, perhaps the primary inspiration for the *kelipah*/*mo'aḥ* imagery.[249] De León explains that, even though the kernel is the essence of the nut, the shell is also called "nut" when it is attached to the kernel. The homonymy results from the phenomenal integration of the shell and the kernel. When detached from the kernel, however, the shell loses the name "nut" and is merely called "shell."

This explanation, however, is not particularly persuasive even in the context in which de León offers it – after all, the *kelipah* in question is called "end" when it is at its most demonically destructive: "the end of all flesh … for it has no aspiration other than destruction and desolation" [קץ כל בשר … כי אין חקירתו אלא תכלית ושממון].[250] In any case, this explanation is completely inadequate when it comes to Zoharic writing. Far from lessening the divine/demonic opposition, homonymy is one of the main Zoharic techniques for setting the two realms in antithetical contrast, particularly when it is declaring the imperative to make an absolute separation between them. Indeed, the forced quality of de León's explanation only serves to highlight the disjunction between rhetorical form, such as the use of antithetical homonyms, and ontological status, such as the greater or lesser "splitting" between the two realms.

This discussion by de León, with its references to both the scheme of antithetical homonyms and the semantic content of the "nut/shell" trope, indicates the urgency of a detailed analysis of the distinctive Zoharic use of tropes. Rhetorical parallelism is far from the only technique that Zoharic writers use to set up relationships of resemblance-and-menace between the divine and the demonic, with all their attendant dangers and opportunities. I have argued, for example, that one source of the seductiveness of the demonic lies in hypnotic, chant-like rhetorical parallelisms, established through the

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levels and as a finer sort of covering at the higher levels – here called *kelishu*, there called "garment." However, here the level of the *kelipah* is clearly identified as pertaining to the Other Side and the notion of the relativity of the very status of *kelipah* and *mo'aḥ* is absent.

249 *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 158.

250 *Ibid*. Although the translation of תכלית as "destruction," in the sense of כליון, is somewhat unusual, it seems clearly warranted by the context. Cf. *Bamidbar Rabah*, 11, 122c (18:12).

constructional scheme of repeated anaphoras, rather than in the content of the images. By contrast, as I explore in detail below, one Zoharic text attributes the seductive power of the demonic precisely to phenomenal resemblance, specifically that of *nogah*, "brightness," to holy light. In addition, in the passage in which I presented my analysis about rhetorical seduction, the "upper left/lower left, upper right/lower right" passage, there was a strong suggestion of a homologous structural relationship between the divine and the demonic (even though, as I have insisted throughout this section, a correlation between rhetorical parallelism and ontological homology must never be assumed). By contrast, the "*nogah*/seduction passage," as we shall see, occurs in a context describing a contiguous, concentric relationship between *nogah* and the holy dimensions – as is, of course, generally the case with *nogah*. I, therefore, now turn from a focus on constructional schemes to a focus on certain key tropes whose distinctive employment also constructs the often dangerously ambivalent relationship between divine and demonic.

V The Rhetorical Construction of Splitting II: the Ambivalence of Tropes

In their distinctive employment of tropes, Zoharic texts construct the divine/demonic split in four principal ways. *Doubling*: an image may appear in two forms, divine and demonic, as in the anaphoras discussed above. *Division*: an image may be portrayed as physically divided, thus belonging to both realms. *Indeterminacy*: an image may lend itself to interpretation as either divine or demonic, giving rise to conflict among later commentators about the affiliation of specific images. "*Hyperbolic ambivalence*": an image, be it an object, a nonhuman creature, a human being, or a divine or demonic *persona*, may concentrate within itself diametrically opposite superlatives, an extremely high level of holiness and an extremely base level of contamination.

It might be tempting to use Tishby's framework to associate the first effect, that of doubling, with relationships of the Other Side to the divine that are geographically remote, structurally homologous, and essentially dualistic; the second effect, that of division, with relationships that are geographically proximate, structurally concentric, and only relatively dualistic, if at all; and the third effect, that of textual indeterminacy, with more complex textual constructions in which elements from both of Tishby's models are combined. In the preceding sections, however, I have put into question these associations between geography, structure, and essence as an adequate approach to reading Zoharic texts, an inadequacy as true of tropes as it is of schemes. We must,

instead, engage in close readings of individual passages to discover the distinctive and paradoxical ways Zoharic writers employ heterogeneous images to construct a split cosmos.

This paradoxicality is most evident in relation to the fourth kind of images, those I call images of "hyperbolic ambivalence." Such tropes are simultaneously divine and demonic, "highest" and "lowest," the holiest and the most contaminated, participating in both sides of the split cosmos, and capable of signifying radically opposed meanings. The capacity of such images to embody either or both of two radically incompatible valences derives from the nature of the image itself, rather than from interpretive quandaries. Such images embody the most condensed rhetorical technique for constructing ontological ambivalence.

This section focuses on specific images, highlighting the four mechanisms outlined here: doubling, division, indeterminacy, and hyperbolic ambivalence. In particular, I examine passages containing the imagery of dragons, examples of nonhuman creatures as well as divine and demonic *personae*, the biblical human figure of Job, and *nogah*, the "brightness" of Ezekiel's vision, an example of a metaphysical entity. This last discussion will bring together the analysis of tropes and schemes.

A *Dragons*

We find some of the Zoharic literature's most elaborately developed ambivalent imagery in its portrayals of a variety of reptilian creatures: the *naḥash*, נחש, the *ḥivya*, חויא, the *tanin*, תנין, and *livyatan*, לויתן, variously rendered in English translations as snakes, serpents, sea monsters, whales, crocodiles, leviathans, and dragons. I am partial to the last of these terms primarily because of its mythic resonance – but also because of the archetypally dragon-like Zoharic descriptions of some of these beings, particularly the *tanin*, featuring multiple wings, fire-breathing, gargantuan size, awesome power, fearsome swinging tails, and so on. In any event, while some of these translations may seem more suitable for one or the other of the reptiles, individual Zoharic passages also often use two or more of the reptilian designations interchangeably. In relation to these creatures, one finds all four characteristics of Zoharic imagery outlined above: doubling, division, indeterminacy, and hyperbolic ambivalence. We should perhaps not be surprised by this rich elaboration of ambivalence in relation to such creatures, for their ambivalent status goes back to rabbinic literature, to the Bible, and undoubtedly far earlier in ancient mythology.[251] More

251 The leviathan appears in the Talmud and midrashic literature as both a dangerous and potentially domesticable creature. For example, reading the verse, "that leviathan, whom

proximately in the history of kabbalah, it was the mid-13th century Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen of Soria, one of the main precursors of Zoharic writing on the Other Side, who elaborated this ambivalent imagery.

I highlight these creatures both because of their importance in kabbalistic portrayals of the Other Side and because of their challenge to some of the key dichotomies used to analyze it. Two 13th century texts give a sense of the range of such portrayals. One Zoharic passage employs a form of rhetorical parallelism to establish structural homology between holy and demonic reptilian counterparts: "this serpent is the death of the world … and it is on the left. The other serpent, of life, is on the right side" [האי חויא היא מותא דעלמא,... הוא לסטר שמאלא, חויא אחרא דחיי בסטר ימינא].[252] In contrast, in a short treatise dedicated to the "Mystery of the Serpent," Yosef Gikatilla (ca. 1248–1305), a kabbalist closely related to Zoharic circles, portrayed it as bearing a concentric relationship to the realm of holiness.

> ובתחילה היה עומד מחוץ לכתלי מחנות הקדושה והיה מחובר לכותל חיצון שבמחנות, אחוריו היו דבוקות בכותל ופניו פונות כלפי חוץ[253]
>
> And in the beginning it stood outside the walls of the camps of holiness and was joined to the outermost wall of these camps. Its hindquarters cleaved to the wall and its face was turned outward.

Gikatilla portrays the serpent's proper dwelling-place as contiguous, indeed joined, to the "wall" surrounding the "holy camps." It may even be part of that "wall," its back attached to the "inside," the divine realm, its face turned to the "outside," the demonic realm. Gikatilla thus portrays the serpent as a liminal being, forming, or even identified with, the very border between the divine and demonic realms. This location makes the serpent key to constructing the split in the cosmos, but also, thereby, gives it the power to destabilize that split. This portrayal is closely related to those of *nogah*, a similarly liminal entity, indispensable for the construction of the concentric structure of the *kelipot*, but also a potential source of destabilization. Gikatilla declares that the serpent serves a divine purpose as long as it keeps to its proper place, maintaining the

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thou hast made to play therein" [לויתן זה יצרת לשחק בו] (Psalms 104:26), a midrash describes this creature as one of God's domestic animals. See *Shemot Rabah* 1, 146a (15:22). The images of these creatures in kabbalah as well as in earlier literature have been analyzed by Yehudah Liebes in a variety of his works. See, e.g., *Sod Ha-Emunah ha-Shabeta'it*, 328–329. See generally, Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking*, esp. chapter 11.

252 *Zohar* 1, 52a.

253 Gikatilla, *Sod Ha-Naḥash u-Mishpato*, 192. See also Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, 78–80.

border between divine and demonic. The serpent only becomes destructive when it leaves its appointed place just outside the garden and enters it – a vivid instance of the perversion of the concentric relationship, other versions of which I discuss below.

More commonly, though, 13th century texts portray demonic reptiles as structurally homologous to their holy counterparts. Thus, Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen's *Treatise on the Left Emanation* systematically portrays the doubling of the reptile into divine and demonic forms.[254] The *Treatise* introduces the *livyatan* first as a term for the Sefirah of *Yesod* [Foundation] which unites the divine bride and bridegroom, also known as the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah, and here associated with the Sefirot of *Tif'eret* [Beauty] and *Malkhut* [Royalty]. Using the terms *livyatan, tanin,* and *naḥash* interchangeably, it goes on to describe a blind reptile [תנינעור] who serves as a demonic counterpart to the Sefirah *Yesod*, uniting Lilith and Sama'el, the demonic counterparts to the divine bride and bridegroom. It then declares that each of the three demonic entities, Lilith, Sama'el, and their phallic intermediary (their *shoshbin*, שושבין), may be called a *livyatan*. The passage's emphasis on homology between divine and demonic entities[255] implies that the term *livyatan* may also be applied to each of the three relevant divine entities, the divine bride, bridegroom, and their phallic intermediary, the Sefirah *Yesod*.[256] Similarly, in another text, Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen analogizes the messiah to a serpent who takes his vengeance on an evil serpent.[257] This text seems to be the source for the equivalence between the messiah and the serpent, reinforced by their numerical equivalence (358 =

254 See Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, 'Ma'amar 'al Ha-Atsilut Ha-Semalit', 99–101. The doubling relationship between the holy and unholy is summarized on p. 100:
כשם שיש לויתן טהור בים כפשוטו ונקרא תנין כך יש תנין גדול טמא בים כפשוטו. וכן למעלה על דרך הנעלם.
Just as there is a pure *livyatan* in the sea, literally, and it is called *tanin*, so there is a great contaminated *tanin* in the sea, literally. And so it is above in the way of concealment.

255 *Ibid.*:
וכן אמרו ז"ל ואף לויתן זכר ונקבה בראם זה עם זה וזה עם זה, טהור ושאיננו טהור
And so they said, and even the *livyatan* was created male and female, this with this, and this with this, the pure and the one who is not pure.

256 These associations are made explicit by Cordovero, in *Pardes*, 11, 55c–d, commenting on the Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen text. I note that this passage has been implicitly commented on in a wide range of other texts, including the *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah,* 24b, and Ḥayim Vital's *Sefer Ha-Likutim*, 50a.

257 Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, 'Ta'amei Ha-Ta'amim', in Scholem, *Kabbalot*, 111. On these themes in the Zohar, see Yehudah Liebes, 'Ha-Mashiaḥ shel Ha-Zohar', 35–38.

משיח = נחש), influential in Sabbatean and post-Sabbatean texts, particularly in Moshe Ḥayim Luzzatto (1707–1746).[258]

Zoharic texts frequently portray such reptilian doubling. The *naḥash*, the biblical Hebrew word for the serpent in the Garden, is a key Zoharic appellation for diabolical *personae* – sometimes referring to the male devil, Sama'el, sometimes to his female consort, Lilith.[259] Of the *ḥivya*, as I have noted, one Zoharic text tells us that there is a bad, "left" form, a form which "is death to the world," and a good, "right," form, a *ḥivya* of "life" – both of which always accompany every human being and who thus seem, in this text, to be more like *shedim,* the demonic spirits who pervade everyday life.[260] A related kind of doubling appears in the portrayal of the *taninim*. Zoharic texts generally portray the *taninim* as the ultimate embodiments of evil, but also as the holy "fathers," presumably the Sefirot of *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif'eret*,[261] and even as the "supernal *taninim*" that "abide above – those that are blessed" [תנינייא עלאין לעילא קיימין אינון דמתברכאן].[262]

One Zoharic passage characterizes the doubling of the reptilian creatures, and their metaphysical or human avatars, as an effect of the struggle between them. This passage identifies the *taninim* of Genesis 1:21 with Jacob and Esau,[263] figures often taken as embodiments or agents of the central divine and demonic *personae*. It depicts Jacob engaged in battle with Esau, who "cleaved to the crooked *ḥivya*." In this battle, Jacob uses tactics that draw upon that demonic reptile's holy counterpart, the "other crooked *ḥivya*."[264] The human battle

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258 *Sefer Tikunim Ḥadashim,* 372:
ומשיח כגונא דא איהו נחש, לקבל נחש דא
And the Messiah in like manner is a snake, corresponding to that snake

259 Contrast *Zohar* I, 23b, (*naḥash* as Sama'el), with I, 148a (*Sitre Torah*), (*naḥash* as Sama'el's female consort).

260 *Zohar* I, 52a.

261 For the latter interpretation, see *Zohar* III, 39b:
את התנינים הגדולים אלין אבהן דאינון אשתקיין בקדמיתא ומשתרשאן על כלא.
"The great *taninim*": these are the fathers, for they are watered first [i.e., receive divine vitality from the higher levels] and spread their roots over all.

262 *Zohar* II, 27b.

263 *Zohar* I, 138b.

264 *Zohar* I, 138a–b:
ותא חזי יעקב הוה ידע דעשו הוה ליה לאתדבקא בההוא חויא עקימא, ועל דא בכל עובדוי אתמשך עליה חויא עקימא אחרא בחכמתא בעקימו והכי אצטריך. ואתייא הא כי הא דאמר רבי שמעון דכתי' (בראשית א') ויברא אלהים את התנינים הגדולים, דא יעקב ועשו. ואת כל נפש החיה הרומשת, אלין שאר דרגין דבינייהו. ודאי אתעביד יעקב חכים לקבלי' דההוא חויא אחרא והכי אצטריך
And come and see: Jacob knew that Esau had to cling to that crooked serpent, and therefore in all his actions, he drew himself upon him like another crooked serpent, with

between good and bad twins thus participates in the cosmic battle between divine and demonic reptilian doubles, twins even in their "crookedness." This kind of imagery comes very close to a narrative elaboration of the demonic Other who is both the "twin" and the "death" of God that we found in Moshe of Burgos.

At least one Zoharic passage opts for a divided, rather than doubled, image, portraying good and bad dimensions of a single being. The serpent who "bows its head to the dust" while "he raises his tail, … dominates, and strikes," is a creature physically divided between the Shekhinah and the Other Side.[265] This divided serpent may be viewed as an icon of the deep ambivalence with which

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wisdom, with crookedness, and it was necessary thus. And so came about that which Rabbi Shim'on said: "it is written, 'And Elohim created the great *taninim*' (Genesis 1, 21) – this is Jacob and Esau; "and every living creature that crawleth" – these are the other rungs among them. Indeed, Jacob became wise corresponding to that other serpent and it was necessary thus.

The exact metaphysical status of "Jacob" in this passage is complex, as suggested in the immediately preceding lines, *Zohar* II, 138a:

והכא ויקרא שמו יעקב, בכל אתר שמיה לא אקרי על ידא דב"נ, באתר אחרא מה כתי' (בראשית לג כ) ויקרא לו אל אלהי ישראל, קב"ה קרא לו אל ליעקב, א"ל אנא אלהא בעלאי ואנת אלהא בתתאי

And here, "He called him Jacob" [Genesis 25, 26]. In no place was his name called by a human being. In another place, what is written? "And he called him *El*, the Elohim of Israel" [Genesis 33:20] – the blessed Holy One called Jacob *El*. He said to him, "I am God among the upper beings and your are God among the lower beings."

This interpretation here derives from *bMegilah*, 18a. The Talmudic teaching runs directly counter to the teaching in *Bereshit Rabah*, 1, 94c (79:8), which attributes the divine naming of Jacob to Jacob himself and declares that he was punished for his arrogance. Naḥmanides' commentary on the Genesis verse makes explicit the notion of Jacob's apotheosis, identifying his earthly divinity with that of the Shekhinah. See Matt Translation, II, 270–271, n. 27.

265 See *Zohar* III, 119b:

בכה רבי אלעזר. פתח ואמר (ירמיה מו) :קולה כנחש ילך וגו ' השתא בהאי גוונא דישראל בגלותא איהי ודאי אזלא כנחש. חויא כד איהו כפיף רישא לעפרא וסליק זנבא כדין זנבא שליט ומחי לכל אינון דאשכח קמיה. מאן עביד לזנבא דאסתליק לעילא ושליט ומחי, רישא דאתכפיא לתתא. ועם כל דא מאן מדבר ליה לזנבא ומאן נטיל ליה למטלנוי, האי רישא, אע"ג דאיהו כפיף לעפרא הוא מדבר ליה למטלנוי. בגין דא השתא שאר עמין דאינון אחידן בזנבא סלקין לעילא ושלטין ומחיין ורישא כפיף לעפרא

Rabbi Eliezer wept. He opened and said: "The voice thereof shall go like a serpent" (Jeremiah 46:22). Now that Israel is in this manner in exile, she [the Shekhinah] certainly does go like the snake. When the snake bows its head to the dust, it raises his tail, dominates, and strikes all those found before it. What causes the tail to ascend upward, dominate and strike? The [fact that the] head is bowed down. But nonetheless, what is it that drives the tail and what bears it on its journeys? This head. Even though it is bowed to the dust, it still drives [the tail's] journeys. Therefore, at the present time, the other peoples, who cleave to the tail, ascend and dominate, and strike, and the head is bowed to the dust.

the Shekhinah is portrayed throughout the Zohar – merciful and destructive, maternal and monstrous, the indispensable gateway to holiness and the divine entity most susceptible to capture by the demonic.[266]

I now turn to textual indeterminacy, the third effect I associate with Zoharic divine/demonic tropes. The history of the reception of the Zohar suggests that at least some of the Zoharic *taninim* may bear an irreducibly indeterminate relationship to the divine/demonic divide. Above all, the *taninim* who figure in the most extended Zoharic discussion of the subject, the so-called *Ma'amar Ha-Taninim* [*Treatise on the Dragons*] in the pericope *Bo*,[267] have been the subject of sharply conflicting interpretations. Some traditional commentators view these beings as demonic and others as divine; still others interpret the *taninim* in this passage as referring both to their divine and demonic forms.[268] Nor is it surprising that such images were favored in Sabbatean writings, as in the *Derush Ha-Taninim* [*Discourse on the Dragons*] of Nathan of Gaza (1643–1680), an elaborate commentary on this Zoharic passage.[269] According to Scholem, for Nathan, the "great *tanin*" alludes both "to a holy entity and to a demonic

266 A terrifying passage in the *Ra'ya Mehemena*, *Zohar* III, 282a, contains a succinct portrayal of such capture:

ובת מלך אסירא בסרכות בבית הסהר בגלותא דילה, ואיהי קינא דסמא"ל בין כוכביא, וקוד־שא בריך הוא אומי, (עובדיה א ד) אם תגביה כנשר ואם בין כוכבים שים קנך משם אורידך נאם יהו"ה

And the king's daughter is bound in manacles in prison, in her exile, which is the nest of Sama'el among the stars. And the blessed Holy One swears (Obadiah 1:4), "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith YHVH."

Much of the passage is concerned with the perverse domination of the "mistress," the Shekhinah, by her bondwoman, Lilith.

267 *Zohar* II, 34a–35b.

268 Compare, for example, the interpretations of Ḥayim Vital (*taninim* in *Zohar Bo* as demonic) with those of the *Sulam* and, perhaps, the Vilna Gaon (*taninim* in *Zohar Bo* as holy). Ḥayim Vital, *Sefer Ha-Likutim*, 4c; *Sulam*, VII, 201–211; Gaon of Vilna, *Yahel Or*, 1c (pagination in commentary to *Parashat Shemot*). Cordovero, though his interpretation focuses on the *taninim* as holy, also stresses the strict parallelism between the holy and unholy dimensions as key to understanding the passage. *Or Yakar*, VII, 176b. See also *Pardes*, 55c–d. Ibn Tabul interprets the *taninim* in the passage as referring both to the holy and unholy dimensions. See Rubin, *"Derush ha-taninim" le-R. Yosef Ibn Ṭabul*, 22–86. Rubin also provides an overview of the range of interpretations of the passage.

269 Nathan Benjamin ben Elisha HaLevi of Gaza (1643–1680) is best known as the prophet of the messianic Sabbatean movement. Sabbateanism, and Nathan of Gaza in particular, have been central concerns of leading scholars, including Scholem, Tishby, Liebes, Rapoport-Albert, Wolfson and Avraham Elkayam.

entity which is to be repaired by the holy entity whose name is identical to it."[270] Nor should this indeterminacy be reduced to willful misreading by the interpreters; rather, it can be seen as an almost predictable effect of the Zoharic practice of doubling and dividing such images – and perhaps of a deliberate rhetorical strategy.

One final Zoharic instance of reptilian imagery must be mentioned, for it provides an example of hyperbolic ambivalence. I refer to the serpent (*ḥivya*) portrayed at the beginning of the *Sifra di-Tsni'uta* [*Book of Concealment*] section of the Zoharic literature – or, at least, this being as interpreted by Yehudah Liebes:

> גלופי דגלופין כחיזו דחויא אריך ומתפשט לכאן ולכאן, זנבא ברישא, רישא אחורא כתפין, אעבר וזעים, נטיר וגניז[271]
>
> Engravings of engravings, like the appearance of a long serpent, spreading out here and here – tail in the head, head behind the shoulders, enraged and furious, guarded and hidden.

The passage prefaces this reptilian portrayal, evoking archetypal mythical imagery, with a counter-intuitive interpretation of the second verse of Genesis ("And the earth was without form [*Tohu*] and void [*Bohu*])." The passage does not read this verse as referring to what preceded the first creation of light, its evident contextual meaning. On the contrary, it understands it as depicting the aftermath of the final destruction of our world, apparently after the completion of a cosmic cycle.[272] As a result of this destruction, the passage continues, quoting Isaiah 2:11, "YHVH will alone be exalted in that day."

Liebes reads these two contiguous portrayals together, though they are not explicitly connected in the text. In his interpretation, this *ḥivya* refers to a "divine force that seeks to return from the harmony in creation" to the state of primordial "chaos."[273] This "harmony" – the balance between male and female, to which the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta*, indeed the entire Zoharic literature, is dedicated – gives way to the lone *ḥivya* who "reveals its nature as the solitary

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270 Scholem, *Be-Ikvot Mashi'aḥ*, 11 [על דבר שבקדושה וגם על דבר שבקלפה המיתקן ע"י אותו דבר שבקדושה ששמו כשמו].

271 *Zohar* II, 176b (translation, slightly modified, from Matt Translation, V, 551).

272 This portrayal is associated by Liebes with the doctrine of the cosmic cycles, or *shemitot*, a doctrine generally absent from the Zohar, *ibid.*, and explicitly rejected by Moshe de León. See, e.g., *Sefer ha-Mishkal,* 92–93. See Liebes, 'Ketsad Nitḥaber', 72.

273 Liebes, *Torat Ha-Yetsirah*, 135–136 [הכח האלהי המבקש לחזור מההרמוניה שבבריאה אל מצב הכאוס].

God,"[274] the God of whom the Isaiah verse speaks. This divine *and* deadly *ḥivya* "never rests from its destructive efforts," and also "symbolizes a foundational and deep-rooted movement of existence," one that "is destined to prevail and triumph."[275]

This bold interpretation makes the ultimate force for cosmic destruction identical to the ultimate divine. It may also be linked to the kabbalistic notion, formulated particularly by the early 13th century Ezra and Azriel of Gerona, of the need for a "theurgy of maintenance" to counteract the tendency of the Sefirot to return to the *En-Sof*, due either to their natural desire for their source or to human sin.[276] Indeed, under Liebes' interpretation, the *Sifra di-Tsni'uta*'s arresting image of hyperbolic ambivalence may be closely associated with the astonishing identification by Ezra of Gerona of the highest level of the divine with "death and perdition"[277] – and with what Farber-Ginat calls the "anti-cosmic vector" in kabbalah.[278] While Liebes' interpretation may be contested, it draws its strength from the recurrence of hyperbolically ambivalent images, particularly of the reptilian variety, throughout the Zoharic literature.[279]

The story of the post-Zoharic career of these reptilian beings is long and varied. Indeed, this reception history could even be used as a guiding thread through the maze of kabbalistic history as a whole. In key texts of post-Zoharic kabbalah, the doubling of the dragon into divine and demonic forms becomes

274 *Ibid.* [מגלה את טבעו כאל היחיד].

275 *Ibid.*, 136 [אינו נח מנסיונות ההרס שלו ... מסמל תנועה יסודית ושורשית של ההוויה ... וזאת עתידה להתגבר ולהצליח].

276 Idel, *New Perspectives*, 181–182. See also Mopsik, *Les Grands* Text*es*, 103–106. Mopsik sees these two divergent explanations as a contradiction within the writings of Ezra of Gerona.

277 Ezra of Gerona, 'Peirush le-Shir Ha-Shirim,' in *Kitvei Ha-Ramban II* (Chavel ed.), 504.

278 Asi Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet La-Pri', 118–142.

279 Liebes' interpretation rests on the parallel between two successive portrayals at II, 176b. The first seems to portray an ultimate return of the creation to chaos, followed by the verse about the solitary God:

> ולבסוף תהו ובהו וחשך, (ישעיה ב יא) ונשגב יהו"ה לבדו ביום ההוא ...
>
> And in the end, "*Tohu* and bohu and darkness," [Genesis 1:2], "And YHVH alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isaiah 2:11).

The second portrayal on this page describes the activities of the snake. Its ultimate fate is identified with the *taninim* in Genesis of whom the Talmud, *bBava Batra* 74b, tells us that God killed the female:

> חד לאלף יומין זעירין ... אתבר רישיה במין דימא רבא ... תרין הוו, חד אתחזרו
>
> Once every short thousand days, its head is broken in the great sea ... they were two, and reverted to one.

Liebes' interpretation makes this passage an instance of the paradoxical notion that the source of evil lies in the "acosmic" tendency of the divine. See generally Farber-Ginat, '*Kelipah* Kodemet'.

the theme of highly elaborate discourses – in Lurianic writings,[280] as well as in later writers such as Luzzatto,[281] the Vilna Gaon,[282] and Shlomo Elyashiv[283] (not to mention the Sabbatean writings in which it forms a key theme). Such texts, even the latest among them, often echo their 13th century precursors, making this reptilian theme a leitmotif of the kabbalistic tradition as a whole.

For example, in the early 19th century, Yitsḥak Isaac Ḥaver (1789–1852) wrote that messianic times will be "in the mystery of the serpent" [בסוד הנחש],[284] echoing a related statement made nearly six centuries earlier by Yosef Gikatilla.[285] In those times, the "two serpents of the Other Side" will be annihilated by the "two serpents of holiness," identified with Moses and the Messiah[286] – harking back to themes first elaborated in Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen. The permutations of this imagery in the tradition form a long and complicated story which I will not fully present here; much of it has been analyzed in depth by Yehudah Liebes as well as by others.[287] However, I do wish to draw attention

280 See, e.g., Vital, *Sefer Likutei Ha-Shas*, 15a–b. Vital restates the three-part schema of Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, with two reptiles signifying the male and female of both the divine and the demonic and a third on each side signifying the *Yesod*, the phallus, that unites them. On the shifting significance of the snake between holiness and unholiness in Zoharic and Lurianic kabbalah, see Liebes, 'Tren Orzilin de-Ayalta', *passim*.

281 For example, in a messianic vein, in the *Sefer Taktu Tefilot*, 37:
כדי שיתחזק נחש זה הקדוש על אותו הנחש הטמא ... ומיד תחזיק נחש שלהם שהוא משיח להעביר נחש זה האחר שקר טמא
in order to strengthen this holy *nahash* over that contaminated *nahash* ... and may You immediately strengthen their snake who is the messiah in order to remove the other, false, contaminated *nahash* ...

The identification of the Messiah with the snake abounds in Luzzatto writings. See, e.g., *Tikunim Ḥadashim*, 19–20:
ועשו באלהים אלין אתתקף ודאי.... איהו השט"ן ודא עשו. ולקבליה משיח דאיהו נחש,... ומשיח לקבליה אצטריך למיהך אבתריה לאעקרא ליה מכלא.
And Esau will be strengthened in these [other] gods ... He is the Satan and it is Esau. And confronting /corresponding to him is the messiah and he is *naḥash* ... and the messiah confronting/corresponding to him [Esau] must go after him and uproot him from all.

282 See, e.g., *Sifra di-Tseni'uta Commentary*, 12b, 28a.

283 See, e.g., *Sefer Sha'are Leshem Shevo ve-Aḥalimah*, 365a:
משה רבינו ע"ה היה שורשו בהנחש דקדושה עצמו ... ולכן היה שולט הוא על התנין דקליפה לכובשו תחת ידו.
The root of Moses was in the holy *naḥash* himself, ... And therefore he ruled over the *tanin* of *kelipah* to subjugate him under his hand.

284 *Sefer Pitḥe She'arim*, 111b.

285 Gikatilla, *Sod Ha-Naḥash*, 199: "The *nahash* is in the secret of purity [הנחש הוא בסוד הטהרה]."

286 *Sefer Pitḥe She'arim*, 112b.

287 See, e.g., Liebes, *Sod Ha-Emunah Ha-Shabeta'it*, 328–329.

to certain aspects of this reception history that shed light on Zoharic reptilian imagery as well as other Zoharic images of hyperbolic ambivalence.

The *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar* often portray the serpent as protean, capable of transformation from a divine to a demonic form and back again. The *Ra'ya Mehemna* describes this dynamic in terms of the relationship of human beings to intermediate spiritual forces, with frequent reference to the transformations between staffs and serpents in the biblical story of Moses and Pharaoh's magicians. Individuals come to be associated with the demonic "serpent" or the holy "staff," depending on the quality of their deeds; the shift between the two is described either as a shift between two aspects of the archangel Metatron,[288] between a *shed* [שד, a demonic spirit] and an "angel,"[289] or, punningly, between a *shed* and *Shadai* [שדי, a divine name].[290] In retrospect, this shifting back and forth seems to anticipate Sabbatean discourse about the Messiah who entertains a shifting relationship to holiness and unholiness – as well as other discourses, like that of Luzzatto, produced in the Sabbatean wake.[291]

The *Ra'ya Mehemena* also places greater emphasis on the possibility of a holy, even divine, meaning for the reptilian imagery. In one passage, the *livyatan* is identified successively with Moses, with those who have merited identification with the Sefirot of *Tif'eret* and *Yesod*, and finally with *Yesod* itself.[292] To be sure, an explicit identification of the *livyatan* with *Yesod* already occurs in at least one Zoharic passage,[293] echoing the similar usage in Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen.

These two developments come together in the writings of Ḥayim Vital (1543–1620), the principal redactor of Lurianic kabbalah. Vital attributes the dynamic ambivalence of the serpent – its ability to shift back and forth from serpent to staff – to a specific developmental stage of a divine figure, *Ze'er Anpin* [the "Lesser Countenance" or "Impatient One"], the male *persona* associated in the Zoharic literature with the blessed Holy One. According to Vital, the name "serpent" is the "mystery of the immature phase" of *Ze'er Anpin*

288 E.g., *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 93b.

289 E.g., *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 277a.

290 *Ibid.*

291 See, e.g., the following from Luzzatto's anti-Sabbatean tract, *Kin'at Hashem Tseva'ot*, 98:

הנה שורש כל הדברים הוא ענין התהפך המטה ממטה לנחש, ומנחש למטה ... והוא התלבשות המשיח בקליפות

Behold that the root of all things is the matter of the transformation of the staff from a staff to a snake, and from a snake to a staff.... And this is the enclothing of the messiah in the *kelipot*.

I return to theme of "enclothing" in Chapter 4.

292 *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 279a.

293 *Zohar* III, 60b.

[סוד קטנות נקרא נחש].[294] This phase in the evolution of this *persona* is one in which demonic forces attach themselves to him, a stage in which he exists in the "mystery of the staff who turns into a serpent" [שהוא סוד המטה הנהפך לנחש]. Vital declares that it is, consequently, dangerous to occupy oneself with this stage of the divine[295] – a danger perhaps borne out by its Sabbatean use. Startlingly, the serpent and the "immature," though divine, *Ze'er Anpin* share an instability in relation to the divine/demonic divide!

I conclude this section with three late texts, all from the first half of the 20th century, that show that this reception-history of the reptilian beings culminates in their ever-increasing hyperbolic ambivalence. The first text, in the *Shem Mi-Shemu'el* of Shmu'el Bornstein of Sochatchov (1855–1926), takes as its point of departure the Talmudic notion that serpents bite without any gain to themselves.[296] Bornstein emphasizes that this distinctive trait is shared by the holy and unholy serpents, and it is precisely this feature that makes them pure representatives of good and evil: just as the evil serpent does evil for its own sake, so the good serpent seeks to do good for its own sake.[297] It is thus precisely the unique trait they share – that of pure disinterestedness – that makes the good and evil serpents opposites. This interpretation of the relationship of the two serpents is a particularly stark example of the "twin/death" phenomenon identified by Moshe of Burgos, the radical incompatibility between identical doubles.

Moreover, Bornstein tells us that the holy serpent, identified here with Jacob, is called a "serpent" by virtue of its antithetical relationship to its demonic counterpart [והוא דומה לנחש בשלילה].[298] In other words, we understand the nature of the holy (a "serpent" by virtue of its unmotivated goodness) as a back-formation from that of the demonic (a "serpent" by virtue of its unmotivated harmfulness). On one level, this statement undoubtedly constitutes an insight into the entire history of the kabbalistic use of reptilian imagery to portray holy entities.[299] I would, however, also extend this insight from the semantic and epistemological levels to that of the ontological nature of the dynamic

294 *Sefer Peri Ets Ḥayim*, 517–518.

295 *Ibid*. See Liebes, 'Tren Urzilin de-Oraita', *passim*.

296 See, e.g., *yPe'ah* 4a. Bornstein refers us to the Talmud Bavli, *bBava Kama*, but I have been unable to find this notion there. The Yerushalmi passage is quoted in the *Esh Kodesh* text which I discuss at the end of this section.

297 *Sefer Shem mi-Shemu'el*, *Sefer Bamidbar*, 224b. Bornstein cites this idea in the name of his father, Avraham Bornstein. I thank Shaul Magid for this reference.

298 *Ibid*. The same dynamic may be found in Ibn Tabul. Rubin, *Derush ha-taninim*, 39–40.

299 As an epistemological matter, the possibility of learning about the holy from the unholy, this process is suggested in a very different context in the Zoharic literature itself. See *Zohar* I, 194a; Tishby, *MZ* I, 289.

relationship between divine and demonic. It also highlights the instability of the crucial boundary between divine and demonic and the cognitive and religious dangers posed by the rhetorical homonymy and ontological twinning between such intimate, and yet radically opposed, rivals.

Two other late works take this one step further – and perhaps closer to the rabbinic sources as well as to the kind of early kabbalistic tradition articulated in the Gikatilla passage cited above. In such works, there is only one serpent, an entity that is uniquely suited for both good and bad. Such a notion can be found both in the Talmudic passage upon which Bornstein based his homily and in another passage noting that the serpent was destined to be king of the animals and was then cast down to the level of the most cursed among them.[300] In the *Sha'are Leshem*, Shlomo Elyashiv (1841–1926) interprets this latter Talmudic dictum as implying that the serpent belonged to the level of *Da'at* [Knowledge], one of the highest divine levels, closely connected with the Sefirah of *Keter* [Crown] (and evoking associations with sexuality and the Tree of Knowledge). This level is composed of both the left and the right cosmic dimensions, making the serpent uniquely suited for the choice between good and evil.[301] The *Esh Kodesh* of Kalonimus Kalman Shapira (1889–1943) presents the serpent in a manner even closer to the first Talmudic passage: the one and only serpent is a creature abstracted from natural needs and from natural causality.[302] This creature performs the pure and uncompromised will of God, without any mediation [בלא התלבשות, literally, without enclothing] – whether it be for good or ill. The appearance of the serpent may signify either the arrival of unmotivated evil as an expression of pure divine judgment, or of unmotivated salvation as an expression of pure divine mercy.[303]

These three late texts bring the hyperbolic ambivalence embodied in the serpent imagery to a supremely concentrated form. They may, however, also be read as simply drawing forth the implications of the imagery present in

300 *bSotah* 9b.

301 *Sha'are Leshem*, 351b:
משום ששורשו הוא מבחי' דעת והדעת הוא מבריח מן הקצה אל הקצה שעולה למעלה על הכל כנודע. ומשום שהוא מהדעת אשר הוא כולל ב' עטרין חו"ג לכן היה בו ג"כ כח הבחירה להטות לכאן ולכאן.
For [the snake's] root is from the aspect of *Da'at* and *Da'at* reaches from end to end, which goes above all, as is known. And because he is from *Da'at* which includes two crowns, *Ḥesed* and *Gevurah*, therefore there was within him the power of choice to incline to one side or the other.

302 Kalonimus Kalmish Shapira of Piasetzna, *Sefer Esh Kodesh*, 60–62. I thank Shaul Magid for this reference.

303 Of course, the author's extreme situation in the Warsaw Ghetto provides the context for this teaching.

kabbalah at least as far back as Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen – or in the Jewish tradition as far back as the Talmud and the Bible, with roots plunging into far earlier forms of poetic mythology.

B *Job*

Perhaps no discussion of the demonic in the Jewish tradition would be complete without a discussion of the story of Job. Aside from a brief reference in Zechariah 3, Job is the only biblical book that clearly refers to a personified "Satan." My interest here, however, is not in the figure of the biblical Satan – more a prosecutorial than diabolical figure – but in the Zoharic treatment of Job himself. Against the plain meaning of the biblical narrative, Zoharic texts attempt to identify the reason for Job's fate by examining his character, specifically his stance toward the divine/demonic divide. However counter-intuitive it may sound, the Zoharic accounts of the very human figure of Job share an underlying similarity with Zoharic and later kabbalistic accounts of the reptilian images discussed in the preceding section: the use of tropes of hyperbolic ambivalence, a particularly concentrated form of the conjunction between "resemblance" and "menace," "twinning" and "death." This technique functions in different ways in the two Zoharic texts I will discuss here, which I call the "fearful Job" and the "clean hands Job" passages.

In the first of these passages, Job, like Shapira's serpent, is characterized by a distinctive trait that makes him suited for superlative performance in both the holy and demonic realms. In Job's case, that trait is fear, his "essence":

> איוב הוה דחיל בדחילו, ובההוא דחילו הוה עקרא דיליה. בגין דמלה דלעילא בין דקדושה בין דסטרא אחרא לא יכיל בר נש לאמשכא רוחא דלעילא לתתא ולמקרב גביה אי לא בדחילו, ויכוין לביה ורעותיה בדחילו ותבירו דלבא[304]

> Job feared with fear. And in this fear was his essence. For concerning any matter above, either of holiness or of the Other Side, a person cannot draw its spirit from above to below or to come near to it if not through fear. And he should concentrate his heart and will through fear and the brokenness of the heart.

By virtue of the concentration of purpose made possible by that fear, the passage implies, Job was able to serve as one of Pharaoh's chief demonic

304 *Zohar* II, 69a.

magicians.[305] And also by virtue of that very trait, "the abundance of this great fear of his," he was able to repent and "fear before the blessed Holy One."[306] The fearful Job is thus a human figure of hyperbolic ambivalence.

A second Zoharic text, the "clean hands Job" passage, provides a different account.[307] At the family feast which precedes Job's degradation, he brings offerings only to the divine – refusing to give a portion to the Other Side. If he had done so, the Other Side would have "cleared the way and departed from the Temple," and the holy side would have "ascended to the highest level."[308] In consequence, the text says, the "the blessed Holy One brought evil upon him."

The approach of the Other Side to "the Temple" is a common Zoharic image for the capture, even rape, of the Shekhinah, the female consort of the blessed Holy One, by demonic forces, particularly Sama'el, the principal male diabolical figure. Job's refusal of any engagement with the demonic meant that he failed to secure Sama'el's departure from preying on the Shekhinah. The passage thus implies that Job was punished by the divine bridegroom for failing to secure his bride by getting rid of her captor. Moreover, in his refusal to give the Other Side a share of his offering, Job failed to act like God Himself who offered Job to Satan in order to distract him from his desire to persecute Israel.[309]

The immediate continuation of the passage, however, suggests a rather different interpretation, though without marking it as such. Introduced by "Come and see," in the printed editions, and simply by "Also" in Matt's critical edition, it states:

> כמא דאיהו אתפרש ולא אכליל טוב ורע איהו דן ליה בהאי גוונא, יהב ליה טוב ולבתר רע ולבתר אהדריה לטוב.[310]

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305 On the idea that utilization of both divine and demonic forces involves drawing forces from "above," and that the difference depends on a person's intention, see also *Zohar* I, 99b:
אי רעותיה איכוין במלה עלאה, איהו אמשיך להה־יא מלה מלעילא לתתא לגביה, ואי רעותיה לאתדבקא בסטרא אחרא ואיכוין ביה, איהו אמשיך ליה מלעילא לתתא לגביה.
If his will is oriented towards a supernal entity, he draws that entity to himself from above to below. If his will is to cleave to the *Sitra Aḥra*, and he orients himself to it, he draws that to himself from above to below.

306 *Zohar* II:69a: בסגיאו דההוא דחילו דילה ... למדחל מקמי קב"ה.

307 *Zohar* II, 34a. Cf. Wolfson, 'Light through Darkness', 87–88.

308 *Zohar* II, 34a: יפני ארחא ויסתלק מעל מקדשא, וסטרא דקדושא אסתלק לעילא לעילא.

309 *Zohar* II, 33a. The passage even suggests that Satan had a reasonable legal claim against the family of Abraham, of whom Job was viewed as a distant relation.

310 *Zohar* II:34a.

> Just as [Job] separated and did not integrate good and evil, so [God] judged him in this manner: He gave him good, and then evil, and then returned him to good.

This proclamation differs from the preceding lines in two ways. First, rather than a failure to perform a theurgical action that would have ensured the *departure* of the Other Side, Job's flaw was the opposite: the failure to *integrate* evil with good. Second, although the language of divine judgment is used, it seems as though Job's fate is more of an automatic consequence of his actions. Because he separated good and evil, he experienced each of them separately: an exclusively good life, followed by an exclusively bad life, then an exclusively good life – with the text playfully shifting between the normative and hedonic meanings of "good" and "bad." It was Job's hyperbolic desire for separation that led to the hyperbolic oscillations in his fortunes. Job's story, from this perspective, is a narrativization of hyperbolic ambivalence, its temporal unfolding.

The line that follows, however, seems like yet a third position.

> דהכי אתחזי לב"נ למנדע טוב ולמנדע רע ולאהדרא גרמיה לטוב ודא איהו רזא דמהימנותא

> For thus is it fitting for a person: to know good, and to know evil, and then to return himself to good. And this is the mystery of faith.

Here the oscillations in Job's fortunes are neither a punishment, nor a quasi-automatic consequence of his deeds, but a fitting path for human development. It does away with the apparent distinction between normative and hedonic good and evil in the immediately preceding sentence. Instead, it suggests that the shift between pure good and pure evil, apparently both on the normative or even metaphysical plane, is necessary for spiritual development. One gains access to the "mystery of faith" only by first experiencing good and evil separately, and then "returning oneself to good" – presumably by integrating the evil into the good. This last sentence thus forms part of the series of Zoharic texts proclaiming the need to "descend" to the Other Side for the sake of spiritual perfection and/or theurgic imperatives, some of whose complexities we have seen above in the Zoharic treatments of Hosea, Solomon, and others.

Despite its brevity (11 lines in the standard printed edition), the "clean hands Job" passage thus presents a quite divergent set of alternative explanations for Job's fate: a punishment for not inducing the Other Side to depart through offering it part of a sacrifice; a consequence of a failure to integrate good and

evil; and a fitting, dialectical path for human spiritual development.[311] The dizzying shifts among these alternatives can be taken as a sign of the impossible existential situation of a person who is himself an image of hyperbolic ambivalence: simultaneously good and evil, happy and unhappy. All attempts to resolve this ambivalence, subjectively or objectively, can only be utopian; any effort to choose one pole or the other will result in a fateful return of the other; any attempt to integrate the two strives in vain to efface their irreducible opposition.

Without taking any stance on the question of their respective authorship, there are at least two ways one may read the "clean hands Job" passage in relation to the "fearful Job" passage. First, one might read the "fearful Job" narrative as the pre-history of the "clean hands Job" and thus as an explanation of the latter's deficiency. In this reading, Job had once been as exclusive in his worship of the demonic as he was now in his worship of the divine. This exclusivity of the "fearful Job" led to the failure of the "clean hands Job" to engage with the Other Side – whether that failure be to secure the Other Side's departure or its integration.

This reading, however, cannot account for the tone of the "fearful Job" passage. This passage portrays Job's "fearfulness," his ability to concentrate purely on the object of his worship, as the source of his extraordinary ability to link up to metaphysical forces, be they divine or demonic. No critique is offered of this trait as such. Indeed, without it, Job would not have been able to effect the radical and blessed conversion of his identity, his self-transformation from a hyperbolic worshipper of the demonic to that of the divine. Moreover, this very trait allows the passage to compare Job favourably with Balaam and Jethro. All three were said to have been magicians in the service of Pharaoh. And yet, while Job, due to the purity of his "fear," converted rapidly and radically to the worship of God, Balaam never converted and Jethro only did so much later and only after many miraculous demonstrations of God's power.

A better reading, therefore, would reject the notion that the two passages form two parts of one narrative. Rather, they represent two different images of hyperbolic ambivalence. In the "fearful Job" passage, that ambivalence is concentrated in the figure of Job himself, in his fearful "essence." This "essence"

311 Wolfson interprets the passage as clearly favoring the integration of good and evil. Wolfson, 'Light through Darkness', 87–88. Wolfson interprets the inducement to the Other Side to depart as signifying the termination of the autonomous existence of the Other Side, rather than its spatial departure. It seems to me, though, that the passage's divergent pronouncements point to a fundamental ambivalence.

renders him hyperbolically suited for both divine and demonic service. And while Job may thereby seem to be the very embodiment of the integration of the two realms, it is precisely this trait that makes it impossible for him to live this integration, to serve more than one master simultaneously. The very trait that makes him a superlative servant of the demonic also makes him a superlative servant of the divine – and also renders him unable to do both at the same time.

In the "clean hands Job" passage, by contrast, it is the cosmos itself that is hyperbolically ambivalent – simultaneously good and evil. Job, perhaps an emblem of Everyman here, finds himself in an impossible existential predicament. The text first accuses him of failing to rid the divine of the demonic, leading to a punishment by the divine. It then accuses him of failing to integrate the divine and the demonic, leading to his suffering the full malevolent force of the demonic. It finally suggests that the wild shifts in his life actually portray the ultimate path in spiritual development prescribed in the Zoharic literature: descent from the realm of good into the realm of evil, followed by a return to the realm of good. In a cosmos that is simultaneously good and evil, only the supremely dangerous journey of experiencing one aspect at a time will give a person knowledge of the whole, and an ability to integrate them. This path is arduous at best, one that, Zoharic texts proclaim, led to the downfall of many of the greatest biblical figures, including Solomon, Adam, and Noah, and successfully completed only by figures like Abraham and Jacob.

The "clean hands Job" passage provides clear and strong support for the approach to Zoharic texts taken in this book. It reflects neither dualism nor antidualism, though it presses elements of both into its exposition. Rather, it is a constructive literary artifact. By means of the rhetorical technique of oscillating between dramatically shifting stances, it constructs a cosmos of hyperbolic ambivalence – and vividly evokes the impossible existential predicaments in which we are placed, as we seek to negotiate the paradoxical relations of Self and Other.

C Nogah (*"Brightness"*)

Like the polysemous constructional schemes, the paradoxical tropes that abound in Zoharic texts – marked by doubling, division, indeterminacy, and hyperbolic ambivalence – generate the possibility for the gravest errors and most fatal dangers. Since the Zoharic literature is primarily concerned not with neutral cognition but with will and desire, the gravest errors are really those of seduction, deception, and self-deception. In the last section of this chapter, therefore, I turn to a text which takes seduction as its explicit

theme.[312] The text concerns *nogah*, "brightness," a liminal entity situated on the divine/demonic border, well-suited to serve as an occasion for the textual elaboration of ambivalence. Perhaps most intriguingly, this text constructs *nogah* not only as a source of danger, but also of salvation.

The text is a section of a lengthy passage based primarily on a structurally concentric portrayal of the Other Side, often associated with the term *kelipot*. As I have noted, one Zoharic passage declares that *nogah* is the "innermost" of the *kelipot* and "clings to" or even "unites with" the holy *mo'aḥ*.[313] It is this liminality of *nogah* that prepared it for its eventual role in Lurianic kabbalah as the crucial battleground between divine and demonic – a role it already played in at least one 13th century text.[314] In the midst of a broad discussion of the demonic generally, the text under discussion here explores the objective ambivalence of this entity, its embodiment of both divine and demonic valences. It is this ontological ambivalence that makes *nogah* a source of both danger and salvation. The text also stages a dispute between Zoharic sages about the proper existential stance toward the Other Side, a dispute it leaves unresolved. It may also implicitly refer to a dispute among 13th century kabbalists about divine desire for the Other, a central theme of this book. This text is thus not only one *about* (objective) ambivalence but also itself marked *by* (subjective) ambivalence. And, as I maintain throughout this book, only a close attention to its rhetorical techniques can reveal the complexities of this highly fraught text.

The text presents the concentric *kelipot* through an interpretation of the celestial phenomena that announce the vision of the chariot in Ezekiel 1:4:

> וארא והנה רוח סערה באה מן הצפון ענן גדול ואש מתלקחת ונגה לו סביב ומתוכה כעין החשמל מתוך האש

312 *Zohar* II, 203a–b.

313 *Zohar Ḥadash*, 38a–b. The Aramaic "מתאחד" means "to cling to," but often is used in the Zoharic literature as a play on the Hebrew word "one" [אחד], whose letters it contains.

314 See Yosef Gikatilla's discussion of the biblical prohibition on a tree's fruit during the first three years – called in Leviticus 19:23, *orlah* [ערלה], the same word for "foreskin." Gikatilla associates the fruit of these three years with the "three hard *kelipot*." In the fourth year, fruit may be eaten but only when physically brought to Jerusalem or transmuted into money and brought to Jerusalem. Gikatilla associates the fruit of the fourth year with *nogah*. He mentions only the second of the two options for using it, that of converting it into money, and refers to it by the phrase "חילול בדמים". In the context of the fruit law, this formula would mean "deconsecration though money," but Gikatilla clearly intends it to be taken in its more literal meaning of "deconsecration through blood" – evoking a mortal struggle to purify the *nogah*. See Gikatilla, *Sha'are Orah*, 212–214.

> And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness [*nogah*] was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber [*ḥashmal*], out of the midst of the fire.

This verse serves as the basis for related, though far from identical, portrayals of the concentric *kelipot* in other Zoharic texts and other 13th century writings, notably in Moshe de León's commentary on Ezekiel's vision.[315]

The passage interprets each of the first of the three phenomena announcing Ezekiel's vision – wind, cloud, and fire – as belonging to the realm of the *kelipot*, in an ascending order of their association with evil. It first traces the source of the "wind" to the "north," presumably the Sefirah of *Gevurah* [Might]. It assigns a holy task to this *kelipah*, that of protecting the holy *moḥa*. Nonetheless, it also explains that, in accordance with the verse, "for evil appeareth out of the north" [מצפון תפתח הרעה] (Jeremiah 6:1), "Other Sides cling" [סטרין אחרנין אתאי חדן] to this wind. The text refers to the second of the phenomena, the "great cloud," as "dregs of gold" [סוספיתא דדהבא], an important Zoharic image in passages tracing the Other Side to the metastasis of the Sefirah of *Gevurah*. This "cloud" is, however, doubled by a holy cloud, as I shall shortly discuss. The third phenomenon, "fire," is the most unequivocally maleficent, associated with "hard judgment" [דינא קשיא]. As to the fourth of these phenomena, *nogah*, the passage expresses a far more complex ambivalence, as I show below in detail. This ambivalence is reflected in, among other things, the passage's declaration that the alternative interpretations it offers of *nogah* are "all good and proper" [וכלא שפיר ויאות הוא].[316]

To turn to my main theme in this section: the passage explicitly declares two of the phenomena, the "cloud" [ענן *anan*] and the "brightness" [נגה *nogah*], to be seductive. Their seductive powers, however, derive from very different sources. This difference goes to the heart of divergent textual techniques used in Zoharic writing for constructing the divine/demonic relationship.

The passage portrays the seductiveness of the demonic cloud in a manner inextricable from its rhetorical doubling by its holy counterpart:

> ענן גדול, דא איהי ענגא דחשוכא דאחשיך כל עלמא. תא חזי בין ענגא לענגא, ההוא ענגא דכתיב (במדבר י לד) כי ענן יהו"ה עליהם יומם, (שם יד יד) וענגך עומד עליהם,

315 See Moshe de León, *Perush ha-Merkavah le-R. Moshe de León*, 59–61.

316 Note also that the very term "*nogah*" is used in the *Ra'ya Mehemena* to refer to the Shekhinah, an entity also situated at the boundary of divine and demonic and portrayed in complex ways as mediating their relationship. *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 282b.

האי איהו דנהיר וזהיר, וכל נהורין אתחזון גו ההוא ענגא, אבל ענגא דא, ענגא חשוך דלא נהיר כלל, אבל מנע כל נהורין דלא יכלין לאתחזאה מקמיה.[317]

> "A great cloud": this is the cloud of darkness, that darkens the whole world. Come and see: between cloud and cloud, that cloud of which it is written (Numbers 10:34), "for the cloud of YHVH was upon them by day," (*ibid.* 14:14), "and that thy cloud standeth over them" – this is that which illuminates and radiates, and all lights are seen in that cloud. But *this* cloud, dark cloud that does not illuminate at all, but blocks all lights so that they cannot be seen before it.

At the phenomenal level, the two clouds are diametric opposites: the holy cloud in Numbers absolutely illuminated and illuminating, the demonic Ezekiel cloud absolutely dark and darkening. Despite this stark difference, the dark cloud "knows how to seduce" [דידע למפתי][318] – or, perhaps we should say, the phenomenal difference means that some very subtle "knowledge" is required for the seduction to succeed. Such cunning must rely on something other than inducing the target of seduction to make a simple perceptual misjudgment.

One might speculate that the demonic cloud's seductive appeal comes precisely from the attractiveness of alterity. The text, however, does not take this path. Rather, it implicitly suggests that the seductive power of the dark cloud is purely rhetorical, rooted in the identity of the term designating the two contraries – a seductive power expressed by the cadence of the text, rhythmically repeating the key word "cloud" in an almost chant-like manner, sliding between divine and demonic meanings. This rhythm can only come through the original sounds of the text, which I give here in transliteration:

> *"Anan gadol," da ihi anana de-ḥashukha … ben anana le-anana, ha-hu anana di-khtiv, "va-avan YHVH aleihem yoman," "ve-anankha omed aleihem", hai ihu de-nahir ve-zahir, ve-khol nehorin itḥazun go ha-hu anana, aval anana da, anana ḥashukh de-la nahir kelal, aval mana kol nehorin….*

The continual repetition of "*anana*" (cloud), sometimes in its dark, demonic form, sometimes in its illuminated, holy form, together with the phonemic closeness to *anan* of "*nahir*" (illuminate) and "*mana*" (block), creates a hypnotic rhythm conducive to seductive deception and misprision – despite the starkness of the phenomenal difference.

317 *Zohar* II, 203a–b.
318 *Zohar* II, 203a.

The seductiveness the passage attributes to *nogah*, however, is quite different: phenomenal rather than rhetorical. Unlike the demonic cloud, which is the phenomenal opposite of its divine counterpart, *nogah* visually resembles its counterpart, the holy light, as its very name ("brightness") indicates. The passage portrays *nogah* as that which seduces by virtue of its ability to be visually mistaken for the true light, especially when presented in an erotic context. Perhaps befitting the theme of seduction, the passage describes this deception in a brief text that is far more obscure than would appear on first reading. I note that, departing from my general procedure throughout this book, I quote here the Aramaic text from the standard printed editions, giving textual variants adopted by Matt, based on the Toronto manuscript, in parentheses; my reasons for doing so should become clear from my analysis. I also note that, in my translation, I graphically indicate two seeming lacunae with square brackets and the textual variants with parentheses:

> בהאי נגה מפתי לאתתא לנטלא נהורא (נהורה), ועל דא כתיב (משלי ה ג) וחלק משמן חכה, שוי ההוא נהורא לקבליה דברית, ובגיני כך מפתי ליה (לה) ונטלא נהוריה (נהורה), ודא איהו פתויא דמפתי לאתתא, וכתיב (שם) נפת תטפנה שפתי זרה וגו'.[319]

> With this *nogah*, [X?] seduces the Woman to take (her) light. And on this, it is written (Prov. 5:3), "and her mouth is smoother than oil." [X?] put this light opposite the Covenant and thereby seduced him/it (her) and took his/its (her) light. And this is the seduction that seduces the Woman, and it is written, "for the lips of an alien woman drip as an honeycomb," etc. [Ibid.] …

Before attempting to decipher these lines, I first note that they stand in contrast to Tishby's notion that the concentric *kelipot* resemble the holy side to a lesser degree than the homologous Other Side and that this feature makes them less dangerous. Here the quintessential concentric and proximate *kelipah*, *nogah,* resembles the holy dimension to such an extent as to pose a mortal danger of seductive deception.

Some of the key referents of this excerpt are far from clear. First, the agent of the excerpt's first act of seduction, the subject of the first verb "seduces," is not given, an absence I note in my English translation with the symbol "[X?]." Some commentators seek to remedy this difficulty by interpretively supplying the missing subject. Cordovero, for example, declares the agent of the seduction to be the "Serpent," or, more precisely, the "upper Serpent" [הנחש למעלה]

319 *Zohar* II, 203b.

who confronts the "Adam above" and "Eve … the last attribute," i.e., *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut*, the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah.[320]

This interpretation has much to commend it, dramatically increasing the legibility of the text. It aligns this excerpt with other Zoharic passages about the seduction of Adam and Eve,[321] projecting the entire drama into the metaphysical realm, the realm of divine/demonic interaction. It also clarifies the use of the proof-text from Proverbs ("and her mouth is smoother than oil"), provided that we understand the "Serpent" here as the feminine Lilith, as do other Zoharic passages about the seduction in the Garden.[322] Nevertheless, this interpretation suffers from the fact that the text does not mention such a "Serpent" or, indeed, any demonic *persona* at all. Cordovero thus seems to be engaged in a bit of prosopopeia of his own, provoked by the syntactical insubstantiality of the text.

An alternative interpretive strategy would be to transmute the first verb into passive voice. One would then translate the first clause as "the Woman was seduced by this *nogah.*" This strategy would make *nogah* into the covert agent as well as the means of the seduction, which seems more consistent with the way the Ezekiel phenomena are treated in the rest of the passage. It is not, however, supported by the verb-form in the text.

Still another alternative would be to say that occulting the identity of the seducing subject is all too appropriate, given that the seduction here emerges from deception. Indeed, perhaps there is no real subject at all but only an alluring appearance. A final alternative, as I shall explain shortly, is that this obscurity, like some others in this text, may be a product of textual emendations provoked by an unresolved 13th century controversy.

Under any of these interpretations, it is the "brightness" of *nogah* that explains its ability to seduce "the Woman" and thereby "to take light." Nevertheless, even the referent of the latter phrase is not clear. Since the verb is in the infinitive and, in the printed editions, its object is in an uninflected state, the seducer could be interpreted either as appropriating the light of the Woman or, alternatively, as inducing her to receive his – or her, or its – light.[323] On

320 Thus, e.g., Cordovero, *Or Yakar*, XI, 39.

321 E.g., *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* on Shir Ha-Shirim, *Zohar Ḥadash*, 69a.

322 E.g., *ibid.*; *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* on Ekhah, *Zohar Ḥadash*, 91d. This interpretation does face a small difficulty in that Moshe de León emphatically identifies *nogah* with a masculine entity. See Moshe de León, *Perush ha-Merkavah le-R. Moshe de León,* 60. To be sure, there is no need to assume complete consistency between the symbolic associations in the two texts, whether or not they are by the same author.

323 Cordovero and the Lurianic interpretation favor the former view. *Or Yakar*, XI, 39; *Ets Ḥayim* 112b–c. The *Sulam*, however, favors the latter. *Sulam* X, 57.

the basis of the Toronto manuscript, however, Matt emends the word "light" to read "her light," implying theft of the Woman's light by the seducer.[324]

Uncertainty also attaches to the referents of the masculine pronoun and possessive in the next sentence as it appears in the printed editions: "[X?] placed this light opposite the covenant and thereby seduced *him/it* (her) and took *his/its* (her) light" [שוי ההוא נהורא לקבליה דברית, ובגיני כך מפתי ליה (לה) ונטלא נהוריה (נהורה)]. No masculine noun appears in the text to provide a clear referent for the phrase's pronoun and possessive. To avoid this difficulty, some commentators do not feel bound by the gender of the pronoun ("seduces *him*") and possessive ("*his* light").[325] Such interpretations may be making the assumption that the object of the seduction is the "covenant," a feminine noun in Hebrew. Moreover, they interpret the "covenant" as a reference to *Malkhut*, thus completing the reading of the object of the seduction as feminine, since *Malkhut* is associated with the Shekhinah, one of whose Zoharic synonyms is "the Woman."[326] This reading is supported by the textual emendation favored by Matt on the basis of the same manuscript, which I have given in parentheses, changing both words to the feminine form ("seduces her" and "her light") – though they appear in the masculine in both the Mantua and Cremona editions.[327] I note that the *Sulam*, in its Hebrew translation, favors a mix of these variants, making the phrase read: "*he* seduced *her* and *she* received *his* light" [פיתה אותה ולקחה אורו].[328]

Another reading, however, one that would render the excerpt more consistent with other Zoharic passages about the Garden, would understand this phrase to refer to the seduction of the male consort of the "Woman" who was seduced at the start of the excerpt, just as the biblical Adam was seduced after Eve. This reading would take the "covenant" as *Yesod*, the divine phallus, its more common referent in Zoharic writing. Keeping the pronoun and possessive in the masculine form, this reading would understand the seduction of "him" and the appropriation of "his light" as referring to Adam – and/or the divine "upper Adam." The second sentence of this text would thus refer to the

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324 Private correspondence with Daniel Matt, September 13, 2017.

325 Both Cordovero and the Lurianic texts assume that the referent here is the "woman." *Or Yakar* XI, 39; Vital, *Sha'ar Ma'amere Rashbi*, 205b. The *Sulam* translates the pronoun as "her" and the possessive as "his light."

326 On the Sefirotic reference of the word "ברית," compare *Zohar* I, 116b (ברית as the Shekhinah) with *Zohar* I, 32a (ברית as *Yesod*). The latter, of course, is the more intuitive and common reference.

327 Such textual variants are also given in the *Sulam* X, 57. The *Sulam* does not give the source of these variants.

328 *Ibid.* (emphasis added).

way the seducer in the Garden turned to seduce and expropriate Adam after the successful seduction and expropriation of Eve, a narrative turn explicitly found in at least one other Zoharic Garden text.[329] Nevertheless, the obscurity of the referents in this text, as I have suggested, is perfectly suited to its subject-matter – seduction through the substitution of one kind of light for another.

As I mentioned above, this text may also be an implicit record of a controversy, which might explain the lacunae, grammatical and syntactical difficulties, copyists' or editors' emendations, and disagreements among subsequent commentators. Specifically, it may reflect a debate among 13th century kabbalists about whether it is appropriate to speak about seduction and even sin in relation to divine figures like the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah, *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut*.[330] This kind of debate is of particular interest from the perspective of the most fraught issues about alterity I discussed in the Introduction, the desire and animosity prevailing between Self and Other, and the role of Zoharic writing as the poetic mythology of a broken world.

The notion of divine seduction and sin seems to be explicitly endorsed by Moshe of Burgos, evoking a parallel between the primordial earthly sin and a divine counterpart – even referring to illicit "desire and undermining" [תאוה וערעור] on the part of the Shekhinah, corresponding to that of Eve.[331] One Zoharic passage[332] appears to directly, if implicitly, engage with this Moshe of Burgos formulation, seeking to mitigate its scandalousness. It declares that the seduction of the "primal Adam" concerns a figure lower on the cosmic scale than that of the highest divine figures, a figure who crystallized on the second day of Creation[333] – perhaps an angelic figure, in accordance with the

329 *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* on Shir Ha-Shirim, *Zohar Ḥadash*, 69a. Note that the seducer in this passage is the demonic female, the "woman of whoredom" [אשת זנונים], who seduces first Eve, then Adam.

330 Tishby presents this debate in *MZ* I, 299–300.

331 Moshe of Burgos, 'Ma'amar Al Sod "Hasir Hamitsnefet Harim Atarah"', 50. See also Moshe of Burgos, 'Hosafot me-Ibud Ma'amaro shel R. Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen al ha-Atsilut', 194–195. To be sure, on p. 195 he seems to step back from the very notion that he had just expounded. See also an apparent articulation of the same notion in Todros Ha-levi Abulafia, *Otsar Ha-Kavod*, 28b.

332 *Zohar* II, 144a–b.

333 Tishby seems undecided about whether this passage is a polemic against the Moshe of Burgos position or an attempt to conceal it. *MZ* I, 300. The fact that a number of Zoharic passages clearly refer to mating between males and females from opposite sides of the divine/demonic divide strongly suggests the plausibility of the latter. See my discussion in Chapter 2, pp. 129–136.

midrashic view, adopted elsewhere in the Zoharic literature, that the angels were created on that day.[334]

I suggest that the uncertain *nogah* text under discussion here implicitly records layers of engagement between these two views. The text seems to refer to the successive seduction of the divine Adam and Eve by *nogah* or perhaps by a demonic *persona* using *nogah* as an instrument. The unclarity of its referents might very well indicate the deletion or distortion of certain elements of rival versions in order to obscure that doctrine in relation to the divine Adam. Whatever the merits of this speculative suggestion, the theme of the text, the dangerous play between "brightness" and "light," is suited both to seduction and to uncertainty about the identity of both seducer and seduced.

Indeed, the text itself suggests the importance of this uncertainty to the seduction process with its statement that "[X?] placed this light on the covenant and thereby seduced …" – implying that this act enabled the seduction through inducing the seduced "Woman" to mistake the one for the other. I note again that it is the very contiguity of *nogah* and the divine phallus that enables the former to place itself next to the latter, and thus in a position from which to lead the "Woman" astray: the concentricity of the *kelipah* in relation to the divine becoming an essential component of its dangerous quality.

Moreover, in view of the demonic female Zoharically evoked by the Proverbs proof-text, the seduction by *nogah* through its placement next to the covenant also may suggest a gender-substitution in the seduction process: the demonic female seducing the holy female by passing herself off as male, a gender-shifting that emerges in various forms in Zoharic seduction scenes.[335] I caution that we must keep in mind the obscurity about whether the seductive "light" in this part of the excerpt is the light appropriated from the "Woman" or that of *nogah* itself, with the latter option thereby affirming that "brightness" may itself be called "light."

The danger of *nogah* portrayed here is not only that of deception or self-deception but rather of an ontological ambivalence. But in that ontological

334 See *Zohar* I, 18b–19a; *Bereshit Rabah* I, 1b (1:3). To be sure, there are significant differences between the fully formed figure presented in *Zohar* II, 144a and the beings in I, 18b–19a who are said to be without form.

335 The *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* on Ekhah, in *Zohar Ḥadash*, 91d, suggests that it was the demonic female who seduced Eve: "for a woman can only be seduced by another woman" [דאתתא לא אתפתת אלא באתתא אחרא]. (This is even more explicit in the parallel passage in *Zohar Ḥadash*, 69a.) Mopsik suggests a same-sex seduction scene or, alternatively, that the seductive demonic snake combines masculine and feminine features. Mopsik, *Le Zohar: Lamentations*, 137–138. Compare also the seduction scene in which a "fool" is seduced by a Lilith-like figure who turns into a murderous armed male who casts him into hell. *Zohar* I, 148a–b (*Sitre Torah*).

ambivalence lies also *nogah*'s redemptive potential. Here, as elsewhere, both in the Zoharic literature and its successors, *nogah* is genuinely suitable for service to both the divine and demonic dimensions; indeed, even its seductive potential seems able to be put to both good and evil purposes. In the text just cited (at least in one reading), *nogah* robs the divine of its true light due to its phenomenal resemblance and geographical closeness to it, enabling it to place itself in the position of the divine phallus. In another part of the passage, however, these very same traits enable *nogah* to perform precisely the opposite action, to remove the demonic blockage that prevents the shining forth of the divine phallic light. The passage describes this operation as divine circumcision, the removal of the "foreskin" of impurity:

> אבל מבוצינא קדישא שמענא רזא דרזין, כד ערלה שרי על קיימא קדישא, לסאבא מקדשא, כדין ההוא מקדשא אתעכב מלגלאה רזא דאת קיימא מגו ערלה, וכד האי נגה עאל לגו, ואפריש בין ערלה ובין מקדשא, כדין אקרי חשמל, חש ואתגליא מל, מהו מל, כמה דאת אמר (יהושע ח ד) מל יהושע, רזא דאת קיימא, דלא אתעכב מלאתגליא מגו ערלה.[336]
>
> But from the Holy Lamp I have heard mystery of mysteries. When foreskin dwells on the holy Covenant, contaminating the Temple, then that Temple is prevented from revealing the mystery of the sign of Covenant from within the foreskin. And when this *nogah* enters within, and separates between foreskin and the Temple, then it is called *ḥashmal* – "*ḥash*," quickly, it revealed "*mal*." What is "*mal*"? As is said: "Joshua circumcised [*mal*] (Joshua 5:4) – mystery of the sign of Covenant, for it is not prevented from being revealed from within the foreskin.

The foreskin disrupts the proper union between the divine phallus and the Shekhinah (the "Temple") by blocking revelation from the former to the latter, as well as by polluting the Shekhinah – presumably through her union with the contaminating entity, the "foreskin," which would be the demonic phallus. When it is performing this crucial surgery, *nogah* thus becomes a holy entity, or the holy variant of itself, the "*ḥashmal*" (a feature of Ezekiel's vision translated by the KJV as "amber"). Unlike the two "clouds," the two variants of the *nogah/ḥashmal* entity are related not through homonymy, but rather through phenomenal resemblance. The transition from one state to the other is effected by its passing from the service of the demonic to that of the divine realm (and presumably vice versa). Indeed, in contrast with the "clouds," there seems

336 *Zohar* II, 203b.

to be only one entity, shifting between divine and demonic forms. *Nogah/ḥashmal* thus proves to be one of those hyperbolically ambivalent entities akin to the Zoharic Job and the kabbalistic Serpent, particularly in Shapira's interpretation.

Nogah/ḥashmal is particularly well-placed for the delicate operation of divine circumcision due to its location at the threshold between the divine and demonic realms, and well-equipped to achieve it, due to its affinity with both realms. In other words, the same traits that make *nogah* dangerously seductive also empower it for holy service as the divine circumcisor, the divine *mohel*. Though the text does not use the word "seduction" in the context of the circumcision, the spirit of the text suggests that, just as *nogah* seduces the Woman/Shekhinah in order to rob her light, so *ḥashmal* cunningly deceives the demonic foreskin in order to separate it from the divine phallus and permit the latter's light to shine. This implicit link between seduction and circumcision is a remarkable consequence of the concentricity of the *kelipah*. *Nogah* is able to switch sides, as it were, with the aggression it formerly used for demonic purposes now pressed into the service of the divine. Such a cunning procedure to induce the departure of the foreskin by *nogah/ḥashmal* also makes it akin to the Zoharic Jacob who adopted the methods of the "crooked serpent" to mislead and then cause the departure of Esau.[337]

The presence of a demonic foreskin on the divine phallus, entailing the need for divine circumcision, is one of those theologically scandalous notions that abound in the Zoharic literature. The presence of the foreskin on the divine phallus might be understood in a number of ways. If modeled on its human counterpart as the initial state of the phallus, it could be understood as an instantiation of the Zoharic dictum that "it is the way of the *kelipot* to precede the *moḥa*" [דהכי ארחא דקליפין דמקדימין למוחא][338] – or, in Kristeva's terms, the abjection of refuse as a prerequisite to the formation of a bounded identity. If understood as a derivative condition, a consequence of a mishap in the cosmos, for example human sin, the foreskin would prove capable of covering over a primordially or subsequently circumcised phallus – contrary to its human model, but suggested in at least one Zoharic passage.[339] In either case, divine circumcision is one more indication of the inadequacy of Tishby's association of concentricity with a lesser menace posed by the *kelipot*: the foreskin, after all, is a most strikingly literal example of a concentric *kelipah* on the (human or divine) body, perhaps the ultimate model for all *kelipot*.

337 *Zohar* I, 138a.
338 *Zohar* I, 263a (*Hashmatot*).
339 *Zohar* II, 258a.

A short text from Moshe of Burgos explains the presence of the foreskin on the divine phallus in a way that explicitly confirms the presence in 13th century kabbalah of the notion of divine seduction by the demonic:

> כביכול עברה רוח פיתוי מצד לילית המקטרג על מדת יסוד עולם ... בזו נתכסה הכח הפנימי הקדוש לצאת מן הכח אל הפועל, שכח המצנפת הרוחנית נתלבש בה ומאז והלאה נולדו כתות זרות ורעות מחריבי עולם מעלה ומטה
>
> A spirit of seduction, as it were, passed from Lilith the accuser over the attribute of Foundation of the World [*Yesod Olam*] ... Thus, the internal holy power was covered over from going from potentiality to actuality, for the power of the spiritual turban [or "mitre"] became enclothed in it. And from that time on, evil and strange bands were born, destroyers of the world above and below.[340]

The "turban" that blocks the divine phallus – the *Yesod* [Foundation] – from bringing forth its "internal holy power" strongly evokes, or perhaps serves as a euphemism for, the foreskin. This seduction of the divine phallus by Lilith, leading to a blockage of the beneficent divine potential, shows a strong kinship with the Zoharic passage under discussion here, itself replete with seduction and consequent blockages of the divine. If we read the two passages as variants of the same myth, moreover, the Zoharic passage might be interpreted as identifying *nogah* with the foreskin: since both Moshe of Burgos' "turban" and the Zoharic "*nogah*" are described as adjacent to the divine light emanating from the divine phallus and covering it over. This identification is, indeed, explicitly made in Lurianic texts.[341]

In this reading, *nogah/ḥashmal* would thus be responsible both for the presence of the foreskin on the divine phallus and for its removal. Indeed, the logic of this interpretation brings hyperbolic ambivalence to its ultimate conclusion: for *nogah/ḥashmal* would thus *be* the very entity that, in its two opposite guises, both requires removing and does the removing.

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340 Moshe of Burgos, 'Ma'amar 'al Sod "Hasir ha-Mitsnefet Harim ha-Atarah", 50:
כביכול עברה רוח פיתוי מצד לילית המקטרג על מדת יסוד עולם ... בזו נתכסה הכח הפנימי הקדוש לצאת מן הכח אל הפועל, שכח המצנפת הרוחנית נתלבש בה ומאז והלאה נולדו כתות זרות ורעות מחריבי עולם מעלה ומטה
A spirit of seduction, as it were, passed from Lilith the accuser over the attribute of *Yesod Olam* ... Thus, the internal holy power was covered over from going from potentiality to actuality, for the power of the spiritual turban became enclothed in it. And from that time on, evil and strange bands were born, destroyers of the world above and below.

341 E.g., *Ets Ḥayim*, 87a.

I add one further, though more speculative, sharpening of these associations. The affirmation that the divine *Yesod* produced demons, "evil and strange bands," due to its Lilith-induced "covering," is undoubtedly a projection into the metaphysical realm of an amalgam of two rabbinic tales about Adam. One of these tales portrays the birth of demons from Adam's nocturnal emissions during the long period after his sin when he remorsefully abstained from sexual relations with Eve, binding his groin with fig leaves.[342] In the second tale, Adam fathered demons by copulating with female demons; Eve also gave birth to demons, by copulating with male demons.[343] In this light, Moshe of Burgos' "turban" may not only result from intimacy with Lilith, but may be Lilith herself. The passage would thus be asserting that the "covering" is a form of unholy coitus between the divine and the demonic. If the "turban"/foreskin/Lilith of Moshe of Burgos may be associated with the *nogah* in the Zoharic passage, then the ability of *nogah* to transform itself into a holy entity would suggest that the *ḥashmal* is none other than the Shekhinah, the holy counterpart to the demonic Lilith. The transformation back-and-forth of *nogah* and *ḥashmal* would thus be hinting at the transformation back-and-forth between Lilith and the Shekhinah – the metaphysical female *persona* as an epitome of hyperbolic ambivalence. And, indeed, we find in the Zoharic and post-Zoharic literatures instances of the designation of the Shekhinah by *nogah*,[344] as well as other hints of the identification of Lilith with a fallen form of the Shekhinah.[345] I return to the rabbinic myths of the origin of the demons, the *shedim*, and their kabbalistic reinterpretation in Chapter 3.

The passage thematizes the objective ambivalence intrinsic to *nogah*, and its own subjective ambivalence toward it, by staging an unresolved disagreement between two Zoharic sages. This disagreement, between the overall narrator of the homily, Rabbi Yitsḥak, and Rabbi Hamnuna Saba, recalls the oscillations in the Zoharic stance towards the "clean hands Job."

> ונגה לו סביב,... דאף על גב דלית סטרא דא אלא סטרא דמסאבו, נגה לו סביב, ולא אטצריך ליה לבר נש לדחייא ליה לבר, מאי טעמא, בגין דנגה לו סביב, סטרא דקדו־שה אית ליה, ולא אצטריך לאנהגא ביה קלנא, ועל דא אצטריך למיהב ליה חולקא בסטרא דקדושה. רב המנונא סבא הכי אמר וכי נגה לו סביב, ואצטריך לאנהגא ביה

342 *bEruvin* 18b.

343 *Breishit Rabah* 20:11.

344 *Zohar* II, 50a; *Raya Mehemna, Zohar* III, 282a; *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 7a.

345 See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 79b. See Kara-Ivanov Kaniel, *Kedeshot u-Kedoshot*, 206, 212–216.

קלנא האי נגה לגו איהו ולא קיימא לבר, ובגין דקיימא ההוא נגה מגו כתיב ומתוכה כעין החשמל[346]

> "And brightness [*nogah*] was about it" [Ezekiel 1:1]: … for even though this side is nothing other than the Side of Contamination, there is brightness [*nogah*] about it. Therefore a person should not cast it outside. Why? Because "a brightness [*nogah*] was about it," it has a side of holiness, and one should not treat it with contempt. Therefore it should be given a portion in the holy side. Rabbi Hamnuna Saba said as follows: "*could* there be a brightness [*nogah*] about it?!" And it should be treated with contempt. This brightness [*nogah*] is within, and does not stand outside. And because this brightness [*nogah*] stands within, it is written, "and from within it, as the color of amber [*ḥashmal*]" [Ezekiel 1:4].[347]

If our knowledge of *nogah* was limited to this short text, we might even think that it was simply a good entity or phenomenon – perhaps, as in another Zoharic passage, the aspect of the holy light that reaches the *kelipot*.[348] The disagreement between the two sages seems limited to whether the first three *kelipot*, wind, cloud, and fire, are indeed surrounded by *nogah*, not the character of *nogah* itself. Rabbi Yitsḥak's affirmative view leads him to pronounce that the "Side of Contamination" in general should neither be "treated with contempt" nor "cast outside." Rabbi Hamnuna Saba's denial that *nogah* surrounds the *kelipot* leads to the opposite conclusion about the treatment of the Other Side generally.

Rabbi Hamnuna Saba holds the more common view of *nogah*, that it is "within." This view conforms to the physical image of the concentric *kelipot* as surrounding the holy dimension, with *nogah* closest to the *mo'aḥ.* The outermost *kelipot* can therefore be safely "cast outside" without disturbing the holy dimension. Rabbi Yitsḥak maintains a very exceptional understanding of the geography of *nogah* in the kabbalistic imagination, even though it better comports with the language of the Ezekiel verse. It stands directly contrary to the standard image of the concentric *kelipot*, in which the *kelipah* closest to the *mo'aḥ* bears the most kinship with it. His affirmation that the *kelipot* are surrounded by *nogah,* therefore, should be seen as a deliberately emphatic assertion of a less adversarial relationship between the divine and demonic. The

346 *Zohar* II, 203b.

347 I have slightly modified the KJV to conform to Rabbi Hamnuna Saba's reading.

348 See *Zohar Ḥadash,* 38a–b, which seems both to describe *nogah* as one of the four *kelipot* and to declare that it only surrounds them and is not "in" them.

disagreement between the two sages also bears a strong resemblance to many of the conflicting general attitudes toward the Other Side analyzed above, such as the discussion concerning the "end" [*kets*]. The divergent existential stances prescribed by the two sages here also echo two of the divergent prescriptions in the "clean hands Job" passage.

At the level of biblical interpretation, the disagreement between the sages turns on a single signifier, the letter *vav*, "ו": specifically, whether the phrase, "*And* brightness …" [*ve-nogah*, ונגה], should be read in an earnest or ironic, even sarcastic, tone. The single line of the "ו" stands as the knife's edge which divides the two sides of the ambivalence about the Other Side. There are no stable interpretive criteria, of course, for distinguishing irony from earnestness. The *vav*, like some of the hyperbolically ambivalent images discussed above, thus becomes radically indeterminate, poised between opposite meanings. The very possibility that the divine/demonic difference could depend on whether a single letter, a single line, should be read ironically or earnestly introduces a radical indeterminacy into this gravest of distinctions, even more efficiently than the technique of antithetical homonymy.

One should also recall here Liebes' observation that one of the key roles of the Other Side in Zoharic writing is precisely to introduce the destabilizing effect of irony. As I have shown repeatedly, the Other Side is a key factor in the impossibility of definitively establishing the "doctrine of the Zohar."[349] The slightly curved line of the "ו," the most compact embodiment of hyperbolic ambivalence, becomes a snake in the garden of biblical interpretation, rendering all readings a matter of cunning and indirection.

The dispute between Rabbi Yitsḥak and Rabbi Hamnuna Saba can also be read as alternative stances on the dynamic relationship between concentricity and homology. The bottom line of the dispute about *nogah* is whether one should "cast it outside" [לדחייא ליה לבר]. The "casting outside" of the concentric *kelipot* is one of the ways that the demonic comes to form an autonomous realm, homologous to the divine realm, bringing us close to the next chapter's discussion of abjection. By contrast, Rabbi Yitsḥak's position that the concentric *kelipot* should "not be cast outside," recognizes the irreducible intimacy in

349 Yehudah Liebes, 'Zohar ve-Eros', 8. Liebes points to the Zoharic discussion of Isaac's name. Isaac, the Sefirah of *Gevurah*, often the root of the Other Side in the Zoharic literature, is identified with laughter, because of his destabilizing of fixed meaning – transmuting the cosmic opposites into one another:

יצחק בדיחותא חדוה, דאחלף מיא באשא ואשא במיא

Yitsḥak [literally, "he will laugh"): jesting, joy, for he transforms water into fire, and fire into water.

Zohar I, 103b.

the divine/demonic relationship. Both of these stances embody crucial aspects of Zoharic ambivalence in relation to the Other Side.

The passage's staging of the disagreement between the two sages should, therefore, be read as a literary strategy, forming a series with the others discussed in this chapter: antithetical homonymy, anaphora, doubled and divided images, and so on. We might speculate that the disagreement reflects historical debates among 13th century kabbalists – but those debates, too, would be symptomatic of the epistemological and existential conundra that arise in the face of a split cosmos. Read as a literary artifact, the text prove not to be a battleground between pre-existing models, but a literary construction of ontological ambivalence, with its attendant epistemological and existential conundra.

We might well read the disagreement between the sages as something like a conversation in a novel, in which two characters express divergent views about a situation which the reader knows to be more intractable than either realizes. Should the Other be treated with respect or cast outside? The characters debate the point, neither convincing the other. And the reader knows that the ambivalences about Self and Other underlying their discussion are likewise too fraught to be definitively resolved, but can only be endlessly elaborated by the poetic mythology of Zoharic writing.

D *Conclusion*

This chapter has been devoted to the ways Zoharic texts establish a cosmos split between divine and demonic realms. I treated these texts as literary artifacts, whose ontological conceptions cannot be discussed apart from the detailed rhetorical techniques that characterize Zoharic textuality. My emphasis throughout has been on the two-edged nature of such texts, showing that the same rhetorical techniques that construct the cosmos as split also continually destabilize that split. The techniques employed by the texts tend to be intrinsically paradoxical. Schemes in which identical terms designate absolute antagonists, as well as tropes in which images are doubled and divided between absolute antagonists, prove to be indeterminate in relation to the divine/demonic split, or concentrate within themselves extreme forms of each side. At the broadest level, this chapter has been concerned with the mythical portrayal of a cosmos marked by a painful rupture between Self and Other. The continual destabilization of the split is itself a symptom of the pain of that rupture, and of a desire for its overcoming.

I review the stages of the analysis in this chapter. In the first section, I critically presented Tishby's approach of identifying divergent models, each with a structural, geographic, and essential dimension. This approach is consistent

with that of reading the Zoharic literature as a terrain of conflict between divergent tendencies, identified at the broadest level with "Gnosticism" and Neoplatonism. I have criticized this approach as inadequate for reading Zoharic texts – in part because many of them combine elements of the putatively divergent models, but even more importantly, because the juxtaposition of divergent elements is crucial to Zoharic textuality, its way of producing meaning.

Turning to a close examination of that textuality, I looked at two different kinds of rhetorical techniques, constructional schemes and tropes. In relation to both, I identified the ways Zoharic texts both construct and destabilize the cosmic split between divine and demonic. First, I looked at the way Zoharic texts construct this split through rhetorical schemes, particularly anaphora, rather than through the content of images. I also showed the way this construction produces a distinctive danger of conflation between the two realms, through the seductive effect of hypnotically rhythmic and indefinitely extendible passages that slide between realms, dimensions, and levels. In such passages, rhetorical parallelism thus constructs the split and produces a distinctive danger of seduction and confusion between its poles.

Second, I looked at the ways Zoharic texts construct the split between the divine and demonic realms through their distinctive employment of certain tropes. Such images may be doubled into divine and demonic forms, internally divided between the two realms, or may be interpretively indeterminate in relation to their affiliation. I particularly focused, however, on certain images that embody hyperbolic ambivalence, belonging simultaneously and superlatively to the highest and lowest realms. Such tropes yield their own distinctive danger of misprision and seduction, as well as reparative and even redemptive possibilities. Finally, I examined in some detail a passage in which the two kinds of seduction formed the very theme of the Zoharic exposition.

With the discussion of "casting out" in the *nogah* passage, I have reached a natural transition point to my direct discussion in Chapter 3 of the construction of identity, both divine and demonic, through abjection. The passage can be read as an allegory of the irreducible paradox in the construction of identity. The "casting out" of inassimilable elements can always only be partial or provisional, since these Others and the Self originate in the same undifferentiated primordial state. Full expulsion can never be achieved, and the remote Other Side will always maintain a connection with the holy dimension, even if by the flimsiest of links, such as the "slime of the fingernail" of the Shekhinah. Any attempt to sever the link, as in the circumcision of the divine phallus, can never be more than a provisional measure: even the foreskin, against all phenomenal experience, can return. Conversely, any attempt to fully integrate the

concentric *kelipot* into the service of the holy – or at least to integrate *nogah*, that portion of the concentric *kelipot* that seems most amenable to such integration – can also never be fully successful. *Nogah* can at times perform the divine circumcision by becoming transformed into the holy *ḥashmal,* but it can, in the next moment, seduce the divine female by virtue of its brightness, becoming an agent of diabolical forces. Both the project of casting the Other Side "outside," where it would be a wholly external, if homologous, realm, and that of integrating it into the service of the divine are utopian dreams, expressions of the same impossibilities set up by the construction of identity through abjection. At the deepest level, Rabbi Yitsḥak and Rabbi Hamnuna Saba, and the historical differences their dispute may record, are part of the same dream. Indeed, the quasi-oneiric construction of Zoharic texts from divergent juxtapositions of their competing impossibilities is the source of their literary and spiritual power. Chapter 3 turns to the genealogy of those impossibilities.

CHAPTER 3

The Formation of Self and Other through Abjection and Crystallization

> … this abyss that must be constituted into an autonomous site … and into a distinct, that is signifiable, object …
>
> JULIA KRISTEVA[350]

• • •

> דכד תננא נפקא מגו רוגזא תקיף, אתפשט ההוא תננא … בחיזו דכר ונוקבא, … רישא דנפקא לאתפשטא … סליק ונחית, אזיל ושאט, ונח בדוכתיה, … ואיהו צל, צלא על אתר אחרא דאקרי מות[351]
>
> For when smoke goes forth from within fierce wrath, that smoke spreads … appearing as male and female … The head that goes forth to spread … ascends and descends, roams about, and rests in its place…. and it is "Shadow," a shadow on another place called "Death."
>
> ZOHAR

⁘

I Introduction

In this chapter, I shift my focus from the rhetorical construction (even if unstable and ambivalent) of the split cosmos, the ontological dichotomy between divine and demonic, the Holy Side and the Other Side, to the dynamic relationships between them, in which Self and Other emerge from each other, desire each other, sustain each other. These deep kinships, intimacies, and complicities include: a) *the emergence of the demonic*: the *abjection* by the divine (or proto-divine) of inchoate or ephemeral refuse which then *crystallize* into an autonomous "Other Side" inhabited by distinct, bounded entities

350 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 119.
351 *Zohar* II, 242b.

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and *personae*; b) *intimacy with the demonic*: the *drive* for intimate, often erotic, relationships between constituted divine and demonic entities and *personae* – relationships whose abject nature at times manifests itself in the refuse of the divine which serves as their medium and at other times simply inheres in the scandalous liaisons such relationships entail; and c) *sustenance of the demonic*: the *nurturance* of the demonic by the divine, providing it with indispensable vitality, again sometimes through refuse, but always through the impropriety of the pairings. Self and Other prove not only to be antagonists, but to generate each other, seek each other out, provide each other with vitality – but always in fraught, dangerous, sometimes violent, sometimes tender ways.

My change of focus in this chapter brings with it a shift in the primary locus of agency in the relationship between the two realms. In passages concerned with splitting, active relationships between divine and demonic primarily transpire by virtue of episodic transgressions of rhetorical and ontological boundaries by demonic terms and entities. In this chapter, by contrast, the primary focus is on the ways in which it is the divine (or, at the highest reaches, the proto-divine) that enters into relationship with the demonic, crossing rhetorical norms and ontological proprieties. The Self does not merely confront the Other, it actively initiates deeply intimate relationships with it.

In such relationships, the emergence and continual re-emergence of the Other Side, its consolidation and re-consolidation, appear as inevitable byproducts of the construction and reconstruction of divine *personae*. The Other Side is, moreover, sustained through replenishment from divine vitality, while posing an ongoing danger, temptation, and potential resource for the divine. To appropriate Kristeva's terms about the abject, the Other Side proves to be that "unavoidable abomination" which is "nevertheless cultivated," that "demonic doubling" which the divine "designates, brings into existence, and banishes," that "fantasy of an archaic force that tempts" the divine all the way "to the loss of differences" – as well as that which is ultimately "unrejectable, parallel, inseparable from the proper" divine, even while remaining its absolute Other.[352]

The rhetorical techniques that construct these processes primarily involve tropes, particularly tropes that highlight the literal meaning of "trope" as a "turn," which I therefore call "tropes of transition." These tropes construct the processes of abjection-and-crystallization as a series of jarring, incongruous, and phenomenally impossible transitions. And the startling quality of these transitions is further heightened by their equally startling potential for reversibility.

352 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 126.

I recall the basic framework that I outlined in this book's Introduction, adapted from the work of Harold Bloom.[353] The wide range of Zoharic tropes that construct the ontological turns at stake here may be broadly arrayed as a two-stage process. The first stage is initiated by a "trope of limitation": a movement from an image of plenitude to one of deficiency, the latter often associated with the emission of some inchoate, repulsive, or unstable ephemera, but also with the unbearable spectacle of divine figures entering into liaisons with demonic paramours – in the apt words of Hamlet, which could almost have been written by a Zoharic writer: "sating itself in a celestial bed and preying on garbage."

These incongruous transitions are forms of irony: that which *should* be pristine turns out to be sullied, that which *should* be omnipotent turns out to produce deficient results, that which *should* be redemptive turns out to plunge us once more into despair, that which *should* be supremely meaningful turns out to confront us with one more absurdity. The emission of inchoate, ephemeral, or unpleasant byproducts often occurs as a derisory miscarriage of an action expected to have grandly creative effects: in one Zoharic image, like a mighty striking of a blacksmith's hammer, an action aimed at creating a stable and desired object, which succeeds only in giving off a flurry of dangerous and short-lived sparks.[354]

Such a trope of limitation is then followed by a "trope of representation," in which inchoate byproducts are succeeded by the crystallization of distinct, bounded entities and *personae*, divine and demonic, holy and unholy, Self and Other. The tropes which construct these *personae* and entities are: *prosopopeia* – a trope that personifies, or "makes a face"; and *morpho-poeisis* – a trope that "makes a form" (like prosopopeia, but where the forms in question are not "faces").[355] The most important of such forms are the ten divine and demonic Sefirot, as well as the *mo'aḥ* and the four (or three) *kelipot*. The most important of the "faces" are the five principal divine *personae*, Supernal Father [*Aba Ila'ah*], Supernal Mother [*Ima Ila'ah*], the blessed Holy One (also called

353 As noted in the Introduction, I have adapted the terms for the tropes in this sentence from Harold Bloom.

354 *Zohar* III, 292b:

כהאי אומנא מרזפא, כד אכתש אמנא דפרזלא, אפיק זיקין לכל עיבר

Like this craftsman who strikes on an iron tool with a hammer, and brings forth sparks in every direction.

355 On "morphopoiesis," see Tamisari, 'The Meaning of the Steps is in Between: Dancing and the Curse of Compliments', 274–286. Tamisari defines "morphopoiesis" as "speaking forms into place." It provides a useful rhetorical term when "prosopopeia" is not strictly applicable.

Ze'er Anpin, the "Lesser Countenance" or "Impatient One"), the Shekhinah, and the figure who stands above all, the Holy Ancient One [*Atika Kadisha*], (also called *Arikh Anpin*, "Greater Countenance" or "Patient One") – as well as the two principal demonic *personae*, Sama'el and Lilith.

The processes of abjection-and-crystallization, however, are never securely or definitively accomplished. At the rhetorical level, each of the two principal tropes may be succeeded by the other; each turn may be turned back, as it were, by the other. At the ontological level, the bounded subject, whether of Self or Other, is always a precarious achievement. At the extreme, as I show in Chapter 4, faces and forms can collapse back into the abyss; conversely, the abyss can always give rise to new faces and forms.

All the tropes of transition under discussion here may be viewed as forms of *catachresis*, a paradoxical term drawn from classical rhetoric. Quintilian defined catachresis as an "abuse" of language (its literal meaning) that is nonetheless "necessary" to signify "whatever has no proper term."[356] It often involves unnaturally mixed or extended images.[357] Catachresis is an apt term to describe these tropes due to the phenomenally impossible ontological turns they construct: from plenitude to inchoate byproducts, as well as from inchoate miasma to crystallized entities and *personae*.

Although catachresis is abundantly employed in Zoharic texts, it is particularly suited to the realm of the demonic. As Paul de Man points out, there is something disturbing intrinsic to this trope. Catachreses, he writes, "are capable of inventing the most fantastic entities…. They can dismember the texture of reality and reassemble it in the most capricious of ways, pairing man with woman or human being with beast in the most unnatural shapes."[358] These two features of catachresis, "dismemberment" and "reassembling," bear more than a family resemblance to what I call "abjection-and-crystallization." De Man's discussion thus clarifies the aptness of this trope for portrayals of the emergence of demonic entities and *personae*, their continual reconsolidation, and their "most unnatural" relations with the divine. As De Man proclaims, "something monstrous lurks in the most innocent of catachreses: when one speaks of the legs of the table or the face of the mountain, catachresis is already turning into prosopopeia, and one begins to perceive a world of potential ghosts and monsters."[359] The "monstrous" ontological process, by which the demonic begins as the inchoate refuse of the divine or proto-divine and then becomes

356 *Quintilian*, 132.
357 See Preminger, ed., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 104.
358 De Man, 'Epistemology of Metaphor', 21.
359 *Ibid*., 21.

an autonomous realm of formidable structures and mighty *personae*, is textually constructed by rhetorically "monstrous" employments of morpho-poiesis and prosopopeia. These tropes, these turns, are "unspeakable" in both the idiomatic and literal senses of that word – and no description of them can be "proper," either phenomenally or normatively.[360]

Significantly for my suggestion in the Introduction concerning the uncanny convergence between early 20th century cultural-modernism and 13th century kabbalistic esotericism, catachresis may also be viewed as one of the most characteristic tropes of the historical avant-garde. Max Ernst pithily summarized such tropes in a formulation highly pertinent to any analysis of the Zoharic demonic: "the coupling of two realities that seem incapable of coupling [*inaccouplables*] on a plane that seems unsuited for them."[361] Indeed, Zoharic texts about divine/demonic relations are often centrally preoccupied precisely with "unsuitable" and seemingly impossible "couplings."

Moreover, catachresis is a rhetorical technique that can help provide much-needed specification to some recurrent pronouncements in Zohar scholarship. Gershom Scholem, for example, provides a general definition of the mystical "symbol" as that which "makes another reality transparent which cannot appear in any other form."[362] This definition is strikingly similar to Quintilian's definition of the function of catachresis – though the latter, in its rhetorical specificity, suggests one way Scholem's general insight can be used in reading individual texts. In a related formulation, Yehuda Liebes, referring to the Eros that impels Zoharic writing, declares: "to define Eros is to kill it."[363] Attending to the detailed rhetorical techniques that mark Zoharic writing sheds new light on the inexhaustibility of its symbols and the indefinability of its Eros. These features are something other than indices of ineffability, the inadequacy of human language before a transcendent reality. Rather, they can be shown to be produced by identifiable rhetorical techniques, for which catachresis is the most general term.

I conclude this general discussion of tropes of transition by emphasizing the recurrence of these turns. The emergence of demonic entities and *personae* does not signal the completion of any of these turns. The rival crystallizations,

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360 On a related point in antiquity, compare Runia, 'Naming and Knowing: Themes in Philonic Theology', 76–80, with John Whittaker, 'Catachresis and Negative Theology: Philo of Alexandria and Basilides', 61–82.

361 Max Ernst, 'Au-delà de la peinture', 256. Such images, staples of Surrealism, were inspired by Lautréamont's notion of beauty as "the chance juxtaposition of an umbrella and a sewing machine on a dissection table." *Maldoror and Poems*, 217.

362 Scholem, *Major Trends*, 27.

363 Liebes, 'Eros', 4.

the proper divine Self and the (im)proper demonic Other, enter into ceaseless relations with each other. In such relationships, those of intimacy and nurturance, the dynamics of abjection-and-crystallization – and re-abjection and re-crystallization – are replayed on a variety of cosmic levels. In rhetorical terms, tropes of limitation and representation succeed each other in a never-ending "catachretic" dynamic whose resolution is only recounted in tales of a utopian, messianic future.

Before embarking on a detailed elaboration of the rhetoric and ontology of abjection-and-crystallization, however, I turn to a brief discussion of the place in kabbalistic discourse of narratives of the origin of the Other Side. As in Chapter 2, I find it useful to present my own approach through critical engagement with that of Isaiah Tishby, and thereby with the Scholem tradition's grand schema of conflict between "Platonic" and "Gnostic" strands in kabbalah.

II The Origin of the Demonic: Theological Concern and Mythic Narrative

Many kabbalistic texts discuss the emergence of the Other Side, though with widely varying emphases and detail. They also vary in genre: from theological apologetics to mythic narrative to a range of intermediary or mixed forms. Whatever their genre, the extent to which such texts manifest anxiety about theological objections also varies widely. In addition, some texts concentrate on portrayals of ongoing encounters between divine and demonic *personae*, seemingly unconcerned with the ultimate origin of the latter, while others take pains to provide detailed accounts of the demonic's emergence. One possible response to these divergences in the kabbalistic tradition generally, and the Zoharic literature in particular, would be to line up this range of genres and concerns with the variable allegiances of particular texts to "Platonic" as opposed to "Gnostic" tendencies. Such a response may be found in some of the writings of Scholem, Tishby, and their followers.

A basic axiom underlying this book, however, is that Zoharic texts are best read as thoroughly literary artifacts, rather than as reflections of theoretical or metaphysical systems. These artifacts consist of a uniquely Zoharic combination of genres, of which mythic narrative is the most prevalent in relation to the issues discussed in this chapter. A vast number of Zoharic texts elaborate diverse, paradoxical, even baffling myths recounting the emergence of divine and demonic *personae*: theogony and demonogony. At times, however, such texts appear to state theological challenges, superficially akin to those one might find in apologetic texts about the compatibility of evil with a world

ruled by an almighty and benevolent deity. Close reading reveals, however, that such challenges do not initiate theological discourses, but rather, serve as literary foils, as pretexts for embarking upon mythological elaborations. Rather than directly confronting the ostensible theological challenge, such passages proceed to elaborate narratives which undermine or ignore the seeming incontrovertibility of the axiom underlying the challenge. By the end of such narratives, the theological scandal is often much graver than at the outset.

A Zoharic discussion of the verse, "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (Exodus 23:19) provides a particularly clear example of this literary technique.[364] Standard Zoharic hermeneutics would decode the image of the "kid" as an embodiment of the demonic and the "mother" as a name for the Shekhinah. One Zoharic sage expresses his theological shock at the implications such decoding would entail: how could the Shekhinah, a divine *persona*, the "holy Mother," be in a maternal relationship with a demonic being?![365] Rabbi Shim'on's response, however, is the very opposite of theological apologetics, ignoring his disciple's shock and treating the question as an occasion to describe the processes by which this precise, albeit lamentable, state of affairs could come to be. He implicitly treats the theological axiom underlying the objection, the absolute separation of the divine from any demonic taint, as irrelevant. Or, more precisely: the ontological condition theology demands, the separation of the divine from the demonic, becomes transformed into one among a range of possible conditions whose vicissitudes depend on the changing relationships of various mythical protagonists. I discuss this passage in detail below, in section VIII.

Such transformations of putative theological arguments into elements of mythical narratives are among the strongest indications of the need for a thoroughly literary reading of Zoharic texts. Like the rhetorical techniques I analyzed in Chapter 2, this technique undermines all attempts to read such texts as theoretical expositions, and, even more so, as expressions of pre-existing theoretical or metaphysical models. Zoharic texts are thick-textured fabrics weaving together heterogeneous images, ideas, and stories, as well as conceptual and narrative motifs from a wide range of traditional sources including the Bible, rabbinic texts, early mystical texts, late midrashim, and medieval philosophy. To understand the unique Zoharic genre requires an appreciation of the way elements from these diverse and divergent sources are brought together in new patterns to form distinctive literary artifacts.

364 *Zohar* II, 125a. See my discussion below.
365 *Ibid.*

To the theologically cautious reader, the boldest Zoharic texts may be those that recount the origins of the Other Side in the most primordial temporal or structural levels of the divine (or proto-divine) realm. Despite their seeming radicalism, such accounts may be found in a range of key 13th century texts, long predating their elaboration by Lurianic and Sabbatean writers.[366] Tishby argues that this position was scattered in a variety of Zoharic texts due to its boldness,[367] elaborated in some Lurianic writings, though concealed in others,[368] and fully emphasized only in Sabbateanism.[369] For Asi Farber-Ginat, by contrast, the origin of the demonic in the highest levels of the divine is a common theme in much of early kabbalah – one, moreover, that cannot be traced to a legacy of historical "Gnostic" sources.[370] The emergence of the demonic out of (proto-) divine refuse at the most primordial levels, preceding the full elaboration of the divine realm, is highly significant for my argument, since it indicates that the formation of divine and demonic *personae* is always subsequent to the abjection of the inassimilable. Farber-Ginat also notes that some texts shift this emergence to lower levels of the divine realm, in an apparent desire to moderate the radicalism of the entire conception.[371]

My primary concern, however, is not with the relative degree of radicalism as measured by the *locus* of such processes, but rather, their proliferation and persistence at *all* cosmic levels, notwithstanding significant variations among them. I am just as concerned with the way the rhetorical and ontological *structure* of subject-formation-through-abjection repeats at *all* levels as with its relative *position* in cosmic, divine, and demonic hierarchies. The fact that one can find subject-formation-through-abjection at all levels, in the continual constructions and re-constructions of divine and demonic *personae*, is one of the key reasons that Kristeva's account of the formation of the subject is so productive for reading Zoharic texts. The pervasiveness and continual recurrence of these processes at every level shows their fragility and the impossibility of their definitive achievement, consequences that one would expect from Kristeva's account. From this perspective, the relative radicalism of various portrayals of the demonic's emergence is less significant than their affinity with each other.

My bracketing of the relative radicalism of the portrayals also follows from my emphasis on the need to read first for literary technique rather

366 Asi Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet La-pri', 118–119.
367 *Zohar* III, 135a–b; Tishby, *MZ* I, 296.
368 See Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra*, 56–57.
369 Wirzubski, 'Ha-Te'ologiah ha-Shabeta'it shel R. Natan Ha-Azati', 210–64.
370 Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet', 118–119.
371 *Ibid.*, 118, n. 2.

than theological or metaphysical conceptions. It is precisely by foregrounding the rhetorical techniques persistently employed by Zoharic texts that we can rethink the ontological "doctrine of the Zohar." I argue that the rhetorical techniques used to portray the emergence, and re-emergence, of the demonic at a wide variety of cosmic levels shows the pervasiveness of the ontological processes of abjection-and-crystallization. As I cautioned in the Introduction, however, these processes are intrinsically paradoxical and defiant of univocal linguistic articulation. They thus render impossible any definitive fixation of Zoharic doctrine which would reduce its literary articulation to conceptual content. I seek not to substitute a new paraphrastic articulation of Zoharic doctrine, but to deepen our understanding of its impossibility.

III "Dualism," "Duality," and the Proto-Divine

To highlight the distinctiveness of the approach taken in this chapter, a discussion of Tishby will again prove to be very useful. As I noted in Chapter 2, Tishby asserts that Zoharic depictions of the Other Side are informed by a struggle between a "dualistic tendency" and "restrictions on dualism."[372] This position would mandate that we seek traces of these opposing metaphysical conceptions in divergent Zoharic accounts of the origin of the demonic. Through a critical analysis of Tishby's discussion of that origin, however, I will again demonstrate the necessity, and the contours, of a thoroughly literary approach to Zoharic texts. For such a literary approach, ostensibly dualistic and anti-dualistic motifs in Zoharic texts should not be read as rival systematic conceptions, but as elements in an unfolding textual development, as well as stages in an ongoing ontological process. This critical analysis of Tishby will touch upon his discussion of both Zoharic and Lurianic conceptions of the origins of the Other Side, though my primary concern is with the former.

I preface this analysis with a terminological distinction, advanced here for heuristic purposes only, evoking two understandings of the presence of the demonic (or proto-demonic) in the most primordial levels of the divine (or proto-divine). The first postulates an irreducible and primordial "dualism" of antagonistic forces, a position sometimes called "absolute" or "radical" dualism.[373] A thoroughgoing dualism would postulate that the divine and demonic realms have independent origins, the ultimate scandal for all

372 Tishby, *MZ*, I, 288 [מגמה דואליסטית ... וסייגי השניות]. The overview of Tishby that follows is based on *ibid*., 285–288.

373 See Stoyanov, *The Other God*, 4.

monotheistic theologies, even those that conceive of the deity as a paradoxical unity of multiple attributes, structures, or *personae*. The second, which I propose to call here "duality," envisions the pervasive diffusion of the proto-demonic within the primordial divine or proto-divine.[374] Such a duality, as I have defined it, creates a dynamic tension within the primordial levels of being, launching a process of which "dualism" between distinct divine and demonic realms is a belated *consequence*, rather than an initial condition.

Such a dynamic relationship between duality and dualism, as I have defined them here heuristically, is better suited to explain both Zoharic and Lurianic mythologies than Tishby's rivalry between dualism and its "restriction." When we come to see that duality and dualism are narrative stages within kabbalistic myth, we realize that dualism is far from a radical theological position from which a normative kabbalist would recoil. On the contrary, the transformation of an initial, inchoate duality into a fully crystallized cosmic dualism proves to be the theurgic *goal* in these mythologies, or more precisely, the provisional goal. The direct confrontation of Self and Other is a situation that must be achieved, an achievement as precarious and dangerous as it is urgently pursued.

A primordial dualism between wholly independent good and evil forces does not appear as such in any canonical kabbalistic text, not even in the writings of Nathan of Gaza, the founding prophet of Sabbateanism.[375] Nathan postulates a contrast in the most primordial reaches of the divine between the aspect which seeks to create a cosmos, which Nathan calls the "light that contains thought" (i.e., the thought of creation), and a more transcendent aspect which eschews any such desire, the "light that does not contain thought." This contrast, although it appears explicitly in the work of this heterodox kabbalist, has its roots in 13th century texts, including Zoharic texts. Asi Farber-Ginat conceptualizes this contrast as that between the "cosmic" and "anti-cosmic" vectors in kabbalah.[376] In Chapter 2, we saw an embodiment of the "anti-cosmic vector" in the *Sifra Di-Tsni'uta*'s Serpent, identified with the "solitary God" who seeks only to return being to its pre-Creation state. However, neither in Nathan of Gaza nor in his 13th century precursors is the *initial* condition

374 Of course, the specific terms I have chosen to designate the two views are not crucial, but rather the two different understandings I am using them to designate.

375 Nathan Benjamin ben Elisha HaLevi of Gaza (1643–1680) is best known as the prophet of the messianic Sabbatean movement. Sabbateanism, and Nathan of Gaza in particular, have been central concerns of leading scholars, including Scholem, Tishby, Liebes, Rapoport-Albert, Wolfson and Avraham Elkayam.

376 See generally, Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet', especially 126–30. Liebes, *Sod Ha-Emunah Ha-Shabeta'it*, 57 and fns. 74 & 77.

one of opposition between two distinct, opposed realms. In Nathan's writings, it is only through a very complicated dialectic that the "light without thought" becomes transformed into the demonic realm – a paradoxical dialectic, since the "light without thought" can be viewed as the higher aspect of the divine, that which resists any relationship to finitude.

I begin my analysis of Tishby with his discussion of Lurianic doctrine, a useful preface to his discussion of Zoharic texts. In both discussions, Tishby's detailed analysis of the primary texts stands at odd with his meta-narrative of the rivalry between "dualism" and its "restrictions." Tishby argues that Lurianic kabbalah rests on a myth of divine "catharsis," aimed at purging the hidden roots of evil from within the *En-Sof* . Tishby declares the entire edifice of Lurianic mythology and practice to be motivated by the desire to expel the roots of evil outside the divine, bringing them from their concealment within the *En-Sof* into a distinct, revealed form. In a highly schematic form, I recall the main stages of Lurianic cosmogony, proceeding from: *tsimtsum* (the contraction of the *En Sof* necessary to make space for the cosmos); to the breaking of the vessels (an early cosmic catastrophe, in which the divine act of the emanation of light shatters the vessels meant to give it form); to a long series of *tikunim* (reparative acts, particularly the reconstruction of the divine realm as a configuration of *partsufim*, faces or *personae*), culminating in the final cosmic redemption. This entire drama, by purifying the divine, also forms evil into a distinct realm, making possible its ultimate destruction.[377]

Understood as stages in the cosmic drama, rather than as a conceptual opposition, the relationship between *duality* and *dualism*, as I have defined them, can serve as a vehicle for describing this myth. The primordial reaches of the divine contain a latent duality, not yet articulated into an opposition, between forces of Lovingkindness [חסדים] and nascent forces of judgment [גבורות, literally "mights"] – the latter a source, or even a euphemism, for the (proto-)demonic. Lurianic texts contain imagery that may be described either as crypto-duality or proto-duality: one text speaks of the "filth and thickness of judgment in the light of the *En-Sof*," like a "drop in the great sea," suggesting a crypto-duality.[378] Another text speaks of the power of judgment as akin to a "grain of dirt in the great sea," which "does not make filth and is not felt," suggesting more of a proto-duality – though the text goes on to say that

377 Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra,* 54–57.

378 Vital, 'Derush al Olam Ha-Atsilut', 17 [עכירות ועוביות הדין שבאור האין סוף...כטיפה בים הגדול].

this "dirt" is "revealed" when the "water is filtered," perhaps also suggesting a crypto-duality.[379]

By contrast with these images of a latent, primordial duality in the *En-Sof*, the ongoing drama of purification and *tikun* is aimed at *producing* a cosmic *dualism*: divine on one "side," demonic on the Other Side – in order to make it possible for the former to separate itself from the latter and thereby make it possible for a properly constituted divine to directly combat a properly (or perhaps "improperly") constituted demonic. Dualism is thus the *goal* of a process of catharsis which aims at the production of a distilled, identifiable, and localizable domain of the demonic out of the inchoate primordial mélange – a tactic that forms a crucial part of a grand divine strategy to destroy evil. The roots of the demonic Other, however, lie within the divine (proto-) Self, a primordial reality characterized by proto- or crypto-duality.

Every additional act of purification produces a further "revelation of matter and refuse."[380] Again, dualism is the *goal*, or more precisely, an interim tactical goal, of the process, rather than its *origin*; the latter would rather be found in the primordial proto-duality in the highest reaches of the *En-Sof*. The process is designed to cause a series of cumulative "distantiations" of undesirable elements from the *En-Sof*, "so that judgment will be able to be revealed" and increasingly "come into existence from one level to the next."[381] Or, to borrow Kristeva's terms: it is precisely the abjection of inassimilable elements which increasingly "make them exist"; they are constructed into an autonomous realm through the very series of acts that "banish them."[382]

Tishby, however, in his theoretical discussions, does not describe the myth's relation to dualism in this way. Rather, he begins his study of the Lurianic doctrine of evil with Scholem's notion of the perennial struggle between Neoplatonic and "Gnostic" tendencies, which he associates, respectively, with monistic and dualistic views about evil.[383] Though he maintains that the dualistic, Gnostic strand tends to predominate,[384] he portrays Lurianic kabbalah as marked by the tension between the two, whose coexistence he posits

379 Ibn Tabul, *Derush Ḥeftsi-Bah*, 1d. [גרגיר עפר בתוך ים הגדול אינו עושה עכירות ואינו נרגש וכשיסתננו המים יתגלה וימצא העפר].

380 Ḥayim Vital, *Mevo She'arim*, 6c [ובכל עולם מתחדש בירור נוסף על חבירו וגלוי החומר והפסולת].

381 *Ibid.*, 1c [די שיתרחק מא"ס הרחקה נוספת ...ויכול הדין להתגלות ולהתהוות ממדרגה אחר מדרגה].

382 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 126.

383 Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra*, 13–14.

384 *Ibid.*, 15–16.

"in the heart of its creator."[385] Tishby devotes much of his interpretation of Lurianic doctrine to distinguishing the more theologically palatable, monistic strands from what he considers the "authentic," more "mythological," dualistic strands.[386] I note that this interpretive frame would not be substantially modified even if we rejected a historically identifiable "Gnostic" influence in favor of a strand within Lurianic kabbalah that bears a conceptual or phenomenological kinship with elements of historical "Gnosticism."

From the perspective of the dynamic relationship of *duality* and *dualism* I have outlined above, however, the grand narrative of a struggle between monism and dualism is simply a distraction. Dualism, as it emerges in Tishby's own expositions of Lurianic texts, is not the primordial condition, but rather is produced as an interim stage during the multi-phased process of the divine struggle to purge, and combat, the roots of evil within itself. Dualism is not a radical mythological position in relation to which the kabbalist might feel compelled to step back and establish "restrictions"; on the contrary, it is a bold theurgical achievement that is the central goal of divine striving and kabbalistic practice. By reimagining dualism, not as a theoretical or metaphysical doctrine, but rather as a stage in the cosmic process, we can provide a better framework for reading Lurianic texts.

When it comes to the Zoharic literature, Tishby's discussion is equally, or perhaps to a greater extent, framed by the supposedly perennial tension between "Gnostic" and Neoplatonic strands (or the phenomenological or conceptual features designated by those labels) – though he is rightly far more cautious about positing a single "authentic" Zoharic doctrine. Tishby identifies a process of catharsis at the most primordial level of the divine by reading together three Zoharic passages.[387] He explains that the Zoharic "author" scattered among these passages the various elements of this myth of the "Gnostic dualism of good and evil" within divine Thought, presumably to protect the esoteric status of this daring doctrine.[388]

This process of catharsis begins with the production of sparks by the "Dark Lamp" [בוצינא דקרדינותא; *botsina de-kardinuta*],[389] a kind of primordial cosmic stylus which initiates creation in the most mysterious recesses of the

385 *Ibid.* 60.

386 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 39–52, 64–65.

387 Tishby, *Netive Emunah u-Minut*, 25–26.

388 *Ibid.*: השניות הגנוסטית של טוב ורע. I have translated שניות as "dualism," even though it may also be translated as "duality," because Tishby is here using this term to mean "dualism" as I have defined it above.

389 On the *botsina de-kardinuta*, see Liebes, *Perakim be-Milon Sefer Ha-Zohar*, 167–173.

(proto-)divine. The following excerpt from one of the Zoharic Palaces sections, the *Hekhalot di-Pekude*, portrays this process most concisely:

> כד שרי שירותא רישא דמהימנותא, גו מחשבה, בטש בוצינא דקרדינותא, וסליק גו מחשבה, ואפיק נצוצין, נציצין זריק לתלת מאה ועשרין עיבר, ובריר פסולת מגו מחשבה, ואתבריר.[390]

> When the beginning began, the head of faith, within Thought, the Dark Lamp knocked, and ascended within Thought, and brought forth sparks. Cast sparks upon three-hundred twenty sides, and sifted/selected/clarified (*barir*) refuse from within Thought. And it was sifted/selected/clarified (*itberir*).[391]

Tishby explains that this "clearly mythical" passage recounts the "purification of divine Thought from the roots of evil that were mixed in it and blocked the process of the holy emanation."[392] Such passages embody a Zoharic reworking of the enigmatic midrashic statement that, prior to the Creation of our world, God "built worlds and destroyed them."[393] Zoharic texts identify the primordial "refuse" with these "destroyed worlds."

Nonetheless, we find the same dilemma in Tishby's work on the Zoharic origin of evil as in his work on Lurianic doctrine. I recall again that Tishby structures his essay on the Other Side in *Mishnat ha-Zohar* with a putative tension between "the dualistic tendency" and "restrictions on dualism" in Zoharic writing.*[394]* The key example he gives of such a "restriction" is the notion that evil is generated out of the holy dimension.[395] This notion was elaborated in a variety of forms from in early kabbalah, from the *Bahir* to Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, and plays a key role in both Zoharic and Lurianic writings. Such a notion would indeed embody an anti-dualist position if it was formulated in truly instrumentalist terms, according to which the demonic was created and endures purely

390 *Zohar* II, 254b.

391 אתבריר and its cognates pose translation difficulties. The Zoharic literature uses it with a semantic range that includes "sifting" (perhaps its literal meaning), "selection" (a Talmudic usage), and "clarification" – the latter both in the familiar conceptual sense, but even more so in the sense of separating a liquid from matter suspended within it, as in "clarifying wine." A full sense of the usage of this verb requires a reader to keep all three meanings in mind.

392 Tishby, *Netive Emunah*, 25–26: זיכוך המחשבה האלהית משרשי הרע שהיו מעורים בה ועכבו את תהליך האצילות הקדושה.

393 *Bereshit Rabah*, I, 4b–c (3:7).

394 Tishby, *MZ* I, 285–307.

395 *Ibid*., 295.

as a servant of divine justice, a "monarchian dualism."[396] Though at times proclaimed in kabbalistic texts like some passages in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, such an instrumentalist conception stands at great odds with the perennial rebellions of the demonic, often portrayed as the "slave who becomes king and the bondwoman who supplants her mistress." Such rebellions constitute central concerns not only of Zoharic texts, but also of the very works that contain passages that occasionally proclaim "monarchian dualism," including the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* itself.

Most importantly, as I have argued above, the emergence of the demonic out of the divine is far from incompatible with the myth of catharsis that Tishby sees as the most authentic, "dualistic," and "Gnostic" strand in Zoharic kabbalah. On the contrary, that emergence is the very heart of that myth, indeed its ultimate goal. In related fashion, as I shall show in detail, Zoharic texts portray the distillation of a pure evil from a heterogeneous, though predominantly good, primordial mélange, or, at times, even more provocatively, the distillation of a pure demonic evil and a pure divine good from a not yet coherently characterizable primordial reality.

Zoharic texts designate this primordial reality either by a name that proclaims the impossibility of characterizing it or by a name of ambivalent significance. An example of the former is "The Concealed that is not known" [סתימא דלא אתידע].[397] An example of the latter is the *Tehiru* [טהירו], which appears as the highest level of the divine in a number of Zoharic passages.[398] It is closely associated, perhaps identified, with the first Sefirah, *Keter* [Crown].

Zoharic texts use the word *Tehiru* and its derivatives in semantically ambivalent ways. On the one hand, *Tehiru* evokes a range of the positive senses that its root signifies in Aramaic and Hebrew: purity, brightness, luster. In its plural form, *tehirin*, טהירין, it evokes the primordial proto-Sefirot, the "soul" of the Sefirot, within the *En-Sof*.[399] On the other hand, however, at least one Zoharic text uses a slightly different form of the same root, *tihara*, טיהרא, the Aramaic word for noon, to describe the locus of the hypertrophy of judgment that give rise to the demonic.[400] Even more strikingly, Zoharic texts employ the same plural form, *tehirin*, that elsewhere names the primordial proto-Sefirot, to refer to destructive demons.[401]

396 Stoyanov, *The Other God*, 4.

397 E.g., *Zohar* I, 15a.

398 E.g., *Zohar* I, 15a.

399 Liebes, *Perakim* 349.

400 *Zohar* I:148a (*Sitre Torah*).

401 See, e.g., *Zohar* II:296a. See discussion in Liebes, *Perakim* 350. This usage apparently draws on the Targum Yerushalmi on Numbers 6, 24

As I mentioned in the Introduction, the most well-known name for the highest level of the divine is *En Sof*, an originally adverbial phrase, "without end," characteristically transformed by 13th century kabbalists into a noun. In Zoharic writing (by contrast with some later kabbalistic writing), this word is not used as a proper noun in the usual sense. For example, Zoharic texts never attribute verbs of action to this noun, let alone adjectives. In its Zoharic usage, this impersonal noun seems to designate more of a primordial place than a distinct being, let alone a *persona*.

One 14th century kabbalistic text declares that the Bible never mentions the *En Sof*, a position that is also implicit in some Zoharic texts.[402] This textual absence should be attributed as much to its ontological indeterminacy as to the limitations of human language. This indeterminacy is due primarily to its lack of a "face" – whether one thinks of the Lurianic term *partsuf*, or of the Zoharic process of *tikunin*, which, both in the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta* and the *Idra Raba*, take as their central focus the unfolding of the "head" of *Atika Kadisha* [the Holy Ancient One].[403] The *En-Sof* might thus be called the proto-divine, insofar as it cannot be considered a personal deity until it has received its *tikun*, its face, or, in rhetorical terms, its prosopopaeia.[404]

The *Tehiru* may, for similar reasons, also be termed an indeterminate proto-divine. It may also be so termed for an additional reason, crucial for the themes of this book: because, both at the semantic and ontological levels, it gives rise to both divine and demonic beings. The *Tehiru*, as word and as primordial being, is the site of an inchoate duality, from whose articulation and unfolding a dualistic language and cosmos emerge.

IV From Catharsis to Abjection

The dynamic relationship between duality and dualism outlined in the preceding section also mandates a critical examination, and re-imagination, of

402 *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, 131a. Zoharic texts implicitly endorse this position in passages such as I, 15a, which asserts that the primordial subject of the verb "created" in Genesis 1, 1 which it refers to as the "Concealed One who is not known," is not named in the verse.

403 See, e.g., *Zohar* II, 176b; III, 128b.

404 Compare Moshe de León's declaration that the primordial name "אהיה," literally, "I will be," signifies that the highest level of the divine has no "known name" [שם ידוע] – and that "I will be and I will construct my existence and draw forth the drawing-forth of being that it may exist" [אהיה ואבנה מציאותי ואמשיך המשכת ההויה להמצא]. Moshe De León, *Sefer Shekel Ha-Kodesh*, 98. Farber-Ginat, '*Kelipah* Kodemet', 137, interprets this passage as declaring that the highest level of the divine "lacks existence in its own being [משוללת מציאות בהוויתה העצמית]." On the inability of the pre-*tikun* divinity to create a stable cosmos, see, e.g., *Idra Raba*, *Zohar*, III:128a & 135a–b, and my discussion below.

the notion of catharsis key to Tishby's account of the origin of the Other Side. Tishby's model of catharsis implicitly assumes a coherent divine Self that is troubled by its own undesirable elements and seeks to purify itself by expelling them. This model, however, cannot explain why this being would be troubled by these elements: if the *En-Sof* is a coherent Self before the catharsis begins, why should it be troubled by elements of its own being? And if it is indeed troubled by those elements, must we not then reject the notion that it was a coherent being before their expulsion?

Tishby's view that portrayals of the emergence of the demonic out of the divine is a "restriction on dualism" implies that such portrayals maintain a fundamentally monistic position. The emergence of the demonic at a relatively belated stage would show that monism remains the underlying cosmic reality, depriving the demonic of a true alterity to the divine. However, as I have shown above, Tishby's own analyses portray the constitution of distinct realms of good and evil out of a primordial proto- or crypto-duality – in short, the constitution of a "dualist" cosmos – as the goal of divine catharsis, as well as the theurgical practices intended to facilitate it. A coherent, unified divine *persona* requires this dualism, rather than standing in tension with it. Monism and dualism are thus not opposed theoretical positions; they are elements in an unfolding dialectical drama.

The narrative of the formation of subjectivity through abjection enables us not so much to avoid the inconsistencies into which Tishby was led as explicitly thematize the paradoxes underlying them. For this account, there is no coherent subject prior to the attempt to expel its refuse. Rather, the expulsion of refuse is what allows a coherent subject to come into existence. To borrow Kristeva's formulation, such expulsion is a "primary repression" which "operates before the emergence of the self and its representations," for it makes this emergence possible.[405] The coherent Self (or, more precisely, a Self striving for coherence) is an after-effect of the process of purification, not its agent – as is the existence of a coherent Other of the Self, the fully constituted Other Side. *Dualism*, between a Self and its Others, is a *product* of the process of the constitution of a coherent Self. This process illuminates what Liebes calls the "paradoxical link" in the Zohar between the "forces that precede the emanation" of the Sefirot and the "forces of evil."[406]

405 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 18. Green, in a similar spirit, portrays "God casting the roots of anger and harshness out of the emergent divine Self." *A Guide to the Zohar*, 118. The puzzle remains, however, concerning the identity of the subject of the verb "casting," prior to the "emergence of the Self."

406 Liebes, *Perakim*, 350.

From this perspective, Zoharic texts are not terrains of competition between incompatible perspectives either bequeathed by religious history – a putatively monistic Neoplatonic tradition and dualistic "Gnostic" tradition – or antagonistically residing within the "heart" of their "author." On the contrary, the striving for the expulsion of refuse is both essential for the construction of a coherent divine subject and inevitably leads to the emergence of a structured realm of the Other Side. The construction of a unitary divine Self can only be accomplished through the construction of a dualistic cosmos. The nameable deity, the divine Self, is a belated development, a product of "*tikunin*," however variously that word might be translated and however various its meanings might be in different kabbalistic texts. The structured realm of the Other Side is similarly a belated structure, emerging from the inchoate formlessness of "smoke," "dregs," "refuse," and so on, as I discuss below.

The belatedness of the bounded divine Self can help explain its precariousness. Kabbalistic texts recount endless cycles of the return of impurities that disrupt the divine Self's unity, necessitating an endless series of expulsions of refuse and re-purifications of that Self.[407] Moreover, the two seemingly opposite goals kabbalistic texts proclaim in relation to the Other Side – annihilation and incorporation[408] – prove to be both responses to the same dilemma, that of the Self confronting that Other with which it was inextricably associated before either came into coherently nameable existence. And both responses are, therefore, equally pyrrhic projects.

The coherence and boundedness of a Self, whether divine or human, are arduous achievements, rather than simply forming the initial condition. A coherent Self always opposes itself to something else, an Other, that emerges from the same amalgam as the Self. That which is abjected comes from the same amalgam as the subject doing the abjecting – or, rather, they both emerge from that which precedes the identifiability of "Self" and "Other." "Catharsis," if that term suggests a definitive separation of the subject from that which destabilizes it, is thus both a belated and ultimately futile project, an inevitable and

407 To be sure, many kabbalistic texts seek to shield the highest reaches of the divine from any vulnerability to evil. This notion is foregrounded already in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, e.g., 98b, 108b. In my view, this tendency, however prominent, often seems at great odds with such texts' own accounts of the relationships of the divine and demonic. Indeed, some writers who exhibit this tendency are also those whose mythic imagination about the demonic runs most freely, such as Cordovero (e.g., *Pardes Rimonim*, 80c-d) and Luzzatto (e.g., *Sefer Taktu Tefilot*, 308) – it seems almost as if their theological precautions allow them to unleash their demonic imagination.

408 Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, 77.

impossible dream, a struggle not so much initiated by a Self as the precondition for its emergence.

Although my critiques of Tishby's discussions of the Other Side in Zoharic and Lurianic kabbalah are similar, I do not intend to minimize the many differences between these two literatures. These differences include a vast range of Lurianic images and ideas not present, or only adumbrated, in Zoharic texts, as well as genre differences, the predominantly expository style of Lurianic texts by contrast with the literary virtuosity of the Zoharic literature. Moreover, while contradictions abound even within individual textual expositions of Lurianic kabbalah, let alone among them, they are more than matched by the vast heterogeneity of ideas and images in the Zoharic literature. It is, of course, far beyond the scope of this book to explore these differences. Nonetheless, I assert that the dynamics of abjection provides an important corrective to the rather loose use of the notion of "catharsis" used in scholarship on both Zoharic and Lurianic texts. I now turn to those dynamics in a wide array of Zoharic writing.

V Ambivalences of Origins

I first turn to Zoharic texts concerned with the emergence of the demonic, informed by the preceding methodological discussion. I discuss texts at a broad range of cosmic levels, highlighting their common rhetorical and ontological structure. If the struggle to achieve a bounded Self is interminable, and its anxious and dangerous relationship to inchoate refuse and crystallized antagonists is irreducible, then one would expect similar features to reappear at all levels. And this is, indeed, what one finds, notwithstanding the significant differences among levels. This proliferation of similarly structured processes at different levels demonstrates the irreducible role of abjection in the construction, and reconstruction, of bounded subjects. The divine and demonic entities and *personae* that thereby emerge can only ever be precarious achievements, requiring their continual crystallization and re-crystallization at all levels.[409]

409 This perspective would lessen the significance of the distinction Wolfson makes between "cathartic" and "emanative" notions of the emergence of evil – a distinction he links closely to the question of whether the demonic is "posterior" to the divine. See Wolfson, 'Left Contained in the Right', 32. As I show below, passages that portray the emergence of evil at 'lower,' 'posterior' levels are marked by narratives structured similarly to those at 'higher,' 'prior' levels. This confirms the notion of the necessity, and fragility, of abjection-and-crystallization.

I will discuss four of these levels. In the first two, abjection-and-crystallization is portrayed all the way from its initiation in inchoate emissions to its culmination in divine and demonic entities and *personae*. Significantly, these two levels are the highest and lowest cosmic levels, "primordial Thought" (presumably the level of *Keter* [Crown] or perhaps the upper reaches of *Ḥokhmah* [Wisdom]) and "Earth" [*Malkhut*, Royalty]. The second two levels I discuss are two intermediate levels, both associated with the "left" side of the divine, *Gevurah* [Might] and *Binah* [Understanding], in which abjection is portrayed as part of the ongoing process of an already constituted structure. I note that there is a fifth level at which these processes can be tracked, that of *Yesod* [Foundation]. However, a discussion of this level requires the introduction of a variety of themes which will be more suitable in a later section.

A *"Thought"*

The first level of abjection-and-crystallization I explore is that of primordial "Thought," as portrayed in the three Zoharic texts highlighted by Tishby. I begin with the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* text, an excerpt of which I quoted above:

> ותא חזי. כד שרי שירותא רישא דמהימנותא, גו מחשבה, בטש בוצינא דקרדינותא, וסליק גו מחשבה, ואפיק נצוצין, נציצין זריק לתלת מאה ועשרין עיבר, ובריר פסולת מגו מחשבה, ואתבריר ...
> ובגין כך, דא שמחה, ודא עציבו, דא חיים, ודא מות, דא טוב, ודא רע, דא גן עדן, ודא גיהנם, וכלא דא בהפוכא דדא[410]

> And come and see. When the beginning began, the head of faith, within Thought, the Dark Lamp [*botsina de-kardinuta*] knocked, and ascended within Thought, and brought forth sparks. Cast sparks upon three-hundred twenty sides, and sifted/selected/clarified (*barir*) refuse from within Thought. And it was sifted/selected/clarified (*itberir*) ... And, therefore, this, joy, and this, sorrow; this, life, and this, death; this, good, and this, evil; this, Garden of Eden, and this, Hell; and all of this the reverse of this.

Many Zoharic texts associate the Dark Lamp with the first stages of the emanative process, portraying these stages in related, though not identical, ways.[411]

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410 *Zohar* 2.254b–255a.

411 In the most well-known of these texts, the Dark Lamp "goes forth within the concealed of the concealed, from the head of En-Sof" [בוצינא דקרדינותא נפיק גו סתים דסתימו מרישא דאין סוף]. *Zohar* 1, 15a. It then produces, or becomes, the inchoate and colorless *kutra*

This text, situated at the moment when the "beginning began," commences with the Dark Lamp "knocking" and "ascending within Thought." The text neither attributes this action to an identifiable subject nor does it link it to the pursuit of a goal.[412] Despite the vigor and boldness of its "knocking" and "ascending," moreover, the Dark Lamp ironically succeeds in producing only "sparks" – an action identified with the "sifting out" of "refuse" from within Thought. The ultimate outcome of this "sifting" is the crystallization of two separate realms, holy and unholy – "this, joy, and this, sorrow, this, life, and this, death, this, good, and this, evil, this, Garden of Eden, and this, Hell, and all of this the reverse of this" [דא שמחה, ודא עציבו, דא חיים, ודא מות, דא טוב, ודא רע, דא גן עדן, ודא גיהנם, וכלא דא בהפוכא דדא].[413]

The text makes no attempt to identify the motivation for the initial movement of the Dark Lamp. This subject-less instrument appears to embody an inchoate desire to establish distinct and bounded entities and *personae*. This desire and the actions to which it gives rise thus necessarily, and in defiance of phenomenal experience and linguistic norms, precede their subject. This initial movement, moreover, cannot achieve the emergence of bounded entities and *personae* from the primordial state of undifferentiation without first expelling that which cannot be assimilated, the abject, the "refuse" identified with the "sparks." Without these travails of abjection, the nascent desire for separation cannot be realized – or, in kabbalistic terms, primordial "Thought" cannot give rise to distinct *Sefirot* and *personae* without the sifting out of its "refuse" by an action initiated prior to the crystallization of its subject. This sifting out of refuse ultimately eventuates in the crystallization of distinct realms of divine and demonic, good and evil, as well as the divine and demonic *personae* who inhabit them.

A Zoharic text from the *Idra Zuta* [Lesser Assembly], a more elaborate, if somewhat un-linear, version of this process, supports this interpretation:

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be-golma [קוטרא בגולמא], "a cluster of vapour forming in formlessness," in Matt's translation. Matt Translation I, 108. It then proceeds to produce the colors which will shape all divine and cosmic forms.

412 This may or may not stand in contrast with the Zohar *Bereshit* passage, which is prefaced by the words "in the beginning of the will of the King" [בריש הורמנותא דמלכא]. *Zohar* I, 15a. Matt renders this phrase as "at the head of the potency of the King." Matt Translation I, 107. It is unclear whether the action of the Dark Lamp is a result of the "will" or activation of the "potency" of the King, a lack of clarity which is, I contend, significant since a persona like a "King" does not really come to be until after a series of events initiated by the Dark Lamp.

413 *Zohar* II, 255a.

עד לא איברי עלמא לא הוו משגיחין אפין באפין ובגין כך עלמין קדמאין אתחרבו ועל־
מין קדמאין בלא תקונא אתעבידו. וההוא דלא הוה בתקונא אקרי זיקין נצוצין כהאי
אומנא מרזפא כד אכתש אמנא דפרזלא אפיק זיקין לכל עיבר ואינון דנפקין להטין
ונהירין ודעכין לאלתר. ואלין אקרון עלמין קדמאי ובגין כך אתחרבו ולא אתקיימו עד
דאיתקן עתיקא קדישא ונפיק אומנא לאומנותיה.

ועל האי תנינן במתניתא דילן דניצוצא אפיק זיקין בזיקין לתלת מאה ועשרין עיבר
ואינון זיקין עלמין קדמאי אתקריין ומיתו לאלתר. לבתר נפק אומנא לאומנותיה
ואתתקן בדכר ונוקבא והני זיקין אתדעכון ומיתו והשתא אתקיים כלא.

מבוצינא דקרדינותא נפק ניצוצא פטישא תקיפא דבטש ואפיק זיקין עלמין קדמאי
ומתערב באוירא דכיא ואתבסמו דא בדא ...[414]

Before the world was created, they were not gazing face-to-face. And, consequently, the primordial worlds were destroyed. And the primordial worlds were made without *tikun*.[415] And that which is without *tikun* is called 'sparkling sparks.' Like this craftsman: the hammer, when it strikes an iron tool, brings forth sparks in every direction. And these sparks that come forth, come forth glowing and illumining, and are extinguished at once. And these are called the primordial worlds. And, consequently, they were destroyed and did not endure – until the Holy Ancient One[416] received his *tikun* and the craftsman went forth to his craft.

In regard to this we learned in our Mishnah that the spark brought forth sparkling sparkles upon three-hundred twenty sides, and these sparkles are called 'primordial worlds,' and they died immediately. Afterwards, the craftsman went forth to his craft. And it received its *tikun* as male and female. And these sparkles, that were extinguished and died, now all endured.

From the Dark Lamp came forth a spark, a strong hammer, which knocked and brought forth sparkles, primordial worlds, and they intermingled in the pure air, and they became fragrant each with the other....

Given the recurrent emphasis in Zoharic texts on relationality for the establishment of a proper subject, particularly male/female relationality, the stage before "face to face" contemplation, evoked at the beginning of this excerpt,

414 *Zohar* III, 292b.

415 *Tikun* is a key word in the Zoharic literature and the kabbalistic tradition. Its semantic range in the Zohar's Aramaic includes: repair, preparation, arrayal, and adornment. Zoharic texts often seem to intend for the word to evoke that full range of meanings.

416 *Atika Kadisha* – a divine persona associated with the highest *Sefirah, Crown* [*Keter*].

must be prior to the constitution of *any* proper "face," any proper subject.[417] And if the stage prior to the "face to face" is prior to the constitution of a proper creative subject, the action of the Dark Lamp should thus also be said to lack a proper subject, for it initiates the process that eventually leads to the formation of such a subject.

The allegory of "this craftsman," the wielder of the hammer apparently standing in for the subject-less Dark Lamp, would thus provide a very imperfect analogy to that lamp – as suggested by the fact that the text, in a relatively rare Zoharic gesture, explicitly flags it as an allegory ["Like this …"]. The allegory may be offered to make the action of the subject-less knocking of the Dark Lamp a bit more palatable, to conform to the expectation that actions are undertaken by subjects. In any case, this figure, apparently a blacksmith, is a very incomplete subject, one who has not received his *tikun* and is incapable of truly creating.

The irony here is palpable: the mighty blacksmith raises his arm, swinging his heavy hammer – and pathetically brings forth flimsy ephemera, sparks that are immediately extinguished. The blacksmith intends to create, but his pre-*tikun* subjectivity misfires, yielding only useless, dissolute byproducts, identified with the "primordial worlds," doomed prefigurations of a stable cosmos. It is only when the creative subject is completed, through the *tikun* of the Holy Ancient One and the *tikun* of the craftsman as male and female, that a true creative subject can emerge "who can proceed with his craft." It is only then that a stable, structured cosmos can crystallize. The *tikun* of the Holy Ancient One in the Zoharic *Idrot* ["Assemblies"] is largely a rhetorical process, a detailed recounting of his facial features, or, in classical rhetorical terms, a prosopopeia – a rhetorical process with ontological effects.[418]

A baffling feature of this passage, as compared with the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* passage, is the fate of the "sparkles." In a catachrestic transition, the text first declares that the sparkles "died"; nonetheless, after some kind of dance in the pure air, they "become fragrant each with the other." One can infer from this "becoming-fragrant" that their morbid state had been attended with the foul

417 See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 7b:

דדכר בלא נוקבא פלג גופא אקרי, ופלג לאו הויא חד

For a male without a female is called half a body, and a half is not one.

The "face-to-face" in III, 292b is probably that of the male/female relationship – though this view is not free from difficulty, since a little further on in the passage, the "face to face" refers to the relationship of *Ze'er Anpin* and *Atika Kadisha*. *Zohar* III, 292b.

418 In contrast with the "Palaces" passage, this passage concludes with the revival and sweetening of the extinguished sparks, rather than their "sifting" out as "refuse" and crystallization as "Hell."

odor of abjection. Their seemingly impossible resurrection is a catachrestic trope, effecting a phenomenally impossible transition, a recurrent feature of such texts.

Still a third option concerning the fate of the sparks is provided by a closely related text in the *Idra Raba* [Greater Assembly]: "some of them became fragrant, some of them became fragrant and not fragrant, and some of them did not become fragrant at all" [מנהון אתבסמו, ומנהון אתבסמו ולא אתבסמו, ומנהון לא אתבסמו כלל].[419] All of these outcomes, in which holy or contaminated entities, or both, eventually emerge from sparks, are seemingly impossible destinies for these inchoate ephemera that had "died immediately." The catachrestic use of the word "death" in the context of the fate of the initial emanations, in which it both does and does not refer to their definitive demise, is even addressed explicitly in the *Idra Raba*.[420]

The third text identified by Tishby, from Zohar *Tazri'a*, completes the process of abjection-and-crystallization, portraying the consolidation of the emitted "sparks" into a personified adversary of the divine. The text does so in the most provocative way imaginable, highlighting both the deepest kinship and absolute antagonism between divine and demonic. It is a catachrestic passage at every turn, with each rhetorical turn more improbable than the next, constructing an ontologically shocking set of transitions:

> תאנא מבוצינא דקרדינותא נפקי תלת מאה ועשרין וחמש ניצוצי מתגלפאן ומתאחידן בסטרא דגבוראן דאקרון גבורות ומתלכדן כחדא ואתעבידו חד גופא, וכד עיילין אלין בגופא אקרי איש ... ומשום דדיני תתאי מתאחדן ומתלכדן בשער' דהאי אקרי הוא דינא קשיא ... גולגלתא ורישא דהאי סומקא כלא כוורדא ושעריה סומק בגו סומקי ותליין מניה כתרין תתאין דלתתא [421]

> It has been taught: From the Dark Lamp issue forth three-hundred twenty-five sparks. They engrave themselves and unite on the side of *Mights* [*Gevuran*, Aramaic plural of *Gevurah*, the name of the fifth Sefirah, archetype of judgment].... And they consolidate as one, and become one body.... When these enter the Body, it is called "Man" [*Ish*] ... And because lower judgments unite and consolidate in the hair of this one, he is called Hard Judgment ...The skull and the head of this one is entirely red as a rose, and his hair red within red. From it hang lower Crowns of below ...[422]

419 *Zohar* III, 135b.

420 *Ibid.* In this passage, the emanations that "died" are identified with the "Kings of Edom."

421 *Zohar* III, 48b.

422 *Ibid.*

This passage makes explicit the end of the story begun in the other two: the movement from the emission of dissolute refuse to its consolidation as a mighty force able to subjugate and even to possess the divine, inhabiting and transmogrifying its very "Body." This divine Body is that of a *persona* here called "*Ish*," one of the Hebrew words for "man," and identified in the passage as a lower figure than a divine figure called "*Adam*," another word for "man." While the commentators differ on how to map these two *personae* onto other, more familiar Zoharic *personae*, this kind of hierarchical relationship between two male divine figures is a familiar feature of Zoharic mythology. In any case, the ephemeral, dissociated sparks, which the *Idra Zuta* passage asserts had "died immediately," here, again impossibly, "consolidate as one," with the power to transform the *Ish*'s very identity.

The consolidation of these fragile ephemera transforms them into their opposites, into "Mights," becoming "red hair" which covers the head of the *Ish*. Since red hair is often associated with the demonic in Zoharic writing, this covering utterly transforms the *Ish*. An entire demonic cosmos, the ten demonic Sefirot (the "lower Crowns of below"), "hangs" from the *Ish*'s hair. The divine "Man" thus becomes a veritable Lord of the Underworld, a Devil produced by the ontological "demonization" of a divine figure.

In a startling, but persuasive, interpretation, Elliot Wolfson suggests that this red-haired figure evokes Esau, Jacob's evil, red-haired, twin.[423] Since Zoharic texts routinely associate Esau and Jacob with Sama'el and the blessed Holy One, respectively, the relationship between the *Ish* in his red-haired and non-red-haired states is the relationship between divine and demonic *personae*. The text thus presents the most radical consequence of bringing together the two names of the highest level of the demonic reported by Moshe of Burgos: the "twin of God" who is also the "death of God" is a transmogrification of the divine subject itself. The enemy twins are also, at the deepest level, simply two versions of the same persona: a Holy Side and an Other Side. *The Self becomes, or proves to be, the Other*.

In rhetorical terms, this is a tale that begins in irony: the irony of the derisory misfire of the vigorous creative act – be it of the bold Dark Lamp or the mighty "craftsman" – which succeeds only in producing ephemeral sparks. It then proceeds to a monstrous prosopopeia: the impossible consolidation of those ephemera into a mighty force that conquers and re-creates the divine *Ish*, transforming it into the personified ruler of the demonic realm.

423 Wolfson, 'Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar', 81 n. 9.

B *"Earth"*

I now turn from the highest level of the divine to the lowest, focusing on a crucial passage near the beginning of Zohar *Bereshit*, which I call the "snow-in-water" passage. This text links the emission of refuse and the generation of the demonic realm to the formation of "the Earth," that Zoharic embodiment of feminine divine entities and *personae*, particularly associated with the Shekhinah and the tenth Sefirah, *Malkhut* [Royalty]. The passage is a complex intertextual artifact, weaving together biblical texts portraying the Creation with those portraying the visions of Elijah and Ezekiel, as well as a number of midrashic texts. The passage is mysterious in mood, marked by deeply evocative, yet obscure, imagery. Its enigmatic quality often verges on indeterminacy, as suggested by the widely divergent interpretations by traditional commentators of some of its key images.

The passage's mysterious atmosphere immediately emerges in its opening lines:

> והארץ היתה תוהו ובהו וגו'. היתה דייקא, מקדמת דנא. תלגא גו מייא. נפקא מנה זוהמא בההוא חילא דתלגא במייא, ואקיש בה אשא תקיפא והוה בה פסולת ואת־עבידת תהו, מדורא דזוהמא, קינא דפסולת. ובהו, ברירו דאתבריר מגו פסולת ואתיישב בה[424]

> "And the earth was *Tohu* [KJV: without form] and *Bohu* [KJV: void]" (Genesis 1:2). "Was," precisely – before this. Snow in water: slime issues forth from it, from the force of snow in water. And a harsh fire strikes it. And there is refuse in it. And it becomes "*Tohu*": the dwelling place of slime, the nest of refuse. "And *Bohu*": a sifting/selecting/clarifying (*beriru*)[425] that was sifted/selected/clarified (*de-itberir*) from within the refuse. And it was settled in it.

The passage creates its air of mystery both by explicitly beginning *in medias res* ("was") and by staging its evocative central image ("snow-in-water") without preface or explanation.

Setting this text in relation to its precursors allows us to see Zoharic creativity in action. The notion that the "Earth" as it first appears in the biblical text "already was" is a hyper-literal gloss on the second verse of Genesis, which is also found in the *Bahir* (and is already broached, with a very different intent,

424 *Zohar* I, 16a.

425 I believe it takes at least three words (sifting/selecting/clarifying) to cover the Zoharic semantic range of the root B-R-R, playing on its Aramaic and Hebrew meanings.

in the Midrash *Bereshit Rabah*).[426] The *Bahir*, preserving the link between the verb ("was") and the first subsequent noun ("*Tohu*"), proclaims the initial state to have been one of baffling, inchoate *Tohu*; it then breaks the link between the two nouns ("*Tohu*" and "*Bohu*"), declaring that that initial state is followed by the slightly more substantial *Bohu*.[427]

The Zoharic text, however, constructs the anteriority of the Earth in a much more radical way than does the *Bahir*. It breaks the link between the verb and *both* nouns, thereby creating an interval before the appearance of *Tohu*, a time of a primordial state of "the Earth was": a state not named, much less characterized, in the verse. The effect of the Zoharic gloss is to empty out the Earth of any possible characterization, reducing it to pure primordiality, as separate from any prior act of a Creator as from any subsequent emanations from it. From such a state of primordial discontinuity, any transition at all can only have a catachrestic quality.

And, indeed, without explanation, the text abruptly announces its central image: snow-in-water. The passage does not link this image in any way to that of the "Earth was," for any link to anything would diminish the Earth's primordiality. This second image, abruptly placed on the darkened textual stage, evokes a timeless and placid hibernal scene, a plenitude of natural beauty. The image, however, then immediately, and in defiance of phenomenal experience, gives way to the emission of slime [זוהמא *zohama*] – initiating a violent drama with demonic forces.

The source of the snow-in-water image is undoubtedly the late midrash *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (8th–9th century): "Whence was the Earth created? He took of the snow under the throne of glory and threw it on the water; the waters froze and became the dust of the Earth."[428] This vignette is a majestic fable of divine power, a king who insouciantly reaches under his throne and playfully casts a snowball that instantly becomes the Earth. Our Zoharic text, by contrast, takes this tale and, as it does with the biblical text, interrupts its meaning, detaching the snow-in-water both from the prior act of the divine king and from the subsequent generation of a perfected Earth.

Rhetorically, the Zoharic text's first action on its midrashic precursor is one of irony, transforming majestic creation by an omnipotent deity into the emission of slime. However, it is an even stronger operation than that – for, its silent, *hors texte*, initial revision elides the tale's divine (snow-throwing) subject, an

426 *Bereshit Rabah*, 1, 3a (1:15); *Sefer Ha-Bahir*, 3.

427 *Sefer Ha-Bahir*, 3.

428 *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, 11 (ch. 3). This account appears to be a reimagining of *bYoma* 54b and Job 37:6.

off-stage prerequisite to presenting snow-in-water as a primordial scene. This elision transforms the Zoharic text's initial turn, from pristine form to filthy repulsiveness, into a subject-less event, defying both syntax and phenomenal experience. The Zoharic writer undoubtedly assumed that the precursor text would be familiar to his readers, who would thus sense the elision of the subject and hence the irony of the revision.[429] Shorn of its agent, initiating act and majesty, the tale becomes a distinctively Zoharic drama of a struggle with nascent demonic forces as a necessary prequel to the emergence of a fully formed cosmos, including its divine entities and *personae*.

The nascent demonic forces first appear as formless slime. After the emission of the slime, the next event is the striking of "harsh fire." This striking, like the knocking of the Dark Lamp in the Primordial Thought and *Idra Zuta* passages, at first unexpectedly yields only refuse [*pesolet* פסולת], another unpleasant by-product. Unlike the "sparks" in the *Idra Zuta* passage, this refuse does not "die immediately," but gives way to the protean, baffling *Tohu* – portrayed as something both "within form" and, "as one contemplates it, no form at all."[430] *Tohu* – "a dwelling place of slime [*zohama*], a nest of refuse [*pesolet*]"[431] – is something of an incipient space for the nascent demonic.[432] An additional sifting/selecting/clarifying of the refuse yields a place where *Bohu* "can settle."

Step by step, the viscous refuse is gradually succeeded by the crystallized demonic, as irony gives way to morphopoiesis. In a dramatic ratcheting-up of the process, a sifting/selecting/clarifying of *Bohu* itself results in the crystallization of a formidably destructive entity, the "great mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks" of Elijah's Ḥorev vision (1 Kgs 19:11). Further "siftings/selections/clarifications" of *Bohu*, as well as the "darkness" of Genesis 1:2, produce two additional destructive entities of Elijah's vision, "earthquake" and "fire." The emergence of these formidable forms from the insubstantial *Tohu*, *Bohu*, and darkness has no phenomenal correlate; its rhetorical persuasiveness

429 Maimonides, for example, refers to the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* "snow under the throne" account as "famous words" ["דברים מפורסמים"]. Maimonides, *Moreh Ha-Nevukhim*, 221.

430 *Zohar* I, 16a.

431 The Mantua edition of the Zohar reads: "from a place of slime, a nest of refuse." This version seems to distinguish between the two sites, portraying a transition from a more inchoate to a more stable location for the emitted filth. See http://jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/books/djvu/1073457–2/index.djvu?djvuopts&thumbnails=yes&zoom=page.

432 Some commentators associate the Zohar's interpretation of *Tohu* here with the philosophers' "hylic matter," citing, for example, Naḥmanides' commentary on Genesis 1:2; see, e.g., Buzaglo, *Sefer Mikdash Melekh*, 80. While this concept may be in the background of the Zoharic passage, I contend that an overemphasis on it detracts from a deeper understanding of the passage.

stems precisely from the tropes' unexpectedly and boldly discontinuous turn to representation.

At the ontological level, the "snow-in-water" passage concisely portrays the inextricability of the initial inchoate impulse toward Creation, the abjection of refuse, and the crystallization of the divine and demonic realms. The text portrays the abjection of slime as an unmotivated event, devoid of subject or intention, cause or goal. The series of events that "sift" this slime yield the crystallization of the demonic with which the divine will forever be at odds. The midrashic vignette thus becomes transformed from one of pure divine omnipotence into one in which the divine only achieves form at the cost of the constitution of its demonic adversaries. And it is only thus that the "Earth," in both its literal and divine meanings, emerges: an emergence initiated by the emission of slime and a series of dramatic transitions that culminate in the crystallization of mighty destructive forces.

At the rhetorical level, this ontological outcome, the crystallization of two separate realms, is effected through two sets of tropes of transition, those of limitation and representation. Both sets, as employed in this text, are instances of catachresis. Just as the emission of slime from snow-in-water is an unexpected, unanticipatable irony, so the emergence of formidable forms from that slime are unforeseeable, audacious acts of morphopoiesis that just as thoroughly defy phenomenal experience and rhetorical convention. It hardly needs to be said that the emergence of these formidable forces from a "sifting" of the insubstantial *Tohu*, *Bohu*, and darkness has no phenomenal correlate. The rhetorical power of this passage lies precisely in these catachreses, these "abuses of language," these grafts of impossibly mixed images onto each other. The persuasiveness of these catachreses, these acts of impossible morpho-poiesis, lies precisely in the audacity of the tropes, their boldly discontinuous turns to representation. The emergence of form from a sifting of the inchoate is just as defiant of experience and language as the emergence of the inchoate from plenitude.

In these ways, the Zoharic text overturns the midrashic vignette from a triumphant tale, that of an already constituted subject enacting verbs of power, to one in which an ironic preface of a subject-less mishap is followed by phenomenally impossible representations of the emergence of form from the inchoate – demonic form, no less. Catharsis, at least as commonly understood, is inadequate to capture this process by which the purification of the divine is accompanied by the formation of the demonic realm. I stress that this diagnosis of the limits of the conventional notion of catharsis is only made possible by close attention to the rhetorical techniques employed by the Zoharic text.

The insistence on place here – "the place of filth, the nest of refuse" – is also rhetorically significant. Metaphor always involves the transport of a term to a "borrowed place."[433] Catachresis is an "abusive" form of such transport, the relocation of a term to an improper place, one it does not politely borrow but violently produces. The initial series of transitions in the text culminate in the production of place: from slime, to refuse, to *Tohu*, to "place of slime, nest of refuse." This "place of slime" then becomes the site of the morpho-poietic consolidation of the demonic forces: wind, earthquake, and fire, an entire demonic realm whose emergence is coeval with the emergence of the divine "Earth."

The text's presentation of its bold rhetorical moves as a reading of its biblical and rabbinic precursors is only made possible by the initial step of creating a gap in previous accounts of Creation, in which it can then insert the previously untold drama of the emergence of the demonic. The snow-in-water passage's revision of the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* imagery is a particularly clear instance of this technique, but the passage may also be read as deploying the technique on the first three verses of Genesis. The first verse of the Bible is a majestic overview, a tale of the seemingly instantaneous creation of heaven and earth in their entirety. The third verse proceeds with a detailed elaboration of this triumphant total act, with the instantaneous creation through divine speech of the specific elements of heaven and earth, beginning with light. The unsettling second verse, by contrast, has long provoked both traditional midrashists and modern scholars into offering diverse theories about its hidden mysteries or relationship to other Near Eastern creation myths. The "snow-in-water" passage treats the second verse as performing the same operation on the biblical Creation story as the Zoharic reading itself performs on the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* version: creating a gap in the smooth unfolding of Creation, a gap in which the initial move towards creation, which the Zoharic revision renders subject-less, is diverted by the emergence of forces adversarial to that move.

The Zoharic passage thus reads the relationship of the second verse of Genesis to the first verse as a rhetorical irony, with the triumphant total creation of the first verse undermined by the struggle with the chaos and darkness in the second. Indeed, the second verse begins with the very word, "the Earth," that was the ostensibly triumphant final word of the majestic announcement of Creation in the first verse. It was undoubtedly the second verse's implicit irony at divine expense that troubled the midrashist who wrote of it, "if it were not written [in the Scripture], it would be impossible to say it."[434]

433 Parker, 'Metaphor and catachresis', 60–73.

434 *Bereshit Rabah*, 1, 1d (1:5): אילולי שהדבר כתוב אי אפשר לאמרו.

It is only after the arduous struggle with abjection, and at the cost of the constitution of a demonic realm, processes concealed within the enigmatic second verse of Genesis, that the divine subject can truly act freely, indeed that this subject truly comes on the scene. Indeed, God first speaks in the Bible only in the third verse's account of the creation of light. The Zoharic reading proclaims that the creation of light in the third verse is not simply the beginning of the detailed recounting of the totalizing act announced in the first verse, but rather an act only made possible by the primordial struggle with the forces of darkness in the second verse. And this creation of light will forever be shadowed by the dark forces that emerged simultaneously with the initial subject-less move toward creation.[435]

Traditionalist commentators on this Zoharic passage have differed widely as to whether the various entities and forces it mentions should be associated with the divine or demonic realms. These disagreements do not simply indicate the difficulty of the passage. Rather, they are deeply symptomatic of the obscurities and ambivalences inherent in the dynamics of abjection-and-crystallization. If neither the (divine) Self nor its (demonic) Other is primordially given, but rather both emerge through an arduous struggle of mutual differentiation, then one might expect a measure of indeterminacy about the divine or demonic affiliation of an individual entity at a particular moment in the process – or, at the least, that this issue might give rise to divergent views.

I focus here on the transition from "slime," to "*Tohu*," to "mighty wind" in three commentaries: the *Mikdash Melekh* of Shalom Buzaglo (ca. 1700–1780), the *Or Yakar* of Moshe Cordovero (1522–1570), and the *Ketem Paz* of Shim'on Ibn Lavi (1486–1585).[436] If one is willing to delve behind Buzaglo's Lurianic terminology, his interpretation seems closest to the spirit of the passage. For this commentator, the slime is a by-product of the union of the snow and the water (associated, respectively, with the Lurianic "drop of Father [*Aba*]" and "drop of Mother [*Ima*]") with the former the purer of the two. He offers alternative explanations of the source of the slime: either it comes solely from the "drop" of *Ima* or from both "drops." In any event, in accordance with the analysis I

435 A precursor to this Zoharic view may be found in *Bereshit Rabah* 1, 3b (2:1):

א"ר ברכיה עד דהיא פגה אפיקת כובייא

Rabbi Berakhia said: "while it [i.e., the Earth in Genesis 1:2] was yet unripe, it brought forth thorns."

436 Other important differences, that I will not discuss here, include the question of the valence of the two substances of the "snow" and the "water." Cordovero (*Or Yakar* 1, 145a) associates the first with the coarsening of divine *shefa* associated with "water." Buzaglo (*Mikdash Melekh*, 1, 80) associates the "snow" with the male quality of compassion and the "water" with the female quality of judgment.

have been developing, the slime ironically comes from the emissions of "drops" that are quite literally the "seminal" (or "ovular") acts of the generation of life.[437]

This abjection is then followed by crystallization. First, *Tohu* is produced from the separation and concentration of the initial slime; Buzaglo proclaims *Tohu* to be both a "*kelipah*" and, perhaps more precisely, the "root of the *kelipot*."[438] The "mighty wind" then emerges from *Tohu*, and corresponds to the "first of the four *kelipot* that Ezekiel saw, 'And behold, a stormy wind,' etc. [Ezekiel 1:1]."[439] This process of the crystallization of the slime into *Tohu* and then into the four Ezekiel phenomena ultimately yields a personified demonic realm: specifically, the demonic male and female, in their Lurianic appellations, "the Lesser [Countenance] and Female of *Kelipah* [זעיר ונוקבא דקליפה]."[440] In rhetorical terms, this consists of morpho-poiesis (the constitution of the "wind," and so on) yielding prosopopeia (the constitution of demonic *personae*).

Cordovero's interpretation differs from that of Buzaglo, at times dramatically so. In describing the origin of the slime, he employs the somewhat ambiguous mixture of images he uses elsewhere in portraying the origin of the *kelipot*.[441] On the one hand, he sees the slime as one stage in the gradual coarsening of entities as they descend the chain of being [העבות הדברים למטה והעתקן ממציאות למציאות]:[442] from the purity of water to the coarser stage of snow (the reverse of Buzaglo's water/snow hierarchy) and then to slime. On the other hand, he combines this set of images with at least two other sets that suggest a more discontinuous relationship between purity and impurity, a discontinuity marked by abjection, specifically digestive refuse and the refuse of afterbirth.

It is in relation to the subsequent stages, however, that Cordovero's view diverges most sharply from that of Buzaglo. First, Cordovero describes a far more foreshortened process. The *Tohu* that emerges from the slime is already exclusively evil [רע לבדו], rather than a way-station to the crystallized *kelipot*.[443] Moreover, in even more striking contrast to Buzaglo, Cordovero sees the three mighty forces of Elijah's vision (wind, earthquake, and fire) as holy forces, whose role is to subdue the *kelipot*.[444] This foreshortening suggests

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437 This kabbalistic irony may derive from a rabbinic sarcasm at the expense of human arrogance: "Whence do you come? From a foul drop" [מאין באת מטפה סרוחה]. *mAvot* 3:1.

438 Buzaglo, *Mikdash Melekh*, 1, 80.

439 *Ibid*., 81: והיא קליפה ראשונה מד' קליפות שראה אליהו והנה רוח סערה וכו'.

440 Referring to the central demonic male as "*Ze'er*," the "Lesser [Countenance]," stresses his homology with the central divine male "*Ze'er Anpin*," the "Lesser Countenance."

441 Cf. *Pardes*, 11, 53b-d.

442 *Or Yakar* 1, 145a.

443 *Ibid*.

444 *Or Yakar*, 1, 145b–c. I note that elsewhere in the *Or Yakar*, v, 220a, Cordovero refers to the first three forces in Elijah's vision as *kelipot*. In *Pardes*, 11, 55d–56a, he quotes a passage

Cordovero's discomfort with the abject, his desire to move past it towards a crystallized dichotomy between good and evil as quickly as possible.[445] To be sure, reading the Zoharic text to abbreviate the movement from the inchoate "slime" to the purely evil "*Tohu*" makes the transition appear even more disjunctive, heightening its phenomenal impossibility and rhetorical impropriety, and emphasizing the monstrously catachrestic quality of the text.

Finally, a brief overview of the complex discussion of Shim'on Ibn Lavi rounds out the range of variations in interpreting this passage. Reversing some of Cordovero's key associations, Ibn Lavi declares that *Tohu* is a holy entity, indeed, perhaps even one of the highest holy entities, *Keter* [Crown] or *Binah* [Understanding].[446] The first of the phenomena in Elijah's vision, the "mighty wind," is a demonic crystallization out of the refuse of *Tohu*, a "dreg" [סיג] that "is drawn down below into the *kelipot* of the nut" [הנמשך למטה בקליפות האגוז];[447] the second and third phenomena, the "earthquake" and "fire," are crystallizations of refuse expelled from two other entities that Ibn Lavi also portrays as holy, *Bohu* and darkness. It is notable, however, that he also declares that there is a *Tohu* on the side of holiness and a *Tohu* on the side of the *kelipah*, the latter *Tohu* identified with "hylic matter."[448] He supports this homology between the holy and unholy *Tohu* with reference to the Ecclesiastes verse (7:14) often cited by kabbalists as a proof-text for divine/demonic homology: "also 'this' confronted with 'this' hath made the Elohim."

These interpretive variations reflect divergent ways of responding to the paradoxes of abjection-and-crystallization, different ways of constructing and managing the inevitable objective and subjective ambivalence attending the emergence of the divine and demonic from primordial undifferentiation. Above all, these commentators diverge on the question of the relative autonomy and power of the demonic: Cordovero hastens to give the upper hand to the holy forces by positioning the phenomena in Elijah's vision on the holy

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from the *Ra'ya Mehemena*, *Zohar* II, 227, which identifies the four entities of Genesis with the four forces from Elijah's vision, and refers to these four entities as four *kelipot*.

445 Nonetheless, it is telling that there is substantial ambiguity in Cordovero about the origin of the first of these forces, the "mighty wind." In the course of the same discussion, he offers three views: a) that it emerges from the purification of *Tohu* (*Or Yakar*, I, 145b); b) that it is identified with the holy "spirit of God" [רוח אלהים] that hovers over the waters, which emerges "from the [holy] emanation itself" [ממש מתוך האצילות], and is absolutely discontinuous with *Tohu* (*Ibid.,* I, 145b–c); and, finally, c) in an assertion that may serve partly to mediate this tension, that it is a holy force that descends into the demonic world to purify it and then emerges from it unscathed (*Ibid.*, I, 145b).

446 Ibn Lavi, *Ketem Paz*, I, 48c.

447 *Ibid.*, 50c.

448 *Ibid.*, 48d.

side, while Buzaglo portrays those phenomena as fearsome destructive forces. They also disagree concerning the relative anteriority of the two dimensions: while Ibn Lavi stresses the supreme holiness of the earliest emerging substance, *Tohu* (despite its unholy homologue), Cordovero and Buzaglo stress its unholy character. Some of these interpretive positions are evidently rather closer to the plain meaning of the text than others. The wide divergences remain, nonetheless, highly symptomatic of the paradoxes of abjection-and-crystallization, which inevitably result in a measure of indeterminacy, both interpretively and ontologically.

Ibn Lavi's assertion of homology between divine and demonic variants of *Tohu*, also found in other kabbalistic texts, is a particularly striking expression of this indeterminacy, conveyed through antithetical homonymy.[449] In doubling *Tohu* in the context of a passage portraying the crystallization of the demonic realm from refuse, Ibn Lavi brings together the splitting and abjection perspectives. I note that the notion of a divine form of *Tohu* does not appear as such in the Zoharic literature, though it seems to me to be compatible with its spirit.[450]

C *"Fierce Wrath"*

I now turn from processes of abjection-and-crystallization at the highest and lowest levels to those that take place at two intermediate levels, the fifth Sefirah, *Gevurah* [Might] and the third Sefirah, *Binah* [Understanding]. The processes at these levels do not concern the initial constitution of structures or *personae*; rather, they disrupt the coherence of already-constituted structures or *personae*. Nonetheless, the processes are quite homologous to those

449 The influential commentary on the *Sefer Yetsirah* by Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi, a 14th century author outside the Zoharic circles (commonly misattributed to the Ra'avad), also presents *Tohu* as a superior divine level, the Sefirah of *Ḥokhmah*. *Sefer Yetsirah Ha-Shalem*, 77.

450 The description of the first stages of emanation at the beginning of Zohar *Bereshit* (*Zohar* 1, 15a, a passage that may be called the "*tehiru*" passage), discussed above, and the portrayal of the emergence of refuse and the demonic several folios later in the "snow in water" passage contain very similar language. Both portray the emergence of color and form from inchoate stuff – the "slime" and *Tohu* in the "snow in water" passage and the *tehiru* and the *kutra be-golma* ["a cluster of vapour forming in formlessness," in Matt's rendering] in the *tehiru* passage. Both describe the striking of a flame as driving the process – the "hard fire" in the "snow in the water" passage, the *botsina de-kardinuta* in the *tehiru* passage. The parallels are close enough to suggest that the *Tohu*/*Tohu* doubling, with its bringing together of splitting and abjection, is close to the spirit of the Zohar – although an exact one-to-one correlation between the images of the two passages may not be drawn.

at the highest and lowest levels: a disruption accompanied by the emission of inchoate refuse, eventually leading to a reconsolidation of a divine entity or *persona*, and attended by the crystallization or reconsolidation of autonomous demonic entities or *personae*.

Zoharic texts most commonly associate the advent of the demonic with the hypertrophy of *Gevurah* [Might], the Sefirah of divine judgment. Here, too, we find ironic tropes of limitation, portraying the emergence of refuse out of a plenitude. At this level, such tropes construct a tragicomic spectacle of a fierce divine passion, God's wrath, yielding an inchoate miasma. This volatilization of divine ferocity, its transformation from exorbitance into intangibility, is then followed by a trope of representation, a prosopopeia, in which the miasma becomes personified, crystallizing as the mighty adversaries of the divine, the diabolical male and female, Sama'el and Lilith, with their own autonomous place in the cosmos.

Two Zoharic passages vividly portray the two steps of this process, one in Zohar *Va-Yetse*, the other in Zohar *Pekude*. While the two passages should be read as complementary, the most complete portrayal is in the latter:

> דכד תננא נפקא מגו רוגזא תקיף, אתפשט ההוא תננא, ואזיל רוגזא בתר רוגזא, דא על דא, ודא רכיב ושליט על דא, בחיזו דכר ונוקבא, למהוי כלא רוגזא תקיף. וכד שארי תננא לאתפשטא, דחיק מגו רוגזא, בדחיקו דחד נקודה לאתפשטא, ולבתר אתפשט תננא דרוגזא בעקימו, כחד חויא חכים לאבאשא.
> רישא דנפקא לאתפשטא, איהו דרגא דאיהו חשוך, סליק ונחית, אזיל ושאט, ונח בדוכתיה, וקיימא דרגא לאתישבא מההוא תננא דנפיק מגו רוגזא. ואיהו צל, צלא על אתר אחרא דאקרי מות, וכד מתחברן תרווייהו כחדא אקרי צלמות, הא אוקימנא, תרין דרגין אינון דמתחבראן כחדא ...[451]

> For when smoke goes forth from fierce wrath, that smoke spreads out, wrath after wrath, this upon this, this riding upon and ruling this, with the appearance of male and female, becoming all a fierce wrath. And when the smoke begins to spread out, it pushes forth from within the wrath through the pressure of one point, in order to spread out. And then the smoke of wrath spreads crookedly, like one Serpent [*ḥivya*], wise in doing evil.
>
> The head that goes forth to spread out is a dark rung. It ascends and descends, goes and sails forth, and rests in its place. The rung halts, in order to settle, from that smoke that goes forth from wrath. And it is "Shadow," a shadow on another place called "Death." And when the two

451 *Zohar* II, 242b–243a.

> of them join as one, it is called "Shadow of Death." As we have established, they are two rungs joining as one.

This passage portrays a process with a structure similar to those at the two levels discussed above. A strong initiative emerges from within the divine sphere: here, the swelling of "fierce wrath" [רוגזא תקיף], a hypertrophy of *Gevurah*. This powerful divine passion, implicitly associated with the biblically pervasive image of divine wrath as fire, produces an inchoate, miasmic emission: smoke, the most insubstantial of all phenomena. In mysterious imagery and poetic cadences, the passage then portrays this smoke as spreading out and beginning to take on visible, personified form: the "appearance as male and female" [בחיזו דכר ונוקבא]. These adumbrated "appearances" then take on a more substantial existence, in the form of "settling" and acquiring "places" in the cosmos. Indeed, they become metonymically identified with those "places," those of "Shadow" and "Death." Having gained this autonomous foothold in the cosmos, this male and female can then engage in a diabolical version of the coupling of the divine male and female. And thus possessed of form, place, and erotic vitality, they descend into the world to do their mischief.

It is crucial to note that this process of the constitution of demonic *personae* is launched by the dissociation of the divine Self, caused by the hypertrophy of divine anger that gives free rein to a miasmic byproduct, the smoke. This passage thus portrays the complete process of the emergence of the demonic: from the dissociation of subjectivity due to the swelling of anger, to the abjection of smoke, to crystallization as the male and female devils – or, in rhetorical terms, from the irony of the emergence of insubstantiality out of divine passion, to the prosopopeia of the crystallization of formidable adversarial *personae* out of dissolute smoke.

The second passage is found in the *Sitre Torah* section printed in Zohar *Va-Yetze,* which I give in Matt's evocative verse translation:

> סתרא דסתרין סתרא, מגו דתוקפא דטיהרא דיצחק, נפקא מגו דורדיא דחמרא, חד נעיצו קטירא, כליל דכר ונוקבא, סומקא כוורדא, מתפרשן לכמה סטרין ושבילין, דכורא אקרי סמא"ל, נוקביה כלילא בגויה תדיר, כמה דאיהו בסטר קדושה הכי נמי בסטרא אחרא, דכר ונוקבא כלילן דא בדא. נוקבא דסמא"ל נחש אקרי, אשת זנונים, קץ כל בשר, קץ הימים, תרין בישין מתדבקן כחדא[452]
>
> The secret of secrets:
> Out of the scorching noon of Isaac,

452 *Zohar* I, 148a.

out of the dregs of wine,
a fungus emerged, a cluster,
male and female together,
red as a rose,
expanding in many directions and paths.
The male is called Sama'el,
his female is always included within him.
Just as it is on the side of holiness,
so it is on the Other Side:
male and female embracing one another.
The female of Sama'el is called Serpent [*Naḥash*],
Woman of Whoredom,
End of All Flesh, End of Days.
Two evil spirits joined together[453]

As should be evident, these two passages contain very closely related narratives. Both portray the emergence of a structured demonic from the inchoate byproducts that issue from the hypertrophy of *Gevurah*. In this second passage, the "dregs of wine" (filling the role played by "smoke" in the first passage) emerge from the "scorching noon of Isaac" (in the place of "fierce wrath," the image of the hypertrophy of *Gevurah* in the first passage). Nonetheless, the catachresis of the sequence "scorching noon → dregs of wine" is even more baffling than "fierce wrath → smoke." The "dregs" then gradually and mysteriously crystallize: beginning with the minimal proto-form of "a fungus … a cluster," and then taking on the personified form of the diabolical male and female couple, explicitly designated spatially as existing "on the Other Side," and coming to mate with each other, just like the divine couple on the holy side. In this passage, the prosopopeia is even more explicit, as the inchoate fungus gives rise to two named *personae*, already proceeding to "embrace one another." In both passages, the rapidity of the process and the recurring references to "spreading out" evoke the image of a metastasis, defined by the OED as "the movement of pain, disease, function, etc., from one site to another within the body."[454]

453 The verse translation is from Daniel C. Matt (trans.), *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, 77.

454 *Oxford English Dictionary*. I note that metastasis is also the name for a rhetorical technique, the "rapid transition" from "one type of figure to another."

Although these passages portray the crystallization of demonic *personae* out of the abject, they do not explicitly tell us of the effect on the *divine* subject of the hypertrophy of *Gevurah* and its abject by-products. Another passage dealing with smoke, which may be called the "divine incense" passage, implicitly provides this part of the story. This passage portrays the possibility of the theurgical modulation of *Gevurah*, thanks to which divine anger may be soothed without the emergence of an autonomous demonic – or, to use the terms of the two passages already discussed, where the emission of the abject does not lead, though metastatic "spreading out," to the acquisition by the demonic of a stable "place" in the cosmos. The passage thus indirectly teaches us, by contrast, about the disruptions of divine identity wrought by processes which *do* generate stabilized demonic entities, as in the first two passages discussed above.

The "divine incense" passage first seeks to explain how destructiveness emerges from the divine, specifically the divine wrath associated with the "nose," a corporeal locus of *Gevurah*.

> אש נפיק מלגיו ואיהו דק, ואחיד במלה אחרא לבר דלאו איהו דק הכי, ואתאחדן דא בדא, וכדין תננא סלקא ... וסימניך חוטמא דנפיק ביה תננא מגו אשא.[455]

> Fire issues from within, and is insubstantial, and it cleaves to another substance, without, less insubstantial; and they cleave to each other. Then smoke ascends.... Your symbol for this is the nose, for smoke issues through it, from within fire.

Note that it is the dissolute by-product, the "smoke," rather than its source, the divine "fire," *Gevurah*'s very element, that "destroys everything."[456]

After portraying the emergence of the destructive smoke, the passage describes the theurgic effect of the divine inhaling of the incense offering:

> ועל דא כתיב (דברים לג י) ישימו קטורה באפך בגין דאהדר אשא לאתריה, וחוטמא אתכניש בההוא ריחא לגו לגו, עד דאתאחיד כלא ותב לאתריה ואתקרב כלא לגו מחשבה ..., עד דנח רוגזא ... וכדין ... נהירו דבוצינין נהירו דאנפין.[457]

455 *Zohar* I, 70a.
456 *Zohar* I, 70b [ושצי כלא].
457 *Zohar* I, 70a.

> And therefore it is written, "they shall place incense in your nose" (Deuteronomy 33:1),[458] for fire returns to its site, and through that aroma the nose withdraws within, within – till all cleaves together, and returns to its place, and everything draws together within Thought, and becomes one will.... Until wrath rests ... Then, ... radiance of lamps, radiance of faces.

This passage provides a vivid portrayal of the experience of abjection undergone by an already constituted subject. As a result of the flaring of divine anger, divine subjectivity undergoes dissociation, accompanied by the emission of the miasmic byproduct, smoke. The hypertrophy of *Gevurah* thus leads to the loss of coherence of the divine subject, the displacement of its elements from their proper sites – above all, the dissociation of divine wrath from divine "Thought" (or, sefirotically, the dissociation of *Gevurah* from *Ḥokhmah* or *Keter*).

The incense placed in the divine "nose" induces the divine subject to take a deep breath, to take a moment to draw back from "Thought-less" anger. Just as a person might try to regain his or her composure after an outburst of mindless rage, this deep breath allows the divine to re-align its "Might" to its "Thought." The deep breath enables the various elements of the divine to resume their proper proportions, regain their proper places, and reconnect to each other. With the reconstitution of *Gevurah* in its proper "site" after the abjection of its dangerous by-product, the destructive force embodied in "smoke," the divine subject can regain its coherence. Having disrupted the movement from abjection to crystallization, from miasmic emission to a structured demonic cosmos, the theurgy effected by the incense offering produces a divine subject in which "all is embraced, returning to its site." And "then," the passage announces its act of morpho-poiesis and prosopopeia: "the radiance of lamps, the shining of faces."

We need now only read this passage in relation to those in which the abject emissions from *Gevurah do* lead to the consolidation of an autonomous demonic realm to obtain the full picture. The construction of a coherent divine Self is precarious, vulnerable to periodic experiences of dissociation, and requiring periodic efforts of reconsolidation. The abject by-products associated with these periodic crises of the coherence of the divine subject lead to the crystallization, or reconsolidation, of an autonomous demonic realm. The theurgical human action required to disrupt this reconsolidation must be continually re-enacted: for the divine subject, as the biblical narratives repeatedly

458 This literal rendering conforms to the Zoharic interpretation here. The KVJ read: "they shall put incense before thee."

show, is subject to recurrent bouts of fury and appeasement, recurrent episodes of abjection and reconsolidation.

The Zoharic tales of divine anger provide some of the clearest occasions for reflection on the broader themes underlying this book, even for an edifying moral. The texts I discuss here depict the swelling of anger as a recurrent, perhaps even organic, feature of the unfolding of the divine Self. They do not attribute this anger to an external provocation, such as human sin, unlike the biblical stories upon which they undoubtedly draw. The dissociation of the Self induced by this swollen anger leads to confrontation with a lethal, adversarial Other, who is nonetheless a crystallization of the inassimilable passions of the Self. Prevention of this irremediable confrontation of deadly enemies cannot be undertaken by the Self alone, but only with the help of others, here from the Israelites proffering incense. Only thus can "all return to its place," even the latently adversarial forces themselves, forestalling their hard congealment into enemy *personae*. Alterity is not abolished, for the bouts of anger are destined to recur. And yet, "with a little help from its friends," the Self can face alterity and acknowledge it as emerging from its deepest recesses, the Other forever inhabiting the Self and rendering its belated, bounded unity forever precarious.

D *"The River"*

Finally, I turn to the most paradoxical Zoharic texts on the emergence of the demonic from divine abjection, those associated with the Sefirah of *Binah* [Understanding]. Such texts resolutely seek *both* to portray the emergence from *Binah* of harsh judgment, and ultimately the demonic, *and* to avoid contaminating *Binah* with any suggestion of internal harshness, let alone evil. To a modern reader, *Binah*'s frequent identification with the Supernal Mother makes it almost irresistible to associate this acute ambivalence with classical Freudian portrayals of ambivalence towards maternal figures.

The following declaration about the "Stream," an embodiment of *Binah*, portrays this relationship at its most concisely inexplicable:

דתנינן אף על גב דבהאי נחל דינא לא אשתכח, דינין מתערין מינה[459]

> As we have learned: this Stream, even though judgment is not found in it, judgments are aroused from Her.

459 This excerpt is found in the printed editions at *Zohar* I, 220b, but Matt relocates it, on the basis of manuscripts, to volume III in the pericope *Emor*.

In such a pronouncement, the question of how an entity which is itself pure compassion, in which "no judgment is found," could "arouse" judgment seems deliberately foreclosed, if not forbidden. The excerpt's pithy irony, the arousal of judgment from the perfectly compassionate *Binah*, is not attributed to an action, as with the Dark Lamp, or with a swelling emotion, as with the fire of the divine wrath, but simply posited as a mystery. The irony here, in quintessential mythic fashion, verges on an inexplicably tragic reversal.

Other passages, however, provide rather more elaboration. The three passages to which I now turn portray both linguistic and ontological relationships between *Binah* and judgment, each highlighting the disjunctive or diversionary nature of such relationships. The first passage discusses those verses in the Bible where the Masoretic tradition instructs us to read the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, as Elohim.[460] This linguistic disjunction constructs an ontological disjunction – for, in standard Zoharic hermeneutics, the Tetragrammaton names the compassionate face of the divine, while Elohim names the judgmental face:

> יו"ד ה"א וא"ו ה"א דאית אתר דאקרי אלהים ... אמאי אקרי אלהים דהא רחמי אינון בכל אתר.... בכל אתר יהוה רחמי, ובשעתא דמהפכי חייביא רחמי לדינא, כתיב יהוה, וקרינן ליה אלהים ...[461]

> YHVH – for there is a place where it is read "Elohim" ... Why is it read Elohim [i.e., though written as YHVH] since they [the letters YHVH] are compassion in every place?! ... YHVH is in every place compassion, but at a time when sinners transform compassion into judgment, then it is written "YHVH" and we read it "Elohim" ...

This passage's explicit focus on the disjunction between the written and read word makes rhetorical analysis particularly apt: for such a disjunction embodies a paradigmatic instance of irony, a gap between meaning and articulation. The rupture between the semantic essence, the unvowelized letters of the Tetragrammaton, on the one hand, and semantic expression, the articulated Elohim, on the other, constructs an ontological rupture between the essence of *Binah* and her manifestation as judgment. The Masoretic injunction here to transgress that rupture, to read YHVH as Elohim, mandates a rhetorical act of irony, constructing an ontologically scandalous transition from compassion to judgment, the two great Zoharic opposites. The passage expresses its protest

460 See, e.g., Genesis 15:2.

461 *Zohar* III, 65a.

against this irony and scandal by exclaiming, "why is [the name] read Elohim, when [the letters] are compassion in every place?!"

Shifting from the linguistic to the organic register, the passage then portrays the disjunction in an image suggesting the emission of refuse. Note that *Binah* is here called both the "River" who waters the "saplings," the lower Sefirot, and the "Mother of the Garden," i.e., of the Shekhinah:

> כלהו נטיעין וכל אינון בוסינין דמתלהטן כלהו נהירין ומתלהטן ואתשקיין ומתברכאן מההוא נהרא דנגיד ונפיק ... והאי אקרי אם לגנתא ... אקרי רחמי בלחודהא, והא מסטרהא דינין מתערין, בגיני כך כתיב ברחמי, ונקוד בדינא, אתוון ברחמי, ואתנגיד בסטרהא דינא[462]
>
> All these saplings and all these flaming lamps all illuminate and flame and are watered from this River that flows and goes forth ... And it is called the Mother of the Garden ... She is called compassion when she is alone, yet from her sides judgments are aroused. Therefore, it is written in compassion [i.e., as YHVH], and vowelized in judgment [i.e., as Elohim]: the letters in compassion, and judgment flows through her sides.

The essence of *Binah*, the River who is also the "Mother of the Garden," is compassion, and her proper activity is to gush vitality to her "saplings," and, especially, her daughter. Nevertheless, at times this essence expresses itself improperly. It is then that she emits judgment from "her sides," an emission in contradiction to her proper essence. She is the life-giving River, the Supernal Mother, to whom the attribution of any harshness is (Oedipally?) prohibited – and yet, involuntarily, perhaps unconsciously, judgments flow from her. The coherence of her maternal being disintegrates, as forces antithetical to her essence issue forth from her "sides," perhaps an allusion to her "Other Side."

A second passage foregrounds the ontological dimension. This passage is concerned with the ontological possibility of a cosmic Day of Judgment, Rosh Hashanah, despite the ceaselessly flowing compassion of the cosmic Supernal Mother, *Binah*. While *Binah* is the mother all seven lower Sefirot, the passage particularly stresses that she is the mother of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, associated with the Sefirot of *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness], *Gevurah* [Might], and *Tif'eret* [Beauty]. The passage wonders: how can Isaac, a name of the divine face of judgment, *Gevurah*, come to dominate alone on Rosh Hashanah, in contradiction to his Mother's compassionate essence? On the one hand, this domination can only come about due to a cessation of *Binah*'s compassionate

462 *Ibid.*

flow. On the other hand, Isaac derives his force precisely from this maternal source.

In characteristic Zoharic fashion, the passage does not solve this puzzle, but rather deepens its insolubility through a set of paradoxical statements and heterogeneous images. In the following key excerpts, *Binah* is figured both as the River and as the "Great Shofar," the great ram's-horn, an image suited for both *Binah*'s expressive, quasi-linguistic role, and, as a womb-like form, for its ontological role as Supernal Mother:

> האי נהר אף על גב דלאו איהו דינא, דינין נפקי מסטריה ואתתקפו ביה ...
> כד אסתלק האי שופר גדול דלא ינקא לבנין, כדין יצחק אתתקף, ואתתקן לדינא בעלמא [463]

> This River: even though it is not itself judgment, judgments come forth from its side and are strengthened through it ... When that Great Shofar ascends and does not suckle the sons, then Isaac is strengthened and receives his *tikun* for judgment in the world.

These two phrases must be read together. The first begins with the assertion of *Binah*'s ontological purity: the River "is not judgment." It continues, however, by declaring that "judgments issue" from its "side" and, moreover, "are strengthened through it." The second phrase further deepens this paradox: Isaac, one of *Binah*'s "sons," is strengthened precisely, and paradoxically, when she no longer "suckles" her "sons." Taken together, the two phrases yield a tale similar to the first passage we looked at: when *Binah* "suckles" her "sons," i.e., bestows vitality upon them in a direct, proper way, then the cosmos receives only compassion; but when her influence is not proper and direct, viz., when it "issues from her side," then what flows from her is judgment – and it is this indirect, "sideways" flow that "strengthens" Isaac. The blockage that besets *Binah*, the cessation of her "suckling," separating her from her "sons," leads to the indirect emission from her of that which strengthens Isaac, a condition closely associated with the strengthening of the Other Side.[464] (I note that I explore the "suckling" trope at length below).

A third passage provides even more of a window into the dynamics of abjection – as well as of reconsolidation – implicit in the mysteries of *Binah*. This passage, which may be called the "*Binah*-as-*Teshuvah*" passage, consists of a series of homilies on the question of when the name *Teshuvah* (i.e.,

463 *Zohar* III, 99a–b.
464 See, e.g., *Zohar* II, 184a.

repentance, but literally, "return") is appropriate for the sefirah of *Binah*. Each homily concludes with versions of the refrain, "and then it is called *Teshuvah*." The close relationship in Zoharic writing (and Jewish tradition generally) between the meriting of a name and ontological achievement suggests that this refrain also portrays an ontological event. This recurrent rhetorical/ontological structure, in turn, implies a disruption of *Binah*'s coherence for which the state of *Teshuvah* ("return") is a subsequent repair and reconsolidation. The employment of *Teshuvah* as a name for *Binah*, a relatively uncommon usage in Zoharic writing, links this text to other 13th century texts in which the name is more common and in which the abjection dimension is clearer.

The first homily in this passage begins with the mysterious issuing forth from *Binah* of stern, destructive, even evil forces in dramatically more graphic language than in the excerpts above.

> מסטרא דאימא נפקין גרדיני גליפין מאחדן בקולפוי דגבורה שליטין על רחמי כד"א (במדבר טז:י"א) הנועדים על יי', על יי' ממש. וכדין אשתכחו עלמין חסירין דלא שלימין ממש וקטטותא אתער בכלהו. ואי בני עלמא מכשירין עובדיהון לתתא מתבסמן דינין ומתעברן ומתערן רחמי ושליטין על ההוא בישא דאתער מדינא קשיא[465]
>
> From the side of Mother issue engraved guardians, clutching clubs of *Gevurah*, prevailing over Compassion, as is said: "gathered together over YHVH" (Numbers 16:11) – "over YHVH," precisely! Then the worlds are found lacking, truly incomplete, and strife is aroused in them all. But if inhabitants of the world rectify their actions below, then judgments are rendered fragrant and pass away – and Compassion is aroused, overpowering that evil aroused by harsh Judgment.[466]

The text links this rare proclamation of the emergence of explicitly evil forces from *Binah* to the emergence of the "incomplete worlds" – a reference to the midrash of the "destroyed worlds" and its Zoharic adaptation.

If read in the light of the passage from the *Idra Zuta* discussed above, this passage would thus be associating the emissions from *Binah* with the primordial refuse emitted as a by-product of the action of the Dark Lamp (which, as I showed above, was associated with the "destroyed worlds" in the *Idra Zuta*). As I discussed above, the *Idra Zuta* associates the latter process with the incompleteness of the subjectivity of the would-be creator of these worlds who has not yet received his *tikun*. Although, as I repeatedly caution, one may

465 *Zohar* III, 15b.

466 This translation is a slightly modified version of that found in Matt Translation, VII, 94.

not necessarily assume a continuity of authorship or even editorship among Zoharic passages, it is clear that these passages emerge from the same mythological matrix.

Indeed, the passage continues precisely with the repair of *Binah* and her achievement of the name of *Teshuvah,* a reconsolidation of her coherence as a bounded subject. The text portrays this repair as the *return* of all the elements of the divine to their proper places, essential for the achievement of this name, *Teshuvah*, whose literal sense signifies return:

> כל כתרא וכתרא תב בקיומיה, ומתברכאן כלהו כחדא, וכד תייבין כל חד וחד לאת־ריה, ומתברכין מתבסמא אימא בקלדיטי גליפין, ותבין לסטרהא, כדין אקרי תשובה גמורה[467]

> Each and every crown returns to its position, and they are all blessed as one. And when each and every one returns to its place and they are blessed, Mother is rendered fragrant by engraved keys, and they return to her sides. Then she is called Complete *Teshuvah*.

The "return" of the elements of the divine subject, each to its proper place, is expressed in language nearly identical to the restoration of the coherence of the divine subject by means of the incense offering, discussed in the preceding section. The very similar reconsolidation of the subject in this passage, subsequent to its disruption by improper emissions, yields a newly coherent subject, "Complete *Teshuvah*."

The production of destructive and incomplete worlds from *Binah*, and her appellation as *Teshuvah*, strongly suggests that this text be read in relation to the key 13th century precursor to Zoharic reflections on evil, Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen's *Treatise on the Left Emanation*. The *Treatise* describes an "emanation, emanated from the power of *Teshuvah*" [אצילות אחד נאצל מכח התשובה].[468] This emanation serves as a "curtain that separates the emanation of the upper levels, among which there are no alien emanations" [מסך מבדיל בין אצילות כל מעלות הקדושות ולא אצילות זרות עמהן]. In principle, this *Teshuvah* should emanate only holy beings and nothing Other, nothing "alien." Immediately, however, things go awry, as essence clashes with realization:

467 *Zohar* III, 15b.

468 Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, 'Ma'amar al Atsilut Ha-Semalit', 87.

ותחלת האצילות שנאצל ממנו הוא כת של נשמות זכות ומזהירות ... ואלו הנשמות שהן אצילות המלאכים עמדו בכח גנוזות בתוך חיק המאציל כפי הנעלם מהכל וקודם צאתם מן הכח אל הפועל נאצל עולם אחד מצורות זרות ומדמיונים משחיתים.[469]

> The beginning of the emanation that is emanated from it is the group of pure and radiant souls ... And these souls, which are the emanations of the angels, existed potentially within the bosom of the Emanator, since it is hidden from all. But before they could emerge from potentiality to actuality, one world was emanated composed of alien forms and destructive images.

Indeed, three such destructive worlds are emanated successively, each seeking to "undermine and confound" [לקטרג ולבלבל] the proper process of emanation. After each such emanation appears, it is destroyed by the Emanator, a destruction that takes the form of a return to the source, as a candle is extinguished by immersing its wick into the very oil which sustained it.[470]

This text is undoubtedly the key precursor to the Zoharic passages we are considering in this section, particularly the "*Binah*-as-*Teshuvah*" passage, all concerned with the improper emanation from the compassionate *Binah* of the forces of judgment, which, in their concentrated form, are demonic forces. As in the "*Binah*-as-*Teshuvah*" passage, the Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen passage portrays deficient, destructive, and evil forces, associated with deficient "worlds," emerging from *Binah*. The passage links this evil emanation to an inexplicable mishap in the act of emanation: as *Binah* was preparing to emanate good forces, it emanated evil forces in their stead, a stark, mythic disruption for which no theological apology is even attempted. The Zoharic passage, for its part, declares that human action can theurgically remedy the destructive consequences of the emanation of the harsh forces, perhaps raising an inference that human sin caused their emanation. But the Zoharic passage's reference to the "incomplete worlds" suggests its link both to the Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen *Ma'amar* and to the frequent Zoharic use of the "destroyed worlds" myth to refer to a primordial mishap in the divine unfolding, unconnected to human action.

A key difference between the two passages lies in the fate of the destructive forces. In the *Treatise*, they are *destroyed* through their "return" to *Teshuvah*; in the Zoharic passage, they are *rendered fragrant* through their "return" to their

469 *Ibid.*
470 *Ibid.*, 88.

proper places. In both texts, however, the appellation *Teshuvah* stems from this entity's role as a place of "return." Both fates can be seen as forms of reintegration into the divine subject, bringing to an end the disruption of its proper unfolding caused by improper emissions.

A missing link between the Zoharic passage and the *Treatise* may be found in a manuscript passage quoted by Moshe Idel, who describes it as both very close to Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen and under Zoharic influence.[471] This passage also clearly links the mysteries of the emanation of demonic forces from *Binah* to abjection. In the midst of a narrative about emanation undoubtedly derived from Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, the passage explicitly associates the Zoharic trope of the emission of "refuse" with *Binah* and links this emission to the constitution of demonic forces. The passage thus describes the "forces of impurity" as having been emanated before the "forces of purity," for "initially the refuse was sifted" [כחות הטמאה נאצלו קודם כחות הטהרה כי תחלה נברר הפסולת].[472] Specifically, these "forces of impurity" were "emanated from the refuse of *Teshuvah*" [כי מפסולת התשובה נאצלו כחות הטומאה]. The text also refers to the "refuse of *Tohu*" which comes from *Teshuvah* [פסולת התוהו שהיה מהתשובה].[473]

This text thus contains themes linking the Ha-Kohen *Ma'amar*, the Zoharic "*Binah*-as-*Teshuvah*" passage, and other Zoharic passages discussed above. Although apparently written after the Zoharic literature (or at least some of it), this text makes explicit the processes of abjection in relation to *Binah*, implicit in the *Binah*/*Teshuvah* passage as well as other passages discussed here. The Zoharic abstention from explicitly attributing "refuse" to *Binah* may or may not be explained by classic Freudian ambivalence towards the mother. Nevertheless, the mysterious transitions from compassion to judgment in the first two Zoharic passages discussed here seem almost to call out for an abjection narrative, a call seemingly answered by the manuscript passage.

In this section, I have shown very similar processes at four quite different levels. Ontologically, at each level, the initial position is one of divine plenitude or tranquillity (among others: primordial Thought, snow-in-water or the newly created Earth, a tranquil "nose," a judgment-less *Binah*), followed by the emission of some refuse (sparks, slime, smoke, evil forces of judgment), followed by the constitution or reconstitution of structured spaces inhabited by divine and/or demonic entities and *personae* (the demonic that crystallizes from the "unsweetened" sparks, the *Tohu* that comes from the slime, Sama'el and Lilith who emerge from the smoke, the destructive "guardians" who emerge from

471 Idel, 'Ha-Maḥshavah Ha-Ra'ah shel Ha-El', 358 & n.8.

472 *Ibid.*, 358.

473 *Ibid.*, 359, n. 8.

Binah). At a rhetorical level, I have identified a recurrent pattern of tropes of limitation, in the form of various kinds of irony, followed by tropes of representation, the morpho-poeisis and prosopopeia that construct the crystallization of divine and demonic entities and *personae*.

VI Divine and Demonic: a Family Affair

Although I have thus far highlighted the similarity of processes occurring on divergent levels, I do not intend to minimize the importance of the differences among them. I have noted, for example, that the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* text, portraying the dialectics within "Primordial Thought," constructs the primordiality of abjection-and-crystallization in a particularly striking way: eliding the very subject wielding the Dark Lamp, for it will only be formed through the process of abjection provoked by the Dark Lamp itself. At other levels, such as *Binah* and *Gevurah*, the portrayals do not concern the initial constitution of a particular Sefirah or its initial integration into the entire divine structure but with its *re*-construction and *re*-integration after a disruption involving the *re*-appearance of the abject.

Differences among levels also concern the relative concretion of the images: the mysterious and almost untranslatable Dark Lamp striking within "Thought," on the one hand, and more sensuous images such as "snow-in-the-water" and "fire and smoke," on the other. Zoharic passages that portray the emergence of the Other Side through tales of human procreation and family dramas further accentuate such differences. Such passages take the relationship of abjection to subject-formation as their explicit theme. Employing quintessential human imagery to portray theogony and demonogony, these texts are perhaps even more provocative than those discussed above. Such passages have two interrelated thematic emphases: the relationship of holy progenitors to good and evil offspring and the sibling relationship between such offspring.

A *Procreational Purification: the "Clean Body" Passage*

A passage in Zohar *Terumah* that I call the "clean Body" passage highlights the puzzle of good and evil offspring emerging from holy progenitors.[474] This passage is an elaborate variant of the numerous Zoharic texts describing divine unfolding through an exegesis of the biblical account of the first and second days of Creation. In keeping with this scriptural context, the passage first

474 *Zohar* II, 167a–b.

focuses on the vicissitudes of light, before moving on to more concrete images of human procreation.

Like some of the passages discussed in the preceding section, this text begins by locating the emergence of the demonic in an unexpected interruption of divine unfolding, an interruption concealed in the biblical source-text. It finds this interruption in the repetitive signifiers of the third verse of Genesis. This repetition appears only in the Hebrew – *yehi or va yehi or* – יהי אור ויהי אור, commonly rendered in English as "Let there be light and there was light." In the Hebrew, if one treats the "and" [*va*] signified by the single line of the letter *vav* [ו] as a dividing line, one finds an exact repetition of signifiers on either side of that line. The Zoharic passage associates the first "*yehi or*" with the cosmic right side, associated with the sefirah of *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness] and the patriarch Abraham, the second with the left side, associated with *Gevurah* [Might, the archetype of Judgment] and the patriarch Isaac. The hypertrophy of the latter is the most pervasive Zoharic source of the Other Side. The very divine attempt to move from potentiality to actuality – from the command "*yehi or*" to its realization "*va-yehi or*" – begins the process leading to the emergence of the Other Side. We have seen variants of this sequence in Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen's *Treatise* as well as in a number of Zoharic passages.

The repetition of the word "light" thus reverses its meaning from its first iteration to its second: the second "light," indeed, signifies the incipience of cosmic darkness, ultimately manifested in the evil deeds of the corrupter Esau, Isaac's son, here implicitly identified with Sama'el.[475] The move from the verbal imperative, "Let there be light" [*Yehi or*], to the report of its ontological effect, "and there was light" [*va-yehi or*], is a move from cosmic Right to Left,

475 *Zohar* II, 167a:
כיון דאמר יהי אור, אמאי כתיב ויהי אור, דהא בויהי כן סגי, אלא יהי אור, דא אור קדמאה דאיהו ימינא ויהי אור, דימינא אפיק שמאלא, ומרזא דימינא נפיק שמאלא, ועל דא ויהי אור דא שמאלא. מכאן ויהי קדמאה דאורייתא בסטרא דשמאלא הוה, ובגין כך לאו איהו סימן ברכה, מאי טעמא, בגין דביה נפק ההוא דאחשיך אנפי עלמא, וסימנא דא כד אתגלי רזא דעשו ועובדוי, בהאי הוה, דכתיב (שם כה כז) ויהי עשו איש יודע ציד , לפתאה בני עלמא דלא יהכון בארח מישר
Since it said, "Let there be light," why is it written "And there was light"? For "And it was so" would have been enough. But rather: "Let there be light": this is the primordial light, which is the right. "And there was light": for the right brought forth the left, and from mystery of right, the left issued forth. And, therefore, "and there was light": this is the left. From here: the first "and there was" [*Vayehi*] in the Torah was on the left side, and therefore it is not a sign of blessing. Why? Because through it issued forth that which darkens the face of the world. The sign for this is that when the mystery of Esau and his actions were revealed, it was by this *Va-yehi*: "And Esau was [*Va-yehi Esav*] a cunning hunter" (Genesis 25:27) – to seduce inhabitants of the world not to walk on the straight path.

and ultimately to the demonic, subverting the portrayal of divine omnipotence announced by the conventional meaning of the verse. This kind of rhetorical parallelism – in which exact repetition becomes a way to signify radical difference – is a favorite Zoharic constructional scheme, particularly in the form of anaphora, as I showed in Chapter 2. That a translation, such as the English "'Let there be light,' and there was light," does not reproduce this technique highlights the fact that this meaning is produced purely by the scheme, rather than the semantic content.

The passage then associates the next verse, "And God saw the light that it was good" [וירא אלהים את האור כי טוב] with the emergence of yet a third light, that of the "Central Column," which "resolves the dispute between right and left" [אפריש מחלוקת דימינא ושמאלא].[476] This reconciliation between Right and Left can only be effected, however, after the emergence of the "darkness" and its crystallization into "Esau" – i.e., only after the expulsion of the abject and its consolidation into a diabolical adversary. Only after this departure of the inassimilable is a perfected light possible, one that God "saw that it was good."[477]

The passage then proceeds, through an exegesis of the Genesis account of the second day, to map this process onto a vivid organic description modeled on human procreation. First, it associates the three elements highlighted in the account of the first and second day – light, water, and firmament – with the cosmic Right, Left, and Center. It then associates the light with male "seed" which is placed into female "water." During the pregnancy that follows this entry of "seed" into "water," a "body" gradually takes form, associated with the cosmic "Center" and the "firmament."

> כיון דאתצייר ואגליף ציורא דיוקנא דגופא אקריש ההוא פשיטו ודא איהו רקיע בתוך המים, ולבתר דאקריש כתיב ויקרא אלהים לרקיע שמים דהא אקריש ההוא לחותא דגופא דהוה גו אינון מים.
> כיון דאבריר גופא ואנקי בנקיו ההוא לחותא דאנגיד ואשתאר הוה פסולת דקא אתעבד גו התוכא ואינון מים הרעים עכורין ומנהון אתעביד פסולת מקטרגא דכל עלמא דכר ונוקבא[478]
>
> Once the form of the image of the Body was formed and engraved, that expansion congealed, and this is "a firmament in the midst of the waters" (Genesis 1:6). After it congealed, it is written: "Elohim called the

476 *Zohar* II, 167b.

477 I interpret this passage in light of the closely related text at I,17a.

478 *Zohar* II, 167b.

> firmament Heaven" (*ibid.*, 8), for the moisture of the Body within that water congealed. Once the Body was sifted/clarified/purified and thoroughly cleansed, the moisture that flowed and remained was refuse, which was made in the smelting. And these are the evil, filthy waters. And from them refuse was made – Accuser of the whole world, male and female.[479]

The "Body" is a term Zoharic texts at times identify with the entire sefirotic structure but more often with its central male *persona*, the blessed Holy One, the Lesser Countenance [*Ze'er Anpin*], or Son. The crystallization of the fully formed "Body" out of the "seed" and "water" suggests that these two substances might be identified here with the Sefirot of *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*, which Zoharic texts often associate with the Supernal Father and Mother of the divine Son, the blessed Holy One. Alternatively, they may refer to the male and female dimensions internal to this male figure, the Sefirot of *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness] and *Gevurah* [Might], though the pregnancy imagery would then seem far less apt.

After the formation of this "Body" that is "thoroughly cleansed" and "purified" [כיון דאתבריר גופא ואתנקי בנקיו], something "remains," a formless "moisture." This "remainder," this abject, is the aspect of the "water," the left side, that was not assimilable by the "Body." This inchoate remainder is the "refuse" that is "made" in the "smelting" process [הוה פסולת, דקא אתעבד גו התוכא], a refuse which then comes to be named "evil, filthy waters." Personified forms then crystallize from this fluid refuse, the diabolical male and female. The demonic *personae* that emerge from the inassimilable remainder, the inevitable byproducts of the process of procreation, thus emerge out of the same process that leads to the crystallization of the divine "Body." In a related passage in Zohar *Bereshit*, the expelled byproduct of the union of the Left and Right in the firmament is Hell, which crystallizes out of the "fire of wrath" [אשא דרוגזא] that arises with the first emergence of the left side.[480] Such passages can be read as variations on still other Zoharic passages portraying the birth of the divine Son and Daughter after gestation in the womb of the divine Mother – but which sometimes lack the portrayal of abjection.[481]

A bit further on, the passage proceeds to a further portrayal of the purging of refuse [פסלת] through procreation. It portrays the three sons of Eve as stages on the way to purification: Cain an attempt to purge the refuse from the Left, Abel

479 Matt Translation v, 469 (translation substantially modified).
480 *Zohar* i, 17a.
481 See, e.g., *Zohar* i, 15b; i, 29b.

from the Right, and Seth as the complete purification.[482] Although this section of the passage may partly refer to the first human family, it is a short version of a more elaborate narrative in the *Idra Raba* which explicitly refers to a divine family: the blessed Holy One (here called *Ze'er Anpin*, the Lesser Countenance) identified with Adam as father, the Matronita/Shekhinah identified with Eve as mother, and Cain, Abel, and Seth as their metaphysical offspring. The text associates Cain and Abel with contaminated spirits, whose contamination is identified with their inassimilability into the divine structure, particularly its bounded selfhood, its "Body":

> כל אינון כתרין דלא אתכלילן בגופא, כלהו רחיקין ומסאבין, ומסאבן כל מאן דיקרב לגבן, למנדע מנהון מלין: ... ואי תימא, אי הכי הא מלאכין קדישין דליתהון בכללא דגופא, לא, דח"ו אי ליהוון לבר מכללא דגופא, לא להוו קדישין ולא מתקיימין ... כלהו בכללא דאדם, בר מהני דליתהון בכללא דגופא, דאינון מסואבין, ומסאבין למאן דיקרב בהדייהו[483]
>
> All of these crowns that were not included in the Body, they are all distant and contaminated. And they contaminate anyone who draws near to them in order to learn things from them ... And should you say: if so, behold holy angels who are not included in the Body! No, heaven forbid, for if they were outside of inclusion in the Body, they would not be holy and they would not endure ... [But rather,] all [angels] are included in 'Adam,' except for those who are not included in the Body, for those are contaminated, and contaminate all who draw near to them.

I return to this theme of the generation of contaminated spirits below. Here, I only wish to emphasize that the text identifies holiness with worthiness of "inclusion in the Body." Or, in Kristeva's terms: that which a bounded subject must exclude from its "clean and proper body" is the abject; or, conversely, the abject is that which cannot be included in the subject. Approaching too close to the abject is disastrous for the subject, contaminating it, ruining its bounded nature.

Before concluding this section, I note that, in the middle of the "clean Body" passage, the text interpolates an alternative description of the divine unfolding, that of the "first Adam" [אדם קדמאה], to which the gendered dimension of the interaction between "light," "water," and "firmament" is not applicable:

482 *Zohar* II, 167b–168a.
483 *Zohar* III, 143a–b.

"without female and without male" [בלא נוקבא ובלא דכורא].[484] The gendered description, which I have detailed above, is then ascribed to the "second Adam" [אדם ... תניינא].[485] This alternative description features the same three elements, light, water, and firmament, but their interaction happens within the *mishḥata* [משחתא] (a term meaning both measure and oil),[486] rather than in the womb, and there is no mention of refuse. Instead of the gestational and family dramas of the first description, the alternative process is said to happen in a "straight path" [בארח מישר].[487]

In comparison with the lengthy and elaborate gendered description, this part of the passage is short and enigmatic; it also comes as an interruption between two phases of the main description, both of which are structured by gender and the purging of contaminants. There is wide disagreement among the traditional commentators about the meaning of this interpolation, and about how to understand the distinction between the "first" and "second" Adam."[488] Cordovero, for example, declares that the key difficulty that compels the elaboration of the alternative, non-gendered portrayal is that, otherwise, one would be imputing the presence of "waste" [מותר] to *Binah*.[489] As I noted above, given the identification of *Binah* with the Supernal Mother, this desire to avoid sullying *Binah* can only appear highly symptomatic to any psychoanalytically attuned reader. Cordovero's comment must also be associated with the complex dynamics I discussed above in relation to *Binah*, whose "sides" are the source of judgment. In any case, it is unclear how Cordovero would reconcile his comment here with the passage in Zohar *Bereshit* asserting the identity of the gestational processes in *Binah* and *Malkhut*.[490]

The co-existence of the two portrayals of the generation of "Adam" lend themselves to a number of interpretations, variations of those I have broached in relation to other juxtapositions of incompatible images in the Zoharic literature. We may, of course, simply be faced with two different traditions or views juxtaposed by the author or editor. We may be reading portrayals of two

484 *Zohar* II, 167b.

485 Tishby declares that this is the only place in the Zoharic literature in which such a distinction is made within the divine sphere. *MZ* I, 157n.6.

486 Liebes, *Perakim*, 187.

487 *Zohar* II, 167b.

488 For example, one Lurianic interpretation associates this term with Mother and Father and their non-gendered emergence with processes that transpire in the beard of *Atik* [the Ancient One]. Vital, *Sha'ar Ma'amere Rashbi*, 104. Margoliot in the *Nitsotse Zohar* on *Zohar* II, 167b refers us to a passage in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 120a that associates the notion of the primordial Adam with *Keter*. On the complexities of interpreting the term "*Adam*" or "*Adam Kadma'ah*" in the Zohar, see Liebes, *Perakim,* 14.

489 *Or Yakar*, X, 92.

490 *Zohar* I, 29b. I note, though, that this passage does not mention the refuse of the afterbirth.

conditions or levels of the divine. Alternatively, their very obscurely explained co-presence within this passage may suggest a particularly acute instance of the management of ambivalence.

Somewhat speculatively, we could read the structure of the passage, in which the non-gendered description is interpolated between two phases of the gendered description, as an instantiation on the expository plane of processes homologous to those I have shown on the ontological plane. Just as a number of passages show how the emission of refuse and the crystallization of the demonic are necessary *ontological* preparations for the full accomplishment of divine creativity, so here a description of the emission of refuse and the crystallization of the demonic are necessary *expository* preparations for a description of the process without the emission of refuse. And just as the precarious accomplishment of divine creativity is always followed ontologically by further relapses that require further *tikunin*, so the exposition of the "straight" process of divine unfolding is followed by further elaboration of the purification process. In this interpretation, we have here an instance of a tight imbrication between Zoharic textuality and Zoharic ontology, each mirroring the paradoxical dynamics of the other.

B *Brothers and Sisters: "Improper Twins"*

I now turn to passages that foreground the sibling relationship between divine and demonic *personae*, a logical, or rather genealogical, corollary of the notion that the same procreative processes engender beings affiliated with both realms. Such passages draw on biblical and midrashic stories of rival siblings, as well as myths of rival metaphysical *personae*. These texts directly exemplify the theme of "improper twins" that I broached in the Introduction.

An elaborate passage in Zohar *Metsora*, which I call the "drops" passage, discusses Isaac's paternity of both Esau and Jacob. Implicitly rejecting the view of a midrash endorsed by Rashi,[491] the passage stresses that Esau was formed from the first seminal "drop" emitted by Isaac, and Jacob from the second "drop."[492] The passage attributes Esau's ruddiness, the color of judgment and hence of the Other Side, to his origin in the first, unpurified "drop," a "drop" that was not "perfected" [שלים]. This image, like that of the birth of Cain prior to Seth,[493] rests on the recurrent Zoharic imperative of an initial emission of refuse before a proper form can be produced. I note also that, while such an emission might be expected in the case of parents like Eve or Isaac, since the

491 *Bereshit Rabah*, I, 73d (63:8) and Rashi's commentary to Genesis 25:26.
492 *Zohar* III, 55b.
493 *Zohar* II, 167b–168a.

feminine (Eve) and *Gevurah* (Isaac) are associated with the left side, other Zoharic passages also portray such an emission with respect to Abraham.[494]

Zoharic passages characterize divine/demonic sibling relationships in a variety of ways. One passage associates the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael with that between "gold" and its "dregs."[495] The familial and mineral images work together to evoke the primordial inextricability of divine and demonic, and the concomitant necessity for a forceful process to divide them into separate beings. The relationship between Jacob and Esau, however, receives much greater attention. Indeed, their names often respectively signify the central divine and demonic male *personae*, the blessed Holy One and Sama'el. The twinning relationship of Jacob and Esau suggests an even more fraught relationship than that between refuse and essence, although the latter image is also employed.

Zoharic texts that track the biblical narratives of the Jacob/Esau relationship take us well beyond the initial stage of subject-formation-through-abjection to the subsequent stage of grappling with a fully crystallized demonic Other. As the biblical account itself tells us, the Jacob/Esau struggle occurred even within the womb, presumably once the initial "drops" stage passed. One extended Zoharic passage portrays the twinning relationship between the two as emerging not so much as a genetic matter but as an *effect* of the ongoing struggle between them: Jacob engages with Esau in the manner of a "crooked snake" *because* Esau "drew upon *that* snake," i.e., Sama'el.[496] The struggle with the demonic sibling thus *produces* the similarity between the two, making it possible to refer to the two antagonists by the same word, "*taninim*" (a word whose translation, and relation to "splitting," I discussed in Chapter 2): "'And Elohim created the two great *taninim*' – this is Jacob and Esau" [ויברא אלהי"ם את התנינים הגדולים, דא יעקב ועשו].[497]

Moreover, the "drops" passage itself, after insisting on the difference between the two seminal emissions, proceeds to two other homonymous divine/demonic relationships. Curiously, these relationships are not between Jacob and Esau, but between two more unexpected pairs, whose twinning is all the more striking because it rests on non-biological bases. The first is Esau and David – both of whom the Bible calls "ruddy" [אדמוני],[498] a pair whose closeness and opposition are evoked a few pages earlier through a pun on the

494 See, e.g., *Zohar* I, 115b; III, 215a. See also *Ra'ya Mehemena* in *Zohar* III, 111b.
495 *Zohar* I, 118b.
496 *Zohar* I, 138a.
497 *Zohar* I, 138b.
498 Genesis 25:25; I Samuel 16:12.

phrases *zohama di-dehava*, "refuse of gold" [זוהמא דדהבא] and *zohara di-dehava*, "luster of gold" [זוהרא דדהבא] (especially in the printed editions).[499] The second, even bolder parallel, is between Esau and the blessed Holy One, a comparison based on the fact that both are called "first" in the Bible – "Esau is called first … and the blessed Holy One is called first" [עשו נקרא ראשון… וקודשא בריך הוא אקרי ראשון].[500] This passage hints that this homonymy facilitates the ability of the blessed Holy One to destroy Esau, here clearly a name for the diabolical Sama'el.[501] The passage thus links the fate of the divine/demonic struggle to the explicitly rhetorical, and implicitly ontological, twinning between them – in a manner very similar to the description of the struggle between Jacob and Esau in the "*taninim*" passage.[502] Read as a whole, the movement in the "drops" passage – from formless seminal emissions to homonymy and confrontation between formidable divine and demonic adversaries – epitomizes the processes upon which I am focusing in this chapter. It also highlights some of the dangers implicit in this process, another leitmotif in my argument.

A passage in the *Pikudin* [*Commandments*] section of the Zoharic literature draws out these dangers in its portrayal of female divine/demonic siblings.[503] This passage describes the Shekhinah and Lilith as "two sisters," associated with the "woman of valor" and the "woman of harlotry" of the Book of

499 *Zohar* III, 51a. I note that Matt's critical edition softens the pun slightly by emending *zohara di-dehava*, "luster of gold" [זוהרא דדהבא] to *zihara di-dehava* [זיהרא דדהבא].

500 *Zohar* III, 56a.

501 *Ibid.*:

וזמין לאתפרעא ראשון מראשון

And the *first* is destined to punish the *first*.

502 I note that another passage, *Zohar* II, 78b, goes to some lengths to deny a twinning relationship between Jacob and Esau. This passage focuses on the fact that, in Genesis 25:24, the word "twins" describing the two brothers is written in the defective form ("תומים" rather than "תאומים"). The passage declares that this shows that Esau was not Jacob's true "twin." Rather, Jacob contains "twins" within himself since he includes both the right and left sides, here represented by the "white" and "red" lights. Esau, by contrast, "turned aside by himself and strayed to the Other Side in nothingness and destruction" [אתפרשא לחודיה וסטא לסטרא אחרא באפיסה ושממון]. This passage follows the basic structure of abjection in the "afterbirth" passage: Jacob is the "Central Column" who reconciles the two cosmic sides, with Esau as the unreconciled abject, who takes up residence in the autonomous domain of the Other Side. I note that an important context for this exploitation of the orthographic displacement between תאומים and תומים may be found in the Moshe of Burgos text I discussed in the Introduction, in which the first Sefirah of the demonic realm is called both *Te'omiel*, תאומיאל, and *Tomi'el*, תומיאל, which I interpreted as signifying the paradoxical juxtaposition of identity and radical difference between the divine and the demonic.

503 *Zohar* III, 97a (note that, in the printed editions, this passage is labeled as part of the *Ra'ya Mehemena*).

Proverbs. The startling context of the passage is that of a metaphysical version of the "*sotah*" ordeal, prescribed in Numbers 5:1–31 for determining the truth of an accusation of adultery lodged against a woman by her husband. The passage portrays the Shekhinah as eager, and Lilith as loath, to undergo the ordeal.

This startling image becomes even more astonishing if we attend to its midrashic source.[504] The midrash describes an adulteress who has been forced by her husband to face the *sotah* ordeal. The accused woman sends her pure sister, "who resembles her," to the priest so that she may undergo the test in the sinner's place. This midrash is undoubtedly the source for the metaphysical Zoharic "sisters," one of whom willingly presents herself for the ordeal [קריבת גרמה] to the priest, the other who "flees from the Temple" [ערקת מן מקדשא], the site of the ordeal.[505]

Read in light of its midrashic background, the *Pikudin* passage implies that the divine and demonic females are not only sisters, but twins, since they may be readily mistaken for each other. Could it even be suggesting complicity between the two "sisters," like their midrashic counterparts, in deceiving the priest and the husband? The passage, moreover, accentuates the stakes of its mythical reinterpretation of the midrashic sisters by referring to the priest responsible for the metaphysical *sotah* ritual as the "high priest" [כהנא רבא], a reference not made in the biblical text. The "high priest" is a common Zoharic term for the sefirah of *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness], the first of the six sefirot of the blessed Holy One, the Shekhinah's consort. This Zoharic conflation of the midrashic figures of the husband and priest yields the following astonishing result: even the divine consort of the Shekhinah might be susceptible to confusing the divine and demonic females! Ultimately, according to the *Pikudin*, it is only through a theurgic ritual, the barely-offering, which functions in the metaphysical realm like the *sotah* ordeal in the human realm, that the twins/opposites may be separated from each other.

This phenomenal resemblance between divine and demonic *personae* due to their sibling relationship poses the gravest cognitive, religious, and metaphysical dangers, closely related to those we saw in Chapter 2 in relation to *nogah*. If the two so strongly resemble each other, an ordinary human being, even more so than the human or divine "high priest," may mistake one for the other and may thus come to mistake a demonic figure for the true object of religious devotion. It is only through the ritual that separates the two that a

504 See *Bamidbar Rabah* 11, 79d (9:9).
505 *Ibid.*

person may be saved from this danger – and it is only thus that "Israel remains meritorious, without admixture, in relation to the mystery of faith."[506]

The threat of an ontological "admixture" and epistemological confusion between the divine and the demonic is thus the ultimate danger that emerges from the processes portrayed in this chapter as well as the previous one. This threat is ever-latent within a portrayal of subject-formation that begins with the abjection of refuse, proceeds to the crystallization of an autonomous Other Side as well as a divine side, continues with the movement towards resemblance between the two sides in the course of their struggle, and now culminates in the danger of perverse misprision made possible by this resemblance. Or, to use rhetorical terms: from the irony of inchoate emissions; to the prosopopeia of the portrayal of divine/demonic *personae*; to the antithetical homonymy of divine/demonic doubles; to the dangerous ambiguity of the reference of any particular term. In my discussion in Chapter 4 of the "impersonation" of the holy by the demonic, I will return at length to this theme of the cognitive and religious dangers caused by ontological and rhetorical "admixtures" of the holy and the demonic – as well as the hidden redemptive promise they bear.

VII Ambivalences of Intimacy

A *Dangerous Liaisons*

I use the phrase "ambivalences of intimacy" primarily to refer to divine/demonic sexual liaisons. Nevertheless, I also intend the phrase to evoke a broader range of meanings, since Zoharic texts regularly portray intimate liaisons between divine and demonic *personae* with putatively non-sexual verbs. The texts often employ these verbs in a manner that evokes associations suggested by their "literal," as well as sexual, meaning. In all their variations, intimate divine/demonic relationships are key sites of the dangerous proximity of the two realms. Such relationships may involve both desire and coercion, as well as indeterminate oscillations between the two. Such intimacies with the demonic feature both male and female divine protagonists, some variants of which we have already seen. The texts present these relationships variously as inexplicable catastrophes, as episodic horrors, as the consequence of human sin, and as more integral and routinized aspects of the cosmic process. Finally, these relationships also bear a hidden utopian dimension, as I noted in the Introduction, the longing for reunification of Self and Other.

506 *Zohar* III, 97a.

The intimate relationships I discuss here transpire between already-crystallized *personae*. The abjection involved in such relationships primarily appears in the debasement undergone by the divine through the very fact of engaging in such intimacies. The texts at times explicitly describe this debasement as entailing a loss of identity, a collapse of the boundaries of the Self associated with abjection in all its forms. Nonetheless, abject emissions also play an important role in some portrayals of divine/demonic intimacies in Zoharic texts. They also appear with prominence in the writings of the 13th century Joseph of Hamadan, a writer close to the Zoharic circle, in his portrayals of the divine male's relationship to demonic female consorts.

In rhetorical terms, such portrayals may be described as a compound form of catachresis: to the prosopopeia of the emergence of mighty *personae* from inchoate emissions, they add the monstrous hybridity of intimacy between incompatible cosmic realms: "the coupling of two realities that seem incapable of coupling [*inaccouplables*] on a plane that seems unsuited for them."[507] These couplings are preceded, and made possible, by the irony of repulsive emissions issuing forth from divine power: in its most startling instance, refuse from the divine phallus.

I begin with the portrayals of female divine intimacies with the demonic. The ease with which the Shekhinah seems to be forced into consorting with the demonic suggests a deep Zoharic mistrust of, as well as concern and desire for, this female *persona*. Zoharic texts employ a variety of verbs for this relationship: the demonic "rules" the divine, the divine "tastes" the demonic, the divine "gives suck to" or "suckles from" the demonic,[508] and so on. This variety suggests the powerful hold of such relationships on the Zoharic imagination.

Indeed, the prevalence of such relationships is such that the Shekhinah will only be fully separated from the Other Side upon the coming of the Messiah. Until then, separation can only be achieved at certain privileged moments, such as the recitation of the *Sh'ma*.[509] One Zoharic text even offers the Other Side's threatening power as the explanation for the requirement that the liturgical pronouncement after the *Sh'ma* ("blessed be the Name" "....ברוך שם") be whispered. The text declares that this requirement was enacted so that the

507 Max Ernst, 'Au-delà de la peinture', 256.

508 The "suckling" imagery recurs in numerous passages. Some commentators have interpreted the term Other Side in these passages as referring to the side of Judgment, rather than the demonic, an interpretation that at times seems plausible and at times seems designed to soften the passages' import. A small sample of such passages include II, 125a; III, 58a; III, 62a; III, 72a; III, 291b. III, 74a contains a use of "tasting" imagery strikingly close to that of the "suckling" imagery in these passages. See my discussion below.

509 *Zohar* II, 134a.

Sh'ma may affect the nuptial coupling of the Shekhinah and the blessed Holy One without alerting the Other Side, thus minimizing the danger of the latter's participation in the union.[510]

The medium of the relationship between the Other Side and the Shekhinah is the *zohama* [זוהמא], the "slime" that the diabolical male "casts" [אטיל] into her.[511] The Zoharic employment of this term in this context undoubtedly derives from its Talmudic usage in portraying the sexual act in the Garden between the serpent and Eve.[512] Transposing this relationship to the metaphysical sphere, a Zoharic text explains that the "casting of *zohama*" into the Shekhinah by the cosmic "Serpent" rendered it impossible for the divine male to have sexual relations with his consort: for the "evil Serpent" thereby effected a "separation" so that the "Sun could not have intercourse with the Moon" [חויא בישא דאטיל זוהמא ועביד פירודא דלא משמש שמשא בסיהרא].[513]

It is important to recall that numerous Zoharic texts use the term *zohama* to denote the abject, even in putatively non-sexual contexts. One may surmise that all such usages ultimately derive from this Talmudic passage. One image that I have discussed above, the slime emitted from the "snow-in-water" may seem non-sexual, but this slime is the (repulsively) fertile incubator of a series of demonic progeny: giving rise at first to "refuse" [*pesolet*], then "*Tohu*," then a formidable demonic entity, "the mighty wind."

One Zoharic phrase laconically condenses this process in the context of the generation of diabolical *personae*: "the Other Side, male and female, the strong form of the slime [*zohama*] of hard judgment" [סטרא אחרא דכר ונוקבא, תוקפא דזוהמא דדינא קשיא].[514] This phrase explicitly proclaims the personified Other Side as the crystallization, the "strong form," of the abject, the "slime." Reading this passage in conjunction with that portraying the sexual intimacy of the demonic as the "casting of slime [*zohama*]" yields an infernal cycle of the abject and crystallized demonic: the personified Other Side, a crystallization of the abject *zohama*, engages in sexual contact through the medium of *zohama*, which would thus be a partial regression of the crystallized demonic back into the *zohama*'s abject formlessness – precisely as a means to degrade the subjectivity of the divine, to render it abject.

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510 *Zohar* II, 133b.

511 E.g., *Zohar* I, 46b, III, 47a.

512 *bShabbat*, 146a.

513 *Zohar* I, 46b.

514 *Zohar* I, 74b (*Sitre Torah*). Cf. *bYoma* 28b: זוהמא דשימשא קשי משימשא, "the slime [*zohama*] of the sun is harder than the sun," whose meaning in context is something like "hazy sunshine is harsher than direct sunlight."

As I noted above, the fallen condition of the Shekhinah, its susceptibility to perverse intimacy with the demonic, is so pervasive in Zoharic texts that it can only be redeemed episodically and precariously. Unifications of the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah demand preliminary theurgical actions to separate the Shekhinah from the Other Side. One passage portraying such a separation on the eve of the Sabbath, the "*ke-gavna*" ["in the same manner"] passage,[515] became one of the most well-known Zoharic texts through its incorporation in the Friday night Lurianic/Ḥasidic liturgy: an incorporation no doubt intended to have a theurgical effect. This passage declares that it is only through such a separation that the Shekhinah achieves her own unity, or, in Kristeva's terms: separation from the abject as a prerequisite for the coherence of the Self. This internal unity renders her, in turn, capable of unity with her consort.[516] Achievement of true intimacy between the holy male and female, and thus the completion of the construction of the divine Self,[517] must traverse abjection and its overcoming, however provisional.

This kind of perverse intimacy also undermines the coherent selfhood of the divine male. The most explicit Zoharic portrayal of this phenomenon occurs in the "king and the bondwoman" passage, which I briefly discussed in the Introduction. This passage portrays the divine King, particularly his phallus, the Righteous One [*Tsadik*], associated with the sefirah of *Yesod*, consorting with the demonic female, the "bondwoman," elsewhere identified with Lilith.

> תאנא יומא חד הוו אזלי חברייא עמיה דר' שמעון. אמר ר' שמעון חמינא אלין עמין כלהו עלאי וישראל תתאה מכלהו מ"ט בגין דמלכא אשדי למטרוניתא מניה ואעיל אמהו באתרה הה"ד [משלי ל:י"א-ט"ו].... תחת עבד כי ימלוך.... ושפחה כי תירש גבירתה ...
>
> בכה ר' שמעון ואמר מלכא בלא מטרוניתא לא אקרי מלכא מלכא דאתדבק באמהו דילה דמטרוניתא אן הוא יקרא דיליה. רזא דמלה זמינא קלא לבשרא למטרוניתא ולימא (זכריה ט: א) גילי מאד בת ציון הריעי בת ירושלם הנה מלכך יבא לך צדיק ונושע הוא ... כלומר צדיק הוא נושע בגין דהוה רכיב עד השתא באתר דלא דיליה באתר נוכראה ויניק לה. ועל דא כתיב עני ורוכב על חמור... כמא דאוקימנא אינון

515 *Zohar* II, 135a–b.

516 *Zohar* II, 135b:

כד עייל שבתא, איהי אתיחדת ואתפרשת מסטרא אחרא, וכל דינין מתעברין מינה, ואיהי אשתארת ביחודא דנהירו קדישא

When Sabbath enters, She unites herself and separates herself from the Other Side, and all judgments pass away from her. And She remains in the unity of the holy light.

517 "A king without a queen is not called a king" [מלכא בלא מטרוניתא לא אקרי מלכא]. *Zohar* III, 69a.

כתרין תתאין....והשתא דיזדווגון כחדא צדיק ונושע הוא דהא לא יתיב בסטרא אחרא.... ומאי אבד אבד למטרוניתא ואדבק באתר אחרא דאקרי שפחה.[518]

It has been taught: one day, the Companions were walking with Rabbi Shim'on. Rabbi Shim'on said: 'I see these nations are all elevated and Israel is the lowest of all. What is the reason? Because the King has cast the Matronita away from him and inserted the bondwoman in her place. As it is written: "... For a servant when he reigneth; ... and a bondwoman who supplants her mistress." [Proverbs 30:21–23].... Rabbi Shim'on wept, and continued: 'A king without a Matronita is not called a king. A king who cleaves to the Matronita's handmaid, where is his honor?'

The mystery of the matter: a voice is destined to bear good tidings to the Matronita, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem, for thy king cometh unto thee; he is righteous [*tsadik*] and has been saved...." (Zechariah 9:9).[519] In other words: The Righteous One [the *Tsadik*] will himself be saved – for he was riding until now in a place that was not his, an alien place, and was suckling it. And for this reason it is written, "lowly, and riding upon an ass" (*Ibid.*).... As we have established, these are the lower crowns ... But now that they will couple as one, "a *Tsadik* and has been saved": for he is no longer sitting on the Other Side..... And what had he lost? He had lost the Matronita and had cleaved to that Other Place that is called the bondwoman.

The divine King actively sends away his true consort and replaces her with the "bondwoman," presumably Lilith, an enactment of desire which is at the same time the ruination of the subject. The text describes the improper consort as abject, as an "ass," and identifies her with the demonic "lower crowns," the Sefirot of the Other Side. The King's relationship to this "ass" is that of a repulsive, and obviously sexual, "riding." The text thus explicitly proclaims the abject dimension of this relationship, both degrading the subject and threatening its coherence. A king who engages in such behavior has no "honor"; indeed, he can no longer be "called a king." The king's very identity collapses as a result of his abject dalliance. And it is this kind of identity-collapse that is the key experience of abjection: the encroachment upon the boundaries of the Self by those forces whose primal expulsion was a prerequisite to its formation.

518 *Zohar* III, 69a.

519 I have altered the KJV to conform to the Zoharic reading.

Despite the attempt to explain away the import of this passage by an ostensibly shocked Cordovero,[520] its meaning seems quite clear. There is at least one other Zoharic passage which gives an abbreviated variant of this myth.[521] Lurianic writings also offer variants of this myth, though, in at least one place, add reservations that remove some of its sting.[522] Closely related images may also be found in at least two other 13th century writers, Moshe of Burgos and Joseph of Hamadan – both of whom, Liebes argues, were closely related to the "circle of the Zohar."[523] In each of the next two sections, I discuss texts from each of these writers to illuminate the Zoharic myth.

B *Seduction of the Divine Phallus and the Generation of the Demonic Spirits* (Shedim)

In the "turban" passage I briefly discussed in Chapter 2, Moshe of Burgos declares:

> כביכול עברה רוח פיתוי מצד לילית המקטרג על מדת יסוד עולם...בזו נתכסה הכח הפנימי הקדוש לצאת מן הכח אל הפועל, שכח המצנפת הרוחנית נתלבש בה ומאז והלאה נולדו כתות זרות ורעות מחריבי עולם מעלה ומטה[524]

> A spirit of seduction, as it were, passed from Lilith the accuser over the attribute of Foundation of the World [*Yesod Olam*] ... By this means, the inner holy power was covered over [and prevented] from going from potentiality to actuality, for the power of the spiritual[525] turban [or mitre] became enclothed in it. And from that time on, strange and evil bands were born, destroyers of the world above and below.

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520 See *Or Yakar* XIII, 57–58.

521 *Zohar* II, 60b–61a:

> דכתיב (משלי ל כג) ותחת שפחה כי תירש גבירתה, דגרים לצדיק דיתדבק בשפחה
>
> As it is written, (Prov. 30:23), "And a bondwoman who supplants her mistress," for it causes the Righteous One to cleave to the bondwoman.

522 Compare *Ets Ḥayim*, 66a, where the idea is stated without more reservation than an "as it were" [כביכול], with *Sha'ar Ma'amere Rashbi*, 191b, where substantial reservations are stated.

523 On Moshe of Burgos, see Liebes, 'Ha-Mashiaḥ shel ha-Zohar', 35–38; on Joseph of Hamadan, see Liebes, 'Ketsad Nitḥaber', 32–67. See also Mopsik, 'Introduction' in Joseph de Hamadan, *Fragment d'un commentaire sur la Genèse*, 8–11.

524 Moshe of Burgos, 'Ma'amar al Sod "Hasir Mitsnefet, Harim ha-Atarah"', 50.

525 On the use of the term "spiritual" to designate Sama'el and Lilith, see also Moshe of Burgos, 'Hosafot me-Ibud Ma'amaro shel R. Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen al Ha-Atsilut', 194.

This passage could not be any more sexually explicit: the phallic "attribute," *Yesod* [Foundation], is seduced by Lilith and "enclothed with a turban." It is thus prevented from bestowing vitality on the cosmos, which would apparently have been through a proper and holy ejaculation into its divine female consort. Instead, the blockage produced by the demonic "turban" diverts the *Yesod*'s bestowal of vitality, causing it to give birth to demonic spirits, the destructive "bands."

This passage, and related contemporaneous texts, consist of a kabbalistic reappropriation of at least three rabbinic sources about the generation of demonic spirits, the *shedim*. Two of these sources concern the birth of *shedim* from Adam and Eve. The first is a Talmudic passage asserting that Adam separated himself conjugally from Eve after the sin in the Garden and bound his sex organs with fig leaves so as to ensure this separation. As a result, Adam had nocturnal emissions which led to the birth of a variety of demonic spirits [רוחין שדין ולילין].[526] The second source is a midrash that asserts that *shedim* were born during this period of conjugal separation as byproducts of the sexual relations of both Adam and Eve with demonic spirits.[527] A third rabbinic source is a midrash that portrays the accidental creation of *shedim* by God himself on the sixth day of Creation, the eve of the first Sabbath. This midrash declares that God had been creating spirits as twilight approached and ran out of time to create their bodies before the Sabbath's commencement, which apparently prohibited him from completing his task; the body-less spirits thus produced are the *shedim*.[528] Each of these tales is that of a creative act going awry – in the first two accounts through sexual deviation, and, in the last tale, through a hasty, incomplete act, which, though not sexualized in the rabbinic source, will be so in its kabbalistic reinterpretation.

The Moshe of Burgos passage is manifestly structured by the kinds of ontological and rhetorical patterns I have identified in the sections on "the ambivalence of origins." The passage portrays the diversion of a potentially holy ejaculation due to the "turban" that covers the *Yesod* after its seduction by Lilith. Again, we are presented with an irony: the majestic divine *Yesod*, the

526 *bEruvin*, 18b.

527 *Bereshit Rabah* 1, 24b–c (20:11); *bPesahim* 54a; *mAvot* 5:6.

528 *Bereshit Rabah*, 1, 8c (7:5); *Yalkut Shim'oni* 1:12. Note the irony expressed, in the first place, in the very image of God running out of time. In addition, the midrash tells us that we can learn "manners" [דרך ארץ] from the *shedim* – even though it means that we should learn from God's conduct in relation to their creation. It then goes on to compare the half-finished *shedim* to a "gem" [מרגלית] that a person finds in his pocket on the eve of the Sabbath, and which he should throw away rather than violate the prohibition on carrying on the Sabbath.

very organ of divine potency, proves to be beset by an inability to pass from potentiality into actuality, but rather is capable only of perverse emissions. From irony and abjection, the passage then goes on to a trope of representation: the crystallization of the demonic in the form of the "strange and evil bands." As I suggested in Chapter 2, one might advance the notion that the "turban" that covers the *Yesod* in this passage is related to, or modeled on, the image of the foreskin – another "covering" that blocks proper conjugal relations and hence proper (pro)creation.

The passage also strongly resonates with the Zoharic passages I have discussed above in relation to *Binah*, where the cessation of the mother's proper "suckling" of her "sons" leads to the emission of "judgments" from her "side." The differences between these texts must also be noted, however. First and most obviously, there is no hint of any kind of "seduction" in the Zoharic *Binah* context. Second, in the heuristic terms I am using in this chapter, the *Binah* texts are "origin" texts rather than "intimacy" texts. Finally, the cessation of proper "suckling" by *Binah* is a necessary aspect of the annual process of the holy renewal of the cosmos that takes place on Rosh Hashanah. Here, by contrast, we are faced with a scandalous seduction of the divine by the demonic, leading to abject emissions and to a horrifying creation of monstrous beings.

The Moshe of Burgos text is even closer to the Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen narrative I discussed above, portraying *Binah*'s emanation of evil worlds, thereby interrupting its preparations to bring forth holy worlds. One may speculate that Moshe of Burgos was here adapting the teaching of his mentor, Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, modeling the troubles that beset *Yesod* on those afflicting *Binah*. Conversely, and far more speculatively, one might wonder whether Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen modeled his narrative of *Binah*'s perverse, premature emanation of destructive worlds on a teaching about the diversion of sexualized creativity at the level of *Yesod* – a teaching only later made explicit by his student.

I now turn to the Zoharic variant of the 13th century kabbalistic reinterpretation of the *shedim* midrashim. I begin with the general statement about the Other Side from the *Idra Raba* quoted above:

כל אינון כתרין דלא אתכללילן בגופא, כלהו רחיקין ומסאבין[529]

> All of these crowns that were not included in the Body are all distant and contaminated.

529 *Zohar* III, 143b. See also *Zohar* II, 214b; III, 43a.

Though this phrase is used as a preface to an extended discussion of various kinds of *shedim*, I note that "crowns" is one common Zoharic name for what other kabbalistic texts call Sefirot, and here refers to the demonic Sefirot. The origin of the Other Side in that which is not "included" in the divine "Body," which then crystallizes into a ten-Sefirot structure, homologous to the divine realm, confirms the Kristevan framework I have been developing in this chapter.[530]

This portrayal, however, also recalls two of the key rabbinic texts about the creation of the *shedim* and suggests their strong influence on overall Zoharic conceptions of the Other Side. The portrayal most obviously recalls the midrash about the divine creation of *shedim* without bodies on the eve of the Sabbath. More obliquely, it also evokes the generation of the *shedim* from Adam's accidental sexual emissions, discharges that escape his body despite his fig-leaf encasement. The latter midrash is particularly significant since, as many Zoharic texts declare, a body is only truly a "whole body" when consisting of a proper union between male and female.[531] Indeed, shortly after the "inclusion in the Body" text, the *Idra Raba* declares that human beings who do not form male/female couples in their lifetime will not enter the divine "Holy Body" [גופא קדישא], called "Adam," after their death. Rather, they will join the ranks of "those who are not called 'Adam' and withdraw from inclusion in the Body" [אינון דלא אקרון אדם ונפקין מככלא דגופא] – apparently a description of their transformation into *shedim*. In Kristeva's terms, the *shedim* are the crystallization of the abject of the divine and human body, inassimilable to its "clean and proper" unity"[532] – those born, in the words of another Zoharic text, "through the cleaving of the slime of the Serpent" [באתדבקותא דזוהמא דנחש] and not "in the image of Adam" [בדיוקנא דאדם].[533]

Another text in the *Idra Raba*, just before the "inclusion in the Body" excerpt, Zoharically reappropriates the midrashic *shedim* tales in a manner which brings together almost the entire range of mythic motifs I have touched upon in this section.[534] The text appears in the midst of an extended transposition

530 On the Other Side as that which is not "included in the body," see Liebes, *Perakim*, 262.

531 See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 81b; III, 143b; III, 296a;

532 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 127.

533 *Zohar* I, 55a.

534 The *Idra Raba* passage relevant here is at *Zohar* III, 142b–144a. The specific text I am interpreting is at III, 142b–143a:
ה"ד (בראשית ב כא) ויסגור בשר תחתנה, וכתיב (יחזקאל לו כו) והסירותי את לב האבן מבשרכם ונתתי לכם לב בשר ובשעתא כד בעי למיעל שבתא, הוה ברי רוחין ושדין ועלעולין, ועד לא סיים לון, עד דאתת מטרוניתא בתקונוי ויתיבת קמיה, בשעתא דיתיבת קמיה, אנח לאינון ברייז ולא אשתלימו, כיון דמטרוניתא יתבת עם מלכא ואתחברו אפין באפין, מאן הוא דעייל ביניהו, מאן הוא דיקרב בהדייהו:

of the entire Genesis narrative of the creation of Adam and Eve to that of the divine male, here called *Ze'er Anpin* (the Lesser Countenance) as well as the King, and the divine female, the Matronita (the Shekhinah). The text portrays *Ze'er Anpin* in the process of creating *shedim* on the Sabbath eve, like the God of the midrashic tale. However, unlike that tale, the Zoharic passage attributes this perverse creation to the "heart of stone," that covers his "flesh," the divine phallus.[535] The attribution of the creation of the *shedim* to the blockage of the divine phallus closely parallels their creation due to its covering by the "turban" in the Moshe of Burgos text – a covering caused, in turn, by its seduction by Lilith.

Ze'er Anpin's perverse creation of the *shedim* is interrupted when the "heart of stone" is replaced by the "heart of flesh" with the arrival of his true consort, the Matronita "in her *tikunin*" [בתקונוי]. The Matronita appears before the King and is united with him – a union which excludes all diabolical interlopers. And it is only then, when the male and female "have joined face to face" [אתחברו אפין באפין] that they begin to achieve their complete form: "and they became fragrant each with the other" [אתבסמו דא בדא]. This proper union with the proper Matronita marks the end of the journey of *Ze'er Anpin* from his abject initial state to the proper formation of his selfhood.

The generation of *shedim* through the earthly or divine primordial man's improper emissions vividly expresses the production of menacing entities through "abjection" of that which precedes, exceeds, or is inassimilable to the subject, byproducts of the inevitably pyrrhic effort to create a seamlessly bounded Self, a "clean and proper body." Throughout the Zoharic literature, such a body requires a proper union between proper male and female consorts. When the human or divine male is blocked from such a union due to the fig-leaf belt, the "turban," Lilith, or the "heart of stone," it prevents him from properly constituting his "Body." In the midrashic tales, the *shedim* are creatures which Adam/*Ze'er Anpin* both cannot and must acknowledge as his offspring: creatures that he "begat" but which were not in "his image."[536] In

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This is as it is written: 'And he closed the flesh underneath it' (Genesis 2:21) and it is written, "And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). And at the hour when the Sabbath was going to enter, he was creating spirits, demons [*shedim*], and storm-spirits [*il'ulin*]. Before he completed them, the Matronita came in her *tikunin* and sat before him. At the moment she sat before him, he laid aside those creatures and they were not completed. Once the Matronita sat with the king and they were united face to face, who could come between them, who could approach them?

535 The passage thus reads the Hebrew in Genesis 2:21, "תחתנה", "in place of it," as referring to the "heart of stone," in the Ezekiel passage.

536 *bEruvin*, 18b.

transferring this notion to the divine Self and its relation to the demonic, kabbalistic texts like those of Moshe of Burgos confirm the unavoidability of abjection as a prerequisite to the construction of even the divine Self and as an ever-present danger to the maintenance of the Self's proper boundaries. In this context, this danger is posed by dangerous liaisons, the union of the divine male with an improper mate – most starkly, that of the divine phallus with Lilith.

I make a final, somewhat speculative, observation on a significant difference between the Zoharic and Moshe of Burgos passages. While Moshe of Burgos attributes the blockage of proper union by the "turban" to Lilith, the *Idra Raba* passage is more allusive, attributing it to the "heart of stone." The subsequent arrival of the Matronita "in her *tikunin*" as the moment of the interruption of the abject emissions suggests that the "heart of stone" is none other a deficient, pre-*tikun* version of the future Matronita.[537] That the deficient Matronita and Lilith could play the same role should not, by this point in this book, be surprising. It is, moreover, supported by another Zoharic passage, closely related to the one under discussion, which portrays the transformation of the Shekhinah into a Lilith-like figure, arousing punitive, perhaps demonic, forces in the world.[538] This kind of image of the divine female as something of a twin of the demonic female, twins that can be mistaken for one another or turn into one another, is one I have now identified in a number of variant forms.[539]

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537 This reading is somewhat speculative and would make this passage stand in tension with two other passages. : 1) *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 96a, which refers to Adam's "two wives," Eve and Lilith, as emerging, respectively, "from the side of the flesh" and "from the side of the bone"; and 2) *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam*, in *Zohar Ḥadash*, 16:c, interpreting "תחתנה" in the same verse from the Genesis, as "in place of *her*" – i.e., as replacing Lilith with Eve. *Zohar* I, 34b also alludes to the same notion.

538 *Zohar* I, 223b.

539 Thus, *Zohar* III, 79b describes the effect on the divine female of the casting of "filth" into her by the "snake":

ונוקבא אסתאבת, ושערה רבא, וטופרהא סגיאו, וכדין דינין שריין לאתערא בעלמא, ויסתאבון כלא, הדא הוא דכתיב (במדבר יט כ) כי את מקדש יהו"ה טמא, מקדש יהו"ה אסתאב בחובייהו דבני נשא ... דתנינן אלף וארבע מאה וחמש זינין בישין, מתאחדן בההוא זוהמא דאטיל חויא תקיפא, וכלהו מתערין בההוא זוהמא דטופרי

And the female is contaminated, and her hair is long and her nails are large, and then judgments begin to arouse in the world, and contaminate everything. This is as it is written: "because he hath defiled the Temple of YHVH" (Ex. 19:20). The Temple of YHVH is contaminated due to the sins of human beings ... As we have learned, one thousand four hundred and five evil species unite in that filth that the fierce *ḥivya* cast and all are aroused in that filth of the nails.

C *Routinization of Abjection*

I now turn to Joseph of Hamadan. This 13th century kabbalist portrays very explicit divine/demonic sexual liaisons, most strikingly between the blessed Holy One and Lilith (under various appellations). Such relationships transpire as part of the regular cosmic process, rather than caused by contingent, tragic, or scandalous misfortunes as in both the Moshe of Burgos and Zoharic passages discussed above. Joseph of Hamadan depicts such relationships as natural, even necessary, aspects of the lives of divine and demonic *personae* – though no less abject for all that.

In his commentary on Genesis, Joseph of Hamadan recounts that the blessed Holy One took two wives, the Shekhinah and one "from the sect not that of purity," otherwise known as Lilith.[540] He offers no explanatory preface or theological apology for this tale, apparently presuming its self-evidence. Joseph stresses the abject nature of the "impure" wife by designating her as a byproduct of her divine counterpart. She is a mere "shadow" who has nonetheless also crystallized as a "whore" and a "concubine"[541] – and whose union with the blessed Holy One produces evil and murderous offspring. Although Joseph states that, in taking two wives, the blessed Holy One resembled Adam (apparently referring to the Pseudo-Ben Sira tale and earlier rabbinic allusions to a "first Eve"), the pre-kabbalistic myths recounting Adam's liaisons never depict him as married both to Eve and Lilith at the same time. Joseph tells his tale as an exegesis of the obscure biblical anecdote of the antediluvian Lemekh and his two wives, Ada and Tsilah.[542] A midrash on this story declares that antediluvian men would take two wives, one for bearing children, the other for sex, a tale that may underlie Joseph's characterization of Tsilah as a "whore."[543] I need not belabor here the implications of these classical Madonna/whore dynamics in imagery of this kind.[544] Here, I simply recall that the Shekhinah is no virgin in Zoharic myth – or, more precisely, a condition of sexual abstinence with her true consort, the blessed Holy One, is a catastrophic condition, for herself, her consort, and the cosmos as a whole.

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540 Joseph de Hamadan, *Fragment d'un commentaire*, 22 (pagination from the Hebrew section): וכת שאינו של טהרה.

541 *Ibid.*: 'צלה' 'יושבים בצל שכינה ולפי' נקר – "they [the 'impure sects'] sit in the shadow of the Shekhinah and therefore she [Lilith] is called 'Tsilah' [read hyper-literally as "her shadow"].

542 Genesis 4, 19–23.

543 *Breishit Rabah*, 1:27b [23:2].

544 Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel has masterfully explored these dynamics in the Jewish tradition, from the Bible to the Zohar and beyond, in *Kedeshot u-Kedoshot*.

In another text, however, Joseph of Hamadan dramatizes the difference between the two relationships in a manner that portrays the blessed Holy One's desire for Lilith as overpowering, apparently far stronger than that for his proper consort. He conducts his relationship with the Shekhinah openly, "for all know that she is his wife and consort," whereas the relationship with the "concubine" is conducted "in secret, at night, because of the honor of his wife."[545] To the shameful nature of the latter relationship, the passage adds the abject medium of its sexuality: while the blessed Holy One mates with the Shekhinah through "pure channels," he does so with the concubine through "covered channels," those of "impurity."[546] These shameful and abject features serve to underscore the overwhelming nature of the divine desire for his demonic consort. These Joseph of Hamadan texts give a vivid, dramatic, and graphic form to the broader themes of this book: the rupture between Self and Other, the powerful ambivalence that prevails in the broken world, the simultaneous revulsion toward, and desire for, the Other.

The demonic consort agrees to the liaison only at a price: divine consent that the progeny of their union will "rule in your kingdom."[547] The blessed Holy One, apparently overcome by the force of his desire for his concubine, agrees to this condition by assuring her of the Moabite lineage of the House of David. The startling result of this tale: the ultimate redeemer, the messiah of the House of David, will be the fruit of the irresistible desire of the divine Self for the demonic Other.

Joseph of Hamadan makes graphically explicit the nature of the two "channels" in yet another work, the *Sefer Tashak*. Note that "Covenant" [*Brit*] and "Foundation" [*Yesod*] are here both names for the divine phallus:

> תחות רתיכא דמלכא קדישא איהי רזא דברית קדישא דקודשא בריך הוא דאתקרי צדיק יסוד עולם ואיהו מבועא דשאיב לבירא קדישא דאיהי מטרוניתא. והנהו תרי ראשין דע' אינהו רזא דהני ב' נקבין דאיכא בפומיה דאמה. ואינון תרין מבועין מבועא דימינא קדישא יניקו דמטרוניתא ומתמן ינקי נביאי וחסידי ותמימי וצדיקי דמתפנקא בגנתא דעדן. ומבועא תניינא יניקו דכתות מסאבותא ומלאכין דמקטרגין בעלמא. ומתמן יניקו דבלעם רשיעא[548]

545 Idel, 'Seridim Nosafim Mi-Kitve R. Yosef ha-ba mi-Shushan ha-Birah,' 47–48: כי גלוי לכל שהיא אשתו ובת זוגו וכשבא לפילגשו בא בצנעא בלילה משום כבוד אשתו.

546 *Ibid.*: צנורות הטהורים ... צנורות מכוסים ... טומאה. The theme of the two channels is also contained in the work of Moshe of Burgos. See 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 217 & n. 10.

547 Idel, 'Seridim Nosafim', 48: [יש]לטו במלכותך.

548 *Sefer Tashak*, 267–268. This passage is quoted by Cordovero, with incorrect attribution, in *Pardes*, 1, 34b.

> Under the chariot of the Holy King is the mystery of the holy Covenant [*Brit*] of the blessed Holy One, which is called the Righteous One, Foundation of the World [*Tsadik Yesod Olam*]. And it is the spring that draws to the holy well which is the Matronita. And the two heads of [the letter] *Ayin* [ע] are the mystery of the two orifices that there are in the mouth of the phallus. And they are two springs. The spring of the right is the suckling of the Matronita – and from there suckle prophets, and pious ones, and pure ones, and righteous ones who enjoy themselves in the Garden of Eden. And the second spring is the suckling of the bands of contamination and the angels who accuse the world. And from there is the suckling of Balaam the wicked.

This passage makes it clear that the abject medium of the sexual relationship with the demonic female is refuse, the waste fluids that come from the second "orifice," the "second spring," in the divine phallus, just as the relationship with the Shekhinah transpires through the "orifice" that contains sperm. This positing of two channels within the "holy King," specifically within his phallus, the Sefirah of *Yesod*, is yet another instance of the doubling phenomenon, the splitting of an entity into its good and bad forms – now installed in the very interior of a divine organ.

A second passage from the same work makes it even clearer that the "two orifices" are the site of sexual liaisons with the two conjugal partners of the divine male described in the author's Genesis commentary:

> דאת צדי אית ליה תרין רישין דרמיז מדת צדיק והנהו תרין מבועין קדישין חד שפיך ושאיב מתמן למטרוניתא ומתמן מתברכין עלאין ותתאין,.... ומבועא דא מתמן אתבּריו מלאכין קדישי' ואתבריו כמ' נשמתין קדישין. ובמבועא תניינא איהו שפיך לסטר שמאלוי דקב"ה ומתמן יניקוי דאשה זרה ואשה מנאפת. ואי זכיין ישראל ההוא מבועא סתים ופתיח מבועא קדישא דימינא. ואי לאו, אפתח ההוא מבועא דשאיב אשה זרה כתות הטומאה היושבים חוץ לישיבה עליונה שנקראו אחרים ... ומשם יוצאין [יונקין] שדין ורוחין ולילין ומזיקין ורשעים מצד שמאל [549]

> For the letter *Tsadi* [צ] has two heads which allude to the attribute of *Tsadik*. And these are two holy springs: one pours forth and draws forth from there to the Matronita, and from there upper and lower beings are blessed. And from this spring holy angels were created and many holy souls were created. And the second spring pours forth to the left side of

549 *Sefer Tashak*, 278–279. The textual variant "יונקין" for "יוצאין" is given by Cordovero. *Pardes* 1, 34b. Again, Cordovero misattributes the text.

> the blessed Holy One, and from there is the suckling of the Alien Woman and the Adulterous Woman. And if Israel is meritorious, this spring closes, and the holy spring of the Right opens. And if not, that spring opens from which draw the Alien Woman and the contaminated factions who sit outside the supernal settlement/academy [*yeshivah*], who are called "Others." And it is from the second spring that go forth [or suckle] demons, flying spirits, *lilin*, destroyers, and wicked ones from the left side.

These passages from the *Sefer Tashak* affirm that each of these channels in the divine phallus routinely mates with divine and demonic female consorts, respectively, vivify and nourish the divine and demonic domains, respectively, and give birth to angels and *shedim*, again respectively.[550]

The passages I have discussed in this section advance at least three reasons for divine liaisons with the demonic. In the two "wife/concubine" passages, they are a product of divine male desire for the "Other" woman, a desire stated very explicitly in the portrayal of the deity's bargain with his secret lover. In the first of the *Sefer Tashak* passages, they appear to result from an organic need of the divine male for an outlet for the abject emissions of the "second orifice" – though this, too, may be seen as a kind of desire. It is only in the second of the *Tashak* passages that these liaisons are attributed to human sin.

Joseph of Hamadan's routinization of the relationship of the divine male to the demonic female does not appear as such in the Zoharic literature. Nonetheless, I have discussed it here for comparative purposes and for the way it renders graphic themes that are implicit in Zoharic texts. It also provides an entry into a theme that does appear there with some frequency, that of the sustenance of the demonic by the divine through "suckling." As a result of this importance of this theme, and the complexity of its portrayal in the Zoharic literature, I will discuss it separately in the next section, though it is closely related to the intimate relationships that are the main topic here.

Before going to that discussion, however, I note that Cordovero, rather surprisingly, seems to have felt more comfortable with the portrayal of the liaison between the male divine and the female demonic in Joseph of Hamadan than in the Zoharic passage discussed above. In *Or Yakar*, his commentary on the Zohar, Cordovero rejects the seemingly clear meaning of the Zoharic passage cited above concerning the consorting of the divine male with Lilith, seeking

550 A very similar passage about the "two springs" in the *Sefer Tashak*, 267–268, that I quoted above in the text, leaves no doubt about the parallelism between the relationships to the two females. I note that the "hosts of contamination" in that passage are later identified in this same work with "the alien woman, the adulterous woman." *Sefer Tashak*, 279.

to distance the divine from any direct relationship of this kind.[551] By contrast, in *Pardes Rimonim*, he quotes extensively from Joseph of Hamadan[552] on the "two channels" within the divine phallus and makes even more graphic their abject implications: explicitly informing us, for example, that the emission from the "second orifice" of the *Yesod*, as from its human counterpart, is repulsive refuse.[553] This seems strange: the parallelism between *Yesod*'s relationship to the "Matronita" and the "Adulterous Woman" in the Joseph of Hamadan passages would seem to be at least as scandalous theologically as the replacement of the Matronita by the "ass" or "bondwoman," in the Zoharic passage whose plain meaning Cordovero so vociferously disavows.

One can only speculate about Cordovero's seemingly incompatible stances in relation to the two formulations. Any such account, however, must grapple with the fact that the routinization of the divine male's relationship to the demonic female alongside his relationship to the Shekhinah seems more acceptable to Cordovero than the replacement of the latter by the former. It seems to be acceptable to Cordovero to declare that the divine male has an ongoing liaison with Lilith as well as with the Shekhinah, that the Sefirah of *Yesod* pours its refuse into Lilith in a manner parallel to its pouring of holy seed into the Shekhinah, and that the divine male sustains and impregnates both – indeed, coming perilously close to Joseph of Hamadan's notion that the blessed Holy One has "two wives" or a "wife" and a "concubine." In line with the theory of abjection, Cordovero may be embracing the notion that just as the emission of the abject precedes the constitution of the divine subject, so the abject coupling with Lilith may be a necessary prerequisite, or accompaniment, to the true and complete coupling with the Shekhinah. By contrast, the replacement of the Shekhinah by Lilith, however episodic, would serve no such purpose.

Nonetheless, the tension between Cordovero's rejection of the Zoharic notion of the substitution of Lilith for the Shekhinah, on the one hand, and his endorsement of the imagery of the "two channels," on the other, remains quite striking – especially in light of the emphasis on objective and subjective ambivalence that informs much of this book. Divine/demonic relationships of intense desire appear to be both indispensable and yet unacceptable. It is also striking that in Lurianic writings, in which a very similar tension appears,[554]

551 *Or Yakar* XIII, 57–58.

552 Though he misattributes the quotations.

553 *Pardes*, I, 34b.

554 Compare *Sha'ar Ma'amere Rashbi*, 46b, on the two channels with the same work, 193a, on the bondwoman. Of course, in the Lurianic schema, one can with agility limit the tension

we are told that the distance between the two "channels" is as thin as a garlic skin, making it easy to confuse the holy and the profane[555] – a kind of danger we have already seen above.

One can speculate, of course, as to whether a variety of prevalent patriarchal norms and prerogatives can shed light on the tension between Cordovero's stances in the two cases. This kind of feminist critique is obviously relevant both here and in many other places in this book, though it would require detailed historical inquiry that goes beyond the limits of my method here. Such work is, of course, the subject of important research by other scholars in the field today, including Elliot Wolfson, Ellen Haskell, and Ruth Kara-Ivanov Kaniel.

Elsewhere in the *Pardes*, Cordovero discusses the "two channels" in a manner that sheds light on his affinity for this image as well as on the relationship between ambivalences of origin, ambivalences of intimacy, and the ongoing sustenance of the demonic by the divine.[556] In that passage, he declares that the theory of the two channels helps explain the puzzling mechanics of the nourishment of the demonic from the divine. He rejects what one might call a conventional Neoplatonic account, in which evil would simply be the lowest rung in the ladder of being, even a mere privation of being. For Cordovero, referring to the post-Zoharic cosmology of the "four worlds," such a stance is impossible, due to the fact that the demonic originates in the Sefirah of *Gevurah* of the highest world, the World of Emanation [*Atsilut*] and that there are many divine levels below that. The theory of the two channels puts the demonic side directly in touch with this quite high level of the divine side, circumventing the need for impure nourishment to traverse divine levels on its way to the demonic side. It thus serves to shore up the kabbalistic affirmation of the reality of the demonic, its parallelism with the divine, and its source in the divine – even while paying the price of apparently positing direct and intimate contact of the divine with the demonic, a notion firmly rejected by Cordovero as theologically unacceptable in the context of the Zoharic passage

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by placing the processes at different levels – e.g., in the first passage on the two channels, we are told that it is limited to the world of *Asiyah*.

555 *Sha'ar Ma'amere Rashbi*, 46b:
ושתי הצנורו' האלו הם סמוכין זה לזה כי אין ביניהם אלא כקליפת השום ... זה קדש וזה חול ... ובדבר מועט אפשר להתערב קדש בחול ח"ו
And these two channels are contiguous to each other, for between them is barely a garlic skin ... this holy, this profane ... and in a thing so slight, it is possible to mix the holy in with the profane, God forbid ...

556 *Pardes*, 1, 53c-d.

about the substitution of Lilith for the Shekhinah.[557] Perhaps most importantly, it provides a narrative that allows him to reconcile two key imperatives in his worldview: on the one hand, the antithesis between divine and demonic, on the other hand, the subordination of the latter to the purposes of the former, in accordance with the verse, "and his kingdom ruleth over all" [ומלכותו בכל משלה] (Psalms 103:19).[558] These conflicting imperatives, that the demonic must both be sustained by, and yet, antithetical to, the divine, are most fully explored in the narratives of "suckling," to which I now turn.

VIII Ambivalences of Sustenance: "Suckling"

The Zoharic literature often portrays active relationships between the divine and the demonic through images of sustenance, particularly "suckling," conveyed through various constructions of the root Y-N-K [ינק].[559] As demonstrated by Ellen Haskell, suckling imagery pervades thirteenth century kabbalah, taking its most vivid form in Zoharic writing.[560] Haskell shows that suckling is one of the main verbs employed by 13th century texts for the bestowal of vitality from higher levels to lower levels, both among divine entities or *personae* and between the divine and humanity.

However, although Haskell does not discuss this feature, it is also one of the main verbs used by Zoharic and some related texts to portray divine/demonic relationships – considerably complicating the import of the various meanings of the term. In Zoharic texts, the term may be read in a number of different ways: "literally," evoking maternal and nutritive imagery; figuratively, evoking

557 Indeed, in another passage in the *Pardes*, 1, 56a–b, he uses the notion of the two channels to interpret the passages in the Zoharic literature that refer to the coupling of the *kelipah*, specifically, the *ḥivya*, with the Shekhinah. According to Cordovero, rather than literally referring to the snake coupling with the Shekhinah, the passages actually refer to the nourishment of the Shekhinah from the impure channel of *Yesod*. This interpretation clearly runs contrary to the plain meaning of the Zoharic passages.

558 See, e.g., *Pardes*, 1, 80c.

559 I note at the outset the following linguistic curiosity. In English, the verb "to suckle" can refer both to the maternal giving of milk to the infant and to the infantile taking of milk from the mother. In Hebrew, this ambiguity generally disappears through distinguishing between הנקה for the former and יניקה for the latter. The Zohar's Aramaic, however, contains the potential for something like the ambiguity of the English verb. For example, the verb לינקא and the third person singular יניק may be used for both senses – though, in the case of the infinitive, different vowelizations may distinguish the two.

560 Haskell, *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts, The Image of a Nursing God in Jewish Mysticism*, *passim*.

sexual imagery; polysemically, evoking both at once; and catachrestically, evoking a unique relationship, an "unspeakable" relationship, for which no other term exists. Zoharic portrayals of such relationships feature male as well as female *personae*, both divine and demonic.

The abject nature of suckling between divine and demonic does not generally manifest itself in Zoharic writing in the form of inchoate emissions, though there is at least one exception; by contrast, Joseph of Hamadan foregrounds that kind of abjection, as demonstrated by the passages cited in the preceding section. Zoharic texts convey the abject nature of such relationships by emphasizing the scandalous admixtures intrinsic to suckling relationships between beings belonging to adversarial realms. Like repulsive and inchoate substances, such improper admixtures evoke the horror of the collapse of the proper boundaries of the subject. They form a series with those social experiences of abjection whose key features, in Kristeva's words, are that they do "not respect proper limits, places, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior."[561]

The abject as an improper "composite" often appears in Zoharic writing. The most explicit example is the use of the word *irbuvia* [ערבוביא, confusion, tumult, motley crowd] to describe the Other Side.[562] In the context of suckling, this disrespect of "proper limits, places, rules" takes the form of the horrifying transformation of that which should be the most nourishing and tender deed, suckling, into an action that empowers malevolence and destruction. Rhetorically, such "unspeakable," monstrous perversions can only be evoked through various forms of catachresis.

Before discussing suckling in divine/demonic relationships, however, we must make a brief excursus on the debate about the term in the context of two or more holy entities or *personae*. Zoharic and other texts use the term in such contexts in ways that evoke sustenance as well as sexual liaison. Recent scholars have debated which of these meanings should be taken as primary.

For Ellen Haskell, suckling in 13th century texts constructs "sefirotic and human relationships as nurturing, sustaining, and interdependent."[563] Haskell's study shows the evolution of suckling imagery from a more metaphoric usage in earlier kabbalistic writing, to a more literal, maternal meaning in Zoharic writing. Zoharic texts, for Haskell, are replete with fully developed imagery of nursing by a "breasted God."

561 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 12.

562 See, e.g., *Zohar* I, 28b–29a, III, 87a.

563 Haskell, *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts*, 40.

> In these Zoharic texts, the image of God as a nursing mother reaches its fullest expression. As in the writings of Isaac the Blind and Ezra of Gerona, suckling imagery serves as a metaphor for divine energy's spiritual transmission, both among the *sefirot* and between divinity and humanity. However, in *Sefer ha-Zohar* the image takes on immediate and experiential qualities absent from earlier literature because it is thoroughly embedded in a stated network of connotations that provide anthropomorphic and anthropopathic structure for the reader.[564]

Haskell's emphasis on maternal love in 13th century kabbalah runs directly counter to some of the central theses of the early work of Elliot Wolfson. Wolfson asserts that, in Zoharic writing, and kabbalistic texts more generally, the divine

> breast that gives milk is functionally equivalent to the penis that ejaculates.... [T]he righteous described as suckling from the splendor of the breasts of the Shekhinah are, in fact, cleaving to and drawing from the corona of the divine phallus.[565]

Wolfson thus displaces the literal meaning of suckling as maternal nurturance in favour of reading it figuratively as male sexuality – or, more precisely, he argues that such a tropic displacement is effected by the kabbalistic texts themselves. Indeed, one of Wolfson's central arguments is that the displacement of the maternal by the phallic is both a central feature of kabbalistic rhetoric and the ontological goal of kabbalistic *tikun*. For Wolfson, kabbalistic texts should be interpreted, at their deepest level, as implicitly attributing masculine gender to the ostensibly female Sefirah of *Binah*, often called the "Supernal Mother" [אמא עילאה]. Moreover, kabbalistic theurgy aims at the reintegration of the female Sefirah of *Malkhut*, the Daughter or "Lower Mother" [אמא תתאה], into the masculine divine *persona* – specifically, into the corona of the divine phallus.[566]

Haskell acknowledges that Wolfson's reading may at times be appropriate, but rejects it as the dominant meaning of suckling in the Zoharic literature. For Haskell, the "nurture, tenderness, duty and dependence" associated with nursing imagery "do an admirable job of expressing the interdependent

564 *Ibid.*, 87.
565 Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, 109.
566 *Ibid.*, 79–121.

relationship between divinity and humanity that kabbalistic theology embraces."[567] Moreover, she argues that "[i]magining the nursing divine's abundant breasts as an overflowing phallus … presents a metaphor with its own field of distinctive connotations that in turn suggest a very different relational model."[568]

Wolfson's assertions about interpreting the emission of milk by the divine breast as the emission of semen by the divine phallus seem categorical. Nevertheless, perhaps he would agree that his distinctive interpretation is not necessarily appropriate for all instances of the suckling imagery – or at all levels of interpretation. Perhaps the disagreement between Wolfson and Haskell should be viewed more as a rigorous debate about the interpretation of individual passages, rather than as a clash of incompatible doctrines.

In any case, both the maternal and phallic readings of suckling must be rethought when one shifts from beneficent occurrences of suckling, the bestowal of divine overflow on holy Sefirot, divine *personae*, or righteous human beings, to maleficent occurrences, the sustenance provided by a divine entity to unholy Sefirot, demonic *personae*, or evil human beings, let alone to sexual union between them. The sinister nature of suckling in such passages puts the alternative interpretations to which the term lends itself in a rather different frame. The relationships on this "other side" of suckling may be roughly divided into three: the parasitical suckling by the demonic from the life force of the divine, the monstrous suckling by the divine from the demonic, and perverse suckling intimacies between the two realms.

I contend that, in such contexts, one cannot ignore either the nutritive or sexual senses of suckling. Rather, the rhetorical power of such passages often depends precisely on the polysemy of the term. These texts do not limit suckling either to its literal sense of nourishment or to its figurative sense of sexual relations, but rather employ the double meaning in a number of ways, including: 1) alternation between one meaning and the other in the course of a passage; 2) evocation of an ambivalent relationship that may either be sexual or nutritive or both at once; or 3) evocation of an intimacy between divine and demonic so shocking, improper, even impossible, that it defies any existing term. The third usage is a paradigmatic example of catachresis, the employment of a term which seems to function figuratively but for which no "proper" term exists.

The perversity ascribed to divine/demonic liaisons make them particularly suited for portrayal by catachresis. As I noted in the Introduction, citing

567 *Ibid.*, 122.
568 *Ibid.*

Paul de Man, there is often something monstrous in catachresis, the evocation of something that cannot be named "properly" – often through the yoking together of incompatible phenomenal or organic elements. In a related sense, Jacques Derrida attributes the "monstrous" quality of his own writing, which he declares to be marked by catachresis, to its "hybridisation," for a "composition that puts heterogeneous bodies together may be called a monster."[569] Finally, we may understand a doubled meaning of suckling, simultaneously sexual and maternal, in classical psychoanalytical terms. Indeed, it is precisely such instances of *double entendre*, of shifting between the sexual and maternal, that the term "Freudian" in its popular sense often evokes. I will, however, also show a more precise way psychoanalysis can shed light on the ontological dimension of the sexual/maternal term of suckling.

A complex Zoharic passage, which I have already introduced above, illustrates a number of different uses of suckling in the context of divine/demonic relations.[570] This passage concerns a verse symptomatically relevant to this topic: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (Ex. 34:26). In conformity with the common Zoharic association of goat imagery with the Other Side and maternal imagery with the Shekhinah, one Zoharic sage, Rabbi Aba, interprets the verse as a prohibition on the intermixture of divine and demonic. Rabbi Yehuda, however, expresses astonishment at this interpretation, due to the verse's use of the possessive "*his* mother": how can the Shekhinah, the "holy Mother" [אימא קדישא], ever be described as the "mother" of a creature from the "Side of Contamination" [סטרא דמסאבא], even in the context of a prohibition? Rabbi Yehuda's question seems to point to a theological, as well as mythological, scandal, the attribution of a demonic consequence to a divine act. In his quintessentially Zoharic response to this question, Rabbi Shim'on offers a narrative embrace of the scandal, portraying the conditions that could give rise to precisely such an intimate link between a divine parent and a demonic offspring:

> אימתי אתאחדן בה, בשעתא דהאי אם ינקא מסטרא אחרא, ומקדשא אסתאבת, וחויא תקיפא שארי לאתגלאה, כדין גדי ינקא מחלבא דאמיה, ודינין מתערין.... בגיני כך לא יכול ליה בשרא בחלבא כל זרעא קדישא, וכל מאן דאתי מסטרא דא, דלא יהבין דוכתא למאן דלא אצטריך, דהא בעובדא תליא מלתא, בעובדא דלתתא לאתערא לעילא [571]

569 Derrida, *Points: Interviews 1974–1994*, 385. On his own writing as marked by monstrous catachresis, see Derrida, 'Deconstruction and the Other', 123.

570 *Zohar* II, 124b–125a.

571 *Zohar* II, 125a.

> When are they [i.e., the demonic forces] joined with Her? When this Mother suckles from the Other Side and the Temple is contaminated and the mighty Serpent [*ḥivya*] begins to reveal himself. Then the kid sucks of his mother's milk and judgments are aroused.... Therefore, all holy seed and anyone who comes from this side should not eat meat with milk, so that they will not give a place for those for whom it would be improper. For the matter depends on action, an action below to arouse above.

This narrative portrays two divine/demonic relationships, both portrayed with the same verb, "suckles," *yanka* [ינקא]. Under certain conditions – for example, under the impact of the demonically theurgical effect of human consumption of milk with meat – the Shekhinah will "suckle" from the Other Side, specifically the Serpent, often identified with Sama'el. As a result, the "kid," the embodiment of a lower demonic force, will "suckle" from the Shekhinah. Under such conditions, the Shekhinah can, indeed, be accurately described as "his mother" in relation to the demonic "kid."

The reading that makes the simplest sense of this text would take the first occurrence of suckling, portraying the relationship of the divine Mother to the Serpent, as sexual, and the second, portraying the relationship of the "kid" to the "Mother," as maternal and nutritive. In this reading, the passage would be asserting that, as a result of specific human transgressions, the Shekhinah copulates with Sama'el, here figured as the Serpent: an evocation of the serpent of Eden, already sexualized in the Talmud, as noted above.[572] The consequence of this act is that the Shekhinah becomes the "mother" of the demonic "kid" either by implicitly giving birth to it, or, as the text states explicitly, by establishing a maternal relationship with it through sustaining it with nourishing milk. The Shekhinah would thus be fittingly called "his mother" in relation to the demonic, either as its progenitor (or perhaps step-parent), since she copulated with a diabolical mate, or as the giver of lactic nourishment.

This passage would thus depart both from Haskell's notion that the suckling image evokes a beneficent maternal God and from Wolfson's notion that it reinforces the dominance of a phallic divinity. Rather, the passage works best if we read it as shifting from one meaning of suckling to the other. It thereby evokes a maleficent mother, albeit one whose maleficence may be the product of coercion. This mother strengthens the forces of evil through nutritively suckling them, resulting in the perverse and parasitical diversion of what should be the holy milk of the "holy Mother." By contrast, the male figure in this passage is the diabolical Serpent who sexually "suckles" the Shekhinah,

572 E.g., *bShabbat*, 146a.

thus diminishing the power of the divine male figure, the blessed Holy One. This interpretation is supported by other Zoharic passages in which the separation of the divine male and female leads to the latter sexually "suckling" from the Other Side.[573]

From the perspective developed in this book, it is highly significant that such monstrous, parasitical, and perverse relationships are brought about by a sin involving a forbidden "mixture," eating meat and milk together. The precarious formation of the subject through abjection of the inassimilable is threatened by any illicit mixture which puts into question the subject's proper boundaries. The passage's entire discussion of the "kid/mother's milk" verse begins with Rabbi Aba's pronouncement: "for one should not mix a lower thing with an upper, and the external [i.e., demonic] side should not suckle from the internal [i.e., divine] side" [דלא לערבא מלה תתאה בעלאה, ולא ינקא סטרא דלבר מסטרא פנימאה].[574] The "upper" and "lower" are thus identified with the "external" and "internal" [דלגו and דלבר], as well as with the "Side of Holiness" and the "Side of Contamination" [סטרא דקדושה and סטרא דמסאבא]. The illicit mixture of the two sides, effected by the transgression of the verse's prohibition, transmogrifies the very identity of the Shekhinah: from the "holy Mother" of Israel to "*his* Mother," i.e., the mother of the demonic.

Moreover, in an evocation of a theme we have seen in portrayals of the constitution of the demonic, the passage closely associates the lactic nourishment of the demonic by the divine with creating a geographical site for the demonic. Transgression of the verse prohibiting the culinary mixture of the "kid" with the milk of the "mother" would "give a place for those for whom it would be improper" [יהבין דוכתא למאן דלא אצטריך].[575] The passage thus implicitly associates the consolidating effect on the "kid" of his suckling of divine milk with the establishment of a solid foothold for the demonic in the cosmos, the "giving of place" to them.

From a Kristevan perspective, it is highly significant that both perverse mixtures evoked in this passage, both sinister "sucklings," concern the maternal body, that primary locus of the drama of abjection. Indeed, Kristeva cites the "kid/milk" verse as a key proof-text for her argument about the relationship of abjection to biblical dietary laws.[576] Kristeva views the prohibition as a "metaphor of incest,"[577] because it is directed at forbidding an improper relationship

573 E.g., *Zohar* III, 58a, III, 291b.
574 *Zohar* II, 124b.
575 *Zohar* II, 125a.
576 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 123–124.
577 *Ibid.*, 124.

between mother and child. Of course, any psychoanalytically informed reading would notice this implication of the Exodus verse and would not be distracted by the rabbinic extension of the prohibition to cover meat and milk generally. For Kristeva, though, this verse provides the key to the whole edifice of biblical purity laws: "Far from being *one* of the semantic values of this vast project of separation which is the biblical text, the taboo on the mother seems to be its originary mytheme."[578] Indeed, the entire biblical "logic of differences dictated by a divine Ego is based on the prohibition of incest."[579] In this reading, the slippage between the two meanings of "suckling" is both an evocation, and a repression, of the danger of incest.

The Zoharic interpretation of the verse dovetails with the psychoanalytic in three ways. First, it restores the specificity of the terms of the biblical verse (the relationship of the "kid" to "his mother") from its rabbinic effacement, stressing the illicit maternal relationship underlying the verse. Second, it highlights the threat to bounded identity this relationship constitutes. Third, it reinforces the double meaning of the suckling relationship evoked in the verse, both sexual and nutritive (even though the Zoharic and psychoanalytical readings might distribute those two meanings differently). Most importantly, the psychoanalytic frame, with its attention to verbal and affective displacements between various levels, allows us to perceive the way the text produces its force at a rhetorical level precisely through such shifts. Although the simplest reading of the Zoharic passage might allocate the improper sexual suckling to a different entity than the improper maternal suckling, the textual force of the passage clearly derives from its repetition of the term even as it shifts from one semantic valence to the other.[580]

My foregrounding of the often maleficent character of suckling, and the protean use of the term to portray different kinds of relationships, brackets the interpretive choice between its lactic and seminal character. One could even make sense of the "kid/milk" passage by reading both instances of suckling in the passage – that of the Shekhinah from the Other Side and that of the demonic "kid" from the Shekhinah – as relating *either* to nourishment *or* to copulation, or to both at once. This interpretive indeterminacy also characterizes numerous other Zoharic passages in which the Shekhinah is said to suckle from the Other Side.[581] Even the references to "his mother" do not

578 *Ibid.*

579 *Ibid.*

580 Note that the *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah*, a 14th century kabbalistic work, explicitly links the "Thou shalt not seethe a kid" prohibition to incest. See *Sefer Ha-Peli'ah*, 32b–33d.

581 See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 58a, III, 62a, III, 72a, III, 180b, III, 291b.

necessarily obviate the possibility of a sexual meaning of the "kid's" suckling, as any psychoanalytically informed reader would point out. Alternatively, the suckling could be read as neither maternal nor sexual, but as some novel, monstrous intimacy.

The doubled, indeterminate, and/or novel meaning of suckling may be explained in psychoanalytical terms as displacements between sexuality and maternity; it may be articulated in rhetorical terms either as displacements between literal and figurative meanings, or as catachreses, in which no "literal" meaning exists – i.e., as a trope for a relationship so "improper" that no word exists to describe it. As I suggest throughout this book, the portrayal of divine/demonic relationships is particularly well-suited for such catachreses.

Finally, I note that, although the suckling passages foreground the perverse relationships between already-constituted *personae* rather than their generation through the emission of repulsive substances, or, in rhetorical terms, prosopopeia rather than irony, the latter dimension is far from wholly absent. On the contrary, the rhetorical force of suckling imagery in the divine/demonic context largely derives from its portrayal of the perversion of maternal milk from its proper role in the nourishing of life to its improper role in the empowering of evil. An action whose essence is the ultimate life-giving deed becomes transformed, in its expression, to the ultimate life-destroying deed. This reversal comes very close to that of a child's sudden and shocking experience of curdled milk, which Kristeva gives as the paradigmatic experience of abjection.[582]

A passage in Zohar *Ḥukat* provides a graphic portrayal of the link between improper intimacies and abject emissions. This passage is an extended commentary on the ritual of the "red heifer." The excerpt relevant here concerns the verse fragment, למי נדה חטאת היא (Num. 19:9), translated by the KJV as "for a water of separation: it is a purification of sin." The Zoharic text, however, reads it hyper-literally, construing it as something like: "for waters of a menstrual woman; she is sin." The text reads the "menstrual woman" as the Shekhinah and her condition as the direct result of her "suckling" from the Other Side:

> רזא דכלא האי דכתיב למי נדה חטאת היא, בגין דכל דינין תתאין, וכל אינון דאתו מסטרא מסאבא, כד איהי ינקא מסטרא אחרא, ויתיבת בדינא, כמה דאת אמר (ישעיה לד ו) מלאה דם, הודשנה מחלב, כדין כלהו מתערי ומסתלקי, ושראן בעלמא[583]

582 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 10.

583 *Zohar* III, 180b.

> The mystery of all is that which is written, "for waters of a menstrual woman; she is sin" [Numbers 19:9]: for all the lower judgments [i.e., demonic forces] and all those who come from the Side of Contamination, when she suckles from the Other Side, and sits in judgment, as it is written, "filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness" (Is. 34:6), then they arouse and rise, and prevail in the world.

The Shekhinah, that "mother" who bestows nourishing milk either, in proper times, on the holy side of the cosmos, or, in improper times, on the demonic side, here becomes "filled with blood," bringing destructive forces upon the world.[584] The Shekhinah here secretes menstrual blood as a result of her "suckling" from the Other Side, which generally in such texts entails intimacy with a male partner, the "mighty Serpent."[585] Menstrual blood, which the (undoubtedly male) Zoharic author views as abject, contaminating, fluid, is the byproduct of this perverse intimacy – the converse of the process of the origin of the demonic, where the abject crystallizes into the demonic. The passage implies that the perverse sexual coupling causes a reversal of crystallization, a regression to a more primal state (a phenomenon I have noted above in my discussion of demonic male *zohama*). Nonetheless, the blood, in turn, leads to the further crystallization of mighty demonic forces who are thereby "aroused" and "prevail in the world."[586]

I now turn to the suckling relationship of the divine male to the demonic female. The Zoharic literature, by contrast with Joseph of Hamadan, contains substantially fewer usages of suckling to portray this relationship than in the context of the Shekhinah. I have, however, already cited a crucial Zoharic instance above, the "king and the bondwoman passage." Recounting the perverse substitution of Lilith for the Shekhinah as the consort of the "King," and specifically, of the "*Tsadik*," the divine phallus, this passage declares: "for he was riding until now in a place not his own, in an alien place, and was suckling it" [בגין דהוה רכיב עד השתא באתר דלאו דיליה, באתר נוכראה ויניק ליה].[587] As in the texts discussed above, the phrase "suckles it," [יניק ליה, *yanik le*], operates here at the junction of its sexual and nutritive meanings. It may be a simple reiteration

584 This maleficent shift from milk to blood may also be intended to evoke the Talmudic dictum that women's blood turns into milk after childbirth. See, e.g., *bNidah*, 9a.

585 Commenting on a related passage in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, Cordovero explicitly portrays the process whereby the "filth" cast into the Shekhinah in the course of her coupling with the serpent becomes menstrual blood. *Pardes*, II, 56a–b.

586 On the depictions of menstruation in classical kabbalah, see generally, Koren, *Forsaken : the Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Part II.

587 *Zohar* III, 69a.

of "riding in a place not his own, in an alien place" – i.e., an additional figurative evocation of copulation between the divine *Yesod* and Lilith. Alternatively, it may signify that, a result of "riding in that place," it then nutritively "suckles," it. A third possibility is that it serves to carry both sexual and nutritive meanings. Finally, it may be read as a catachresis, an evocation of the monstrous, "unspeakable" intimacy between the divine and demonic for which language has no "proper" term. In any event, the rhetorical force of the passage lies in its evocation of the scandalous link between the divine *Yesod* and Lilith. As I noted above, the passage emphasizes the abject nature of this relationship, its destabilization of the identity of the king, who is cast down, without "honor," reduced to intimacy with an "ass," stripped even of his royal name.

In the *Sefer Tashak*, by contrast, Joseph of Hamadan portrays suckling as a routine feature of divine/demonic relations, though no less abject. Joseph of Hamadan shares with the Zoharic writers a key rhetorical technique, the playing on the multiple meanings of suckling. On the one hand, they use the verb to refer to the *Yesod*'s relationship to both the "Matronita" and the "Alien Woman," employing it in a primarily sexual sense. On the other hand, they use it to describe the vivification of the minions of these two females in a primarily nutritive sense – the "holy angels" and "prophets and pious ones" nourished by the Matronita, the "demons and spirits" and "Balaam the evil one" nourished by the "Alien Woman." Although the passages may emphasize one sense or another of suckling depending on the relationship, their evocative force depends on this shifting between senses.

The usage of suckling to describe divine/demonic relationships in Zoharic writing, and even more so, in Joseph of Hamadan, requires a different approach than that of either Haskell or Wolfson. It is neither an act of maternal beneficence and tenderness, as Haskell would have it, nor one of the establishment of exclusive phallic dominance, as Wolfson would have it. The sexual/nutritive suckling of the demonic by the divine through abject emissions – whether blood, semen, and perverted milk in the Zoharic texts or urine in Joseph of Hamadan – debases divine subjectivity. The emissions vivify the Other Side, and link the divine phallus not only with the "Alien Woman" but with her minions, the "impure hosts," both metaphysical and earthly.

Joseph of Hamadan portrays divine/demonic suckling as an integral feature of the cosmos. He most often portrays this sustaining link with the demonic neither as a catastrophic "demonic theurgical" result of human sin nor as the outcome of coercion or seduction by a demonic *persona*, but as an inevitable, desired, even organic process and thus an irreducible aspect of the divine life. The divine routinely undermines its own distinctive qualities, be they maternal or phallic, by providing regular sustenance to its chief antagonist, object of temptation, and wayward offspring.

All three of the ambivalences in this chapter, those of origin, intimacy, and sustenance, flow from the primordial undifferentiation and subsequent rupture between divine and demonic, Self and Other. Ambivalences of origin portray the emergence of the split cosmos; ambivalences of intimacy portray the desire for the overcoming of the split; ambivalences of sustenance portray the complicities between the antagonists within the split cosmos. The texts share a common fund of images and dynamics, but are far from homogeneous. These are all individual literary texts, not systematic expositions of a consistent doctrine. As the structuralists taught us, a myth consists of all its variants; there is no single variant which holds the interpretive key to the rest.

The differences among these variants embody divergent stances toward the rupture between Self and Other. Comparison between portrayals of divine/demonic relationships in the Zoharic literature and Joseph of Hamadan serves to foreground such divergences. These portrayals have much in common, such as the abject, even shameful, aspect of these relationships and the overpowering nature of the desire of Self for Other that animates them. They differ, as I have shown above, in their narratives about the reasons for divine/demonic intimacies: products of misfortune in the Zoharic texts, a regular feature of divine life in Joseph of Hamadan – though scandalous in both.

They also share a redemptive potential, though in quite different ways. The redemptive potential in the Zoharic texts is implicit and is left to the reader, perhaps particularly a modern reader, to infer. If a divine figure so ardently desires intimacy with a demonic figure, there must be a holy dimension to this desire. The reader (again, particularly a modern reader) may be driven to infer that this holy dimension consists of the desire for the reunification of the ruptured cosmos, the reunification of Self and Other – even if this requires a bit of "reading against the grain," against the stated message of the text. This reading would align these passages with those affirming the need for human beings to descend to the dark side in order to achieve perfection.[588]

The force required to thus "read against the grain" is far less in relation to Joseph of Hamadan. Most strikingly, his narrative of the secret sexual relations between the blessed Holy One and his "concubine" includes the notion that the House of David, and thus the messiah, is the product of this union. He forebears from any explanation of any kind for the overpowering desire of the divine Self for the demonic Other: a routinized, if scandalous, feature of the cosmos, even of the divine life, it will eventually bring about the ultimate redemption.

588 See generally, Elliot Wolfson, 'Light Through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar', 81.

IX Epilogue: a Theurgical Parallel

A passage in the so-called "Introduction [*Hakdamah*] of the Zohar"[589] provides a fresh look at the themes in this chapter through a discussion of abjection on the human level and its "demonic theurgical" effects. This passage begins as a homily on Isaiah 51:16: "that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the Earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people," [לנטע שמים וליסד ארץ ולאמר לציון עמי אתה]. Re-vowelizing the word "עמי" to read "with me" instead of "my people" [*imi* rather than *ami*], the passage declares that this verse proclaims the partnership between the kabbalist and the blessed Holy One in Creation.

This partnership with the divine, however, only applies to a proper kabbalist, not to one for whom engagement with the "secrets of the Torah" is not "his way," one who "innovates matters that he does not know in their clear form, as would be appropriate," a sage who has not yet reached the stage of "instruction and teaching" [ההוא דלאו אורחיה ברזין דאורייתא, וחדש מלין דלא ידע על בורייהון כדקא יאות ...תלמיד חכם דלא מטי להוראה].[590] On the contrary, such a person enters into partnership with Sama'el, here called the "perverse man" [איש תהפכות], a word whose root [הפך] highlights the relationship of reversal this *persona* bears to the divine. Rather than creating a proper heaven, the words emitted by the improper kabbalist enable Sama'el to leave his place in the "crevice of the great abyss" [נוקבא דתהומא רבא] and empower him to create a "vain firmament" [רקיעא דשוא]. Immediately following the creation of this vain firmament, Lilith, the "woman of whoredom," emerges, becomes "strengthened though it ... participates in it" and "acquires the license and power to fly" throughout the world [נפקת מיד אשת זנונים, ואתקיפת בההוא רקיעא דשוא ... ואשתתפת ביה... בגין דכד קיימת בההוא רקיעא, אית לה רשו ויכולתא למהוי טס כל עלמא].[591] She then proceeds to engage in murderous rampages, in accordance with a verse from Proverbs (7:26), "For many are those she has struck dead [כי רבים חללים הפילה]."

This elaborate narrative of "demonic theurgy" closely tracks the themes I have been discussing in this chapter. The passage describes the declamation of esoteric words by an improper person in a manner which evokes perversity, implicitly of a sexual nature. Such a person is described as one who "does not know" in an "appropriate" way, a description whose sexual resonance is further emphasized by the phrase that esoteric study is not "his way" [לאו אורחיה] – a

589 *Zohar* I, 5a. On the place of this "Introduction" in the Zoharic literature, see Abrams, 'Ematai Ḥubrah Ha-Hakdamah le-Sefer Ha-Zohar'.

590 *Ibid.*

591 *Ibid.*

phrase which, in both its Aramaic and Hebrew variants, is used in rabbinic writing to describe sexual perversity.[592] Moreover, the chapter from Proverbs in which the cited verse appears is devoted to an elaborate description of the sexual seduction of an innocent by a "prostitute," an "alien woman," both frequent Zoharic names for Lilith.

The Talmudic source of this Zoharic passage does not merely cast the premature sage as a collaborator with this destructive woman, but actually identifies him with her.[593] Moreover, the verb used for the act of killing by this woman, "הפילה" [*hipila*] is also probably intended to evoke gestational prematurity, in the sense of abortion or miscarriage, due to the play on the word "נפל" [*nefel*, stillborn child] as Rashi explains[594] – thus linking the prematurity of the instruction by the sage with the kind of destruction that he thereby causes. And, of course, the destruction of infants and the provocation of nocturnal emissions are two of Lilith's key characteristics in both midrashic and kabbalistic literature.

In light of these associations, we can see that the *Hakdamah* passage presents the central themes of this chapter set in the context of "demonic theurgy." It begins with the nourishment and partial creation of the Other Side by words not purified of their refuse because emitted by an immature subject, one who has not achieved the capacity for full "knowledge" and the proper "way." The unripe sage unleashes perverse, unnatural creative forces in the cosmos, leading to the production of a space for the Other Side, the "vain firmament." He also brings the two key diabolical figures into this stable, albeit "vain," space: Sama'el from his lair in the "great abyss" and Lilith from an unnamed, perhaps even more inchoate whereabouts. Having acquired this stable platform within the cosmos, Lilith is free to pursue her murderous and perverse activities.

We can even identify fairly precisely the moment in Zoharic mythology at which this demonic theurgy occurs. It is a moment at which Sama'el and Lilith have already been constituted, and thus somewhat subsequent to the stage portrayed in the "smoke" narrative in Zohar *Pekude* or the "scorching noon" narrative in Zohar *Va-Yetse*. Yet, it is also a moment at which Sama'el and Lilith have not fully acquired their place in the cosmos, or rather in which they are, at best, resident in the "great abyss." The construction of their domain of the "vain firmament," and their taking up of residence in it, is a result of the premature and perverse emission by the improper kabbalist. Finally, we should note that the movement from the "great abyss" to the "vain firmament" is a

592 See, e.g., *bSanherdrin* 73a.

593 *bAvodah Zarah*, 19b and *bSotah*, 22a.

594 Rashi, commentary on *bSotah*, 22a.

movement from the remote Other Side to the proximate and concentric Other Side – for, as I have shown in Chapter 2, the term "firmament" [רקיעא] is used in Zoharic writing as an image of the concentric Other Side, associated with the "curtains" whose demonic forms surrounds the divine forms. This entire perverse creation and cosmic restructuring is brought about by the premature and improper emission of a mixture of refuse and holy words by the not-yet-fully-formed individual, the improper kabbalist – in short, the crystallization of a mighty demonic realm out of an abject composite.

If, as the passage proclaims, the proper kabbalist is a partner of the blessed Holy One, we may see the improper kabbalist as the partner, or the human equivalent, of an improper god – such as the *Ze'er Anpin* of the *Idra Raba*, engaged in the creation of demons on the eve of the Sabbath. Both indulge in creative activity before the complete formation of their selfhood. The *Idra Raba* passage explains that its demon-creating *Ze'er Anpin* is incomplete because he has not yet been unified with his proper consort, the Matronita "in her *tikunin*." As we know from many passages, the Zoharic writers viewed such a *persona* as incomplete, for the "male without the female is called a 'half-body,' and a half-body is not 'one' [דכר בלא נוקבא פלג גופא אקרי ופלג גופא לאו הויא חד];[595] moreover, a "king without a queen is not called a king [מלכא בלא מטרוניתא לא אקרי מלכא].[596] More implicitly, the *Hakdamah* passage also attributes a failure to achieve a proper sexual relationship to the improper kabbalist, with its references to his acting in a manner that is "not his way" and his immature "knowledge." Proper creativity can only be undertaken by one who has achieved perfected selfhood, which, in Zoharic mythology, always entails relationality to an Other, another person, another gender – relationality of an erotic or, as Haskell reminds us, nurturing, character.

A failure to achieve proper relationality does not mean, however, that the immature subject is exempt from the struggle with alterity. On the contrary, failure to achieve a proper relationship to another, the "face-to-face," means that the immature subject will entertain an improper relationship to an adversarial other, the Other Side. Alterity is irreducible and cannot be escaped. It must be embraced fully or it will end in destruction and falsehood. And, to conclude with a gloss from the most daring texts of Joseph of Hamadan: the split cosmos thus produced will only be healed through the arduous travails and ardent longing of transgressive desire, with all their supremely dangerous and redemptive potentials.

595 *Zohar* III, 7b.
596 *Zohar* III, 69a.

CHAPTER 4

Impersonating the Self, Collapsing into the Abyss: the Convergence of Horror and Redemption

שלף איש נעלו, זה הקב"ה, שנקרא איש מלחמה. ושלף, הוא כמו פשט את הקליפות מעליו, שהוא רומז לנעל. ונותן לרעהו, זה סמא"ל, כי גם זה לעומת זה עשה האלהים.

"*A man* plucked off his shoe" [Ruth 4:7]: this is the blessed Holy One, who is called "*a man* of war" [Exodus 15:3]. "And he plucked": as though he disrobed himself of the *kelipot*, which alludes to the shoe. "And he gives it to his fellow": this is Sama'el. "For also this confronted with this hath made the Elohim" [Ecclesiastes 7:14]

ḤAYIM VITAL[597]

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ועל ידי הדעת שתי תהומות אלה נבקעים, זה מקבל וזה משפיע, ומתאצל בין שניהם מציאות הדעת הנעלם

And by means of the Knowledge, these two abysses are split – this receives and this bestows – and, between the two, the existence of the hidden Knowledge is emanated.

MOSHE CORDOVERO[598]

⁘

In this chapter, I explore two polar consequences of the poetic mythology explored in the preceding chapters, each bearing the potential for the ultimate horror as well as the ultimate redemption. First, in a world in which the

597 Vital, *Sefer Ha-Likutim*, 246b–247a.

598 *Pardes*, 1, 15c. I have given this quote a rather literal translation that brings out its poetic and quasi-"Gnostic" quality. In context, "Knowledge" refers to *Da'at*, the hidden Sefirah between *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*, the two "abysses" in the quote. For Cordovero, *Da'at* is the Sefirah of *Tif'eret* in its supernal aspect.

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Other Side has crystallized into fully formed entities and *personae* (Chapter 3) and in which these come to double those of the Side of Holiness (Chapter 2), impersonation of the divine by the demonic increasingly comes to the fore as a central danger. As the crystallization of the demonic becomes further and further elaborated, it yields a world of entities virtually impossible to distinguish from their divine counterparts: a reified world of simulacra – a world both "alien" and yet "in the likeness" of its divine opposite, in the words of Moshe of Burgos. In its most horrifying form, impersonation results from a coerced ontological amalgamation between divine and demonic *personae*, and expresses itself in the linguistic phenomenon of the demonic speaking with the voice of the divine. The impersonation of the Self by the Other in such a world becomes not simply an illusion or deception, but a phenomenon with an ontological basis.

A world marked by the ubiquitous possibility of such impersonation is terrifying. If one cannot distinguish divine from demonic with any certainty, the possibility of fatal misprision is ever-present, an existentialist's nightmare. Moreover, if such misprision is due not to cognitive error, but to the pervasiveness of ontological divine/demonic composites, the nightmare is one from which one cannot awake. Nevertheless, such a world also contains a concealed, but powerful, possibility of redemption: for is not the ontological amalgamation of divine and demonic another way of describing the re-union of Self and Other, the reunification of the two sides of the broken cosmos? The grotesque image of the coerced amalgamation is a horrifying, yet perhaps secretly utopian, image of the ultimate redemption.

The dangers of impersonation are implicit in much of the Zoharic literature and occasionally become explicit, as in the "two sisters" passage. The full scale of these dangers, however, becomes fully elaborated only in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* and *Ra'ya Mehemena*. It is in these works that a key mechanism for such impersonation, which I call "aggressive enclothing," was first depicted. Impersonation, particularly in the form of aggressive enclothing, then takes a central place in the cosmic drama in later kabbalah.

I then turn to a danger that is the diametrical opposite of a reified world of simulacra: the collapse of the Self into the utterly formless abyss, the *Tehom*. Zoharic texts often implicitly or explicitly associate this abyss with the *Tehom* of the second verse of Genesis: "and darkness was upon the face of the *Tehom*" (translated as "the deep" by the KJV, as "abyssus" by the Vulgate). The abyss, which ever threatens to dissolve all form and meaning, and which is thus often indistinguishable from the abject, is that from which both the divine and demonic emerge and to which they return (Chapter 3). It is, in all ways, the absolute Other of the bounded Self. Nonetheless, in a world in which

reified demonic simulacra have become ubiquitous, it may be only through a plunge back into the dissolving abyss that creativity can be resumed: in Kristeva's words, "rebirth with and against abjection."[599]

Zoharic and post-Zoharic texts explore the potential of the abyss for dissolving and renewing the creative subject through a range of mythic narratives. Such narratives appraise the abyss in terms ranging from the supremely beneficent to the supremely maleficent. They also often portray a restraint on the abyss, usually figured as some kind of hard slab standing between the abyss and the world of crystallized forms, whose appraisal as beneficent or maleficent varies inversely with that of the abyss itself. This liminal slab, governing access between the abyss and the world, has both material and linguistic aspects. On the one hand, the texts describe it as a physical blockage of the abyss, often as a congealment of part of the abyss itself; on the other hand, they describe it as a linguistic artifact, often engraved with letters, even capable of speech. The slab is thus an embodied meaning ever threatened by its dissolution into meaninglessness and formlessness, and yet often renewed and reconsolidated by engagement with its source.

In the Introduction, I asserted that much of Zoharic myth could be understood as etiological, as narrative that recounts the genealogy of the broken state of the world. Nowhere is this truer than in relation to the phenomena discussed in this chapter. For is not a world of reified forms, in which existential choice must be made between difficult-to-distinguish alternatives, and yet which seems ever-perched on the brink of utter dissolution, a poignant description of the world in which we live, never more so than at the present time?

From a contemporary perspective, the mythical narratives explored in this chapter may well seem like the ultimate goal of the entire edifice of Zoharic mythology. Nowhere does the convergence between Zoharic mythology and the existential dilemmas of modernity seem so uncanny as in the portrayals of adversarial simulacra playing out their dangerous rivalries in a world in imminent danger of collapse. That the Zoharic and post-Zoharic texts show both the extreme danger of these phenomena and the hidden redemptive power they contain make exploration of their seemingly recondite mythology urgent for our time.

599 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 39.

I Impersonation: Aggressive Enclothing and *Ethopoeia*

This section explores perhaps the most deeply disturbing variant of divine/demonic relations: impersonation of the divine by the demonic. A world in which such impersonation becomes pervasive is a horrifying prospect: with the convergence of "resemblance" and "menace," the difference between good and evil, friend and foe, God and the Devil, becomes impossible to determine with certainty. Self and Other are at their most antagonistic, and yet at their most indistinguishable. Such a vision is, in fact, the stuff from which many a fictional tale of horror is made; it also corresponds to the terrifying existential dilemmas portrayed by many a modern philosopher.

And yet: the etiology provided by Zoharic mythology of this horrifying vision may also suggest that such a world is but one step away from redemption. Zoharic mythology shows that the possibility of a world of simulacra lies in the shared origins, desires, and sustenance of the "improper twins." These twins are locked in lethal embrace precisely because of their tragic cognitive and ontological separation, a separation with a history, a reversible history. The aggressive mirroring or even coercive amalgamation of divine and demonic may prove to be a monstrous, reified form of the primordial undifferentiation out of which they both emerge, and thus a promise of redemption in grotesque form.

While I have already broached the problem of impersonation a number of times in this book, I focus in this section on specific variants of it, with both linguistic and ontological dimensions. At the rhetorical level, I focus on the trope of "*ethopoeia*," literally the "making of a character," making a *persona* speak in the voice of another. At the ontological level, I focus on the amalgams produced through what I call "*aggressive enclothing*," a kind of forced mythical cross-dressing. Myths of aggressive enclothing portray the demonic forcibly covering a divine entity or *persona* with a "garment" as a means of appropriating its ontological power and linguistic expressiveness.

Portrayals of the aggressive enclothing of the divine by the demonic in kabbalistic texts range from depictions of it as posing the ultimate cosmic and religious dangers, to demonstrations that it secretly holds the key to redemption. The valence attributed to such enclothing is not only portrayed in different ways in different texts, but may even vary within a single text. When portrayed as dangerous, aggressive enclothing is a weapon by which the divine is captured by the demonic. The reversal of the proper hierarchy between clothing and enclothed becomes the instrument for the reversal of the proper hierarchy between the two realms. When enclothing of the divine by the demonic is

portrayed as redemptive, it becomes a divine tactic, even a ruse, a clandestine means by which the divine dominates the demonic from within.

In its initial formulations, the aggression involved in enclothing thus works in both directions: an overt attack by the demonic against the divine, a more covert attack by the divine against the demonic. Moreover, although the myth of enclothing was initially usually reserved for the encasing of the divine in a demonic garment, this was not exclusively the case.[600] And, as the kabbalistic imagination unfolded over the generations, the tactics and fortunes of the two sides in such struggles came to be portrayed in increasingly identical terms. In Lurianic texts, the vicissitudes of divine/demonic combat by means of rival, functionally identical deployments of aggressive enclothing became a central way of describing the perennial oscillations between the fortunes of the divine and demonic realms. These oscillations can be attributed to the reversibility intrinsic to the image itself: garments may easily be doffed and donned, ripped off and harnessed on.

Aggressive enclothing brings together the dominant themes of Chapters 2 and 3 of this book: splitting and abjection-and-crystallization. Upon first consideration, enclothing of the divine by the demonic may seem to be primarily a form of splitting: specifically, between a divine core and a demonic exterior, closely related to the concentric image of the *kelipah*. As with other kinds of splitting, one can see enclothing as a way objective ambivalence is constructed and destabilized, subjective ambivalence managed and dreaded. If one views an entity as bearing contradictory traits, or if one experiences contradictory affects towards it, the notion that the entity is split between a good core and a bad exterior validates that ambivalence: revealing that one's conflicted perception of the entity is a result of a conflict within the object itself. One thereby transforms subjective ambivalence into objective ambivalence, human anxiety into an ontological struggle between antagonistic cosmic forces. Aggressive enclothing, from this perspective, provides an etiology, an ontological backstory, for the confusions and indeterminacies of worldly experience.

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600 See *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 109a:

ואית אילנא דטוב ורע דקליפין, דאינון גרעינין אינון מלגאו רע, ומוחא דקיק מלבר טוב, ואית דמוחא דקיקא מלבר טב ומוחא סגי ביש מלגאו, כגון דהבא וכספא זעיר מצופה מלבר, ועו־פרת סיגים מלגאו, דא מוניטא דשקרא, פומיה טב ולביה ביש

And there is a Tree of Good and Evil of the *kelipot*, for these seeds are evil within, and the thin *moḥa* without is good. And there are those whose thin *moḥa* without is good, and a large *moḥa* within is bad – like a small amount of gold and silver coating without, and lead dross within. This is the stamp of the lie – his mouth is good and his heart is bad.

While this back-story lightens the onus on the ambivalent subject, it is hardly reassuring, for at least two reasons. First, aggressive enclothing combines extreme forms of the key dangerous feature of the "concentric" Other Side, its proximity to the divine, with the key dangerous feature of the "homologous" Other Side, its indistinguishability from the divine. Second, in a world in which impersonation is pervasive and rooted in ontological amalgamation, it seems virtually impossible to avoid the gravest religious pitfall, worshiping the demonic instead of the divine. The correction of cognitive error becomes irrelevant, or even misleading. Instead, the central task becomes the theurgical undoing of a horrifying reality.

I now turn to the relationship of aggressive enclothing to abjection-and-crystallization. Most obviously, aggressive enclothing is a form of splitting that is also intrinsically abject in the conventional sense of degradation, the debasement of the divine through its subordination to a demonic exterior. Such abject subordination reaches its ultimate form in narratives of talking idols, demonic beings perversely invigorated by the divine names inserted into them.

Such narratives, kabbalistically adapted from rabbinic sources, are not only myths of abjection, but also, simultaneously, those of the crystallizations of a *persona*, even if a deceptive one. They constitute mythic portrayals of the classical rhetorical device of ethopoeia, speaking as someone else, often associated with stage-acting. Ethopoeia is closely related to prosopopeia, both tropes which involve the making of a *persona*, and often giving speech to that *persona*. Prosopopeia, however, involves the making of a "face" for something that doesn't otherwise have a face, such as the inanimate or the dead, or, in Zoharic texts, miasmic stuff such as slime. Ethopoeia, by contrast, refers to the staging of the face, and often the voice, by one existing *persona* of another existing *persona*.[601] The narratives of talking idols, as I discuss below, stage monstrous forms of ethopoeia: the divine forced to speak from the mouth of the demonic. Such phenomena simultaneously embody abjection and crystallization.

At a more dynamic level, particularly in Lurianic texts, simultaneous abjection-and-crystallization comes to be the very means of the combat between divine and demonic. In such texts, each side seeks to enclothe a vital core (specifically, the "nine upper Sefirot of *Malkhut*") by inducing its violent expulsion from one realm to another. By enclothing this core, the provisionally victorious side re-crystallizes itself, "completes its *persona* [*partsuf*]." As I shall describe in detail, the vital core itself thus comes to be paradoxically portrayed as the

601 See Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric*, 370. Not all rhetoricians distinguish these two tropes, but the distinction reported by Lausberg is very useful for my analysis here.

refuse that is fought over and violently exchanged between one realm and the other. In these struggles, the convergence of abjection and crystallization reaches its apex as refuse becomes identified with substance.

The myth of aggressive enclothing stems from an innovative composite, created by the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, of two processes that are quite distinct in the Zoharic literature: enclothing and capture. Enclothing is a common way Zoharic texts portray benign and necessary cosmic and divine processes.[602] Although such portrayals take many forms, they generally prescribe "garments" [לבושין] that are appropriate to the entity being clothed, even necessary for its mythical task. A garment may be necessary for a lower entity to ascend to a higher level or for a higher entity to descend to a lower level.[603] A garment might be necessary to conceal secrets for which the world is not worthy or to make secrets accessible to those worthy of them. Most importantly in this context, Zoharic texts reserve holy garments for holy beings and unholy garments for unholy beings. For example, one Zoharic passage refers to bodies as garments for the spirit, with pure bodies enclothing holy spirits and contaminated bodies enclothing contaminated spirits.[604]

The difference between Zoharic portrayals of *kelipot* and garments highlights the benign nature of the latter. Although one may view *kelipot* and garments as quite closely related on a phenomenal level, Zoharic texts generally do not conflate the two. To be sure, the "benign *kelipah*" passage, discussed in Chapter 2, is something of an exception to this rule, even if it does not treat the two terms as synonymous. At the upper levels, as I have shown, the term "garment," and not "*kelipah*," is used to describe the relationship between successive Sefirot. But from *Gevurah* downward, the term "*kelipah*" is used in a manner seemingly interchangeably with the term "garment." We find this usage in the passage's key lines: "so that this is a garment for this, and this for this. This, the kernel [*moḥa*]; this, the shell [*kelipah*]. Although a garment, it becomes the kernel [*moḥa*] of another layer" [עד דאשתכח דא לבושא לדא, ודא לדא, דא מוחא ודא קליפה, ואע"ג דדא לבושא, אתעביד איהו מוחא לדרגא אחרא].

However, and this point is crucial here, the passage's treatment of the terms as partially overlapping does not give any sinister meaning to the term "garment" or the activity of enclothing. Indeed, it is precisely the unusually benign conception of the *kelipah* in that passage that makes its overlap with "garment"

602 See generally, Cohen-Alloro, *Sod ha-Malbush u-Mar'eh ha-Mal'akh be-Sefer ha-Zohar, passim*.

603 See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 184a on the need for a proper garment for a proper *yenikah* to take place.

604 *Zohar* I, 20b.

consistent with the latter's benign significance in Zoharic texts. The fact that a higher entity takes on either a "garment" or (from *Gevurah* downward) a "*kelipah*," poses no problem of capture or misprision.

Indeed, even in the "Lilith-*kelipah*" passage, no danger is posed by enclothing as such. Rather, the danger is that of a metastasis of the *kelipah* dimension, the generation of an entity which is a *kelipah* by essence rather than relationally. To be sure, one finds in this passage a suggestion of the theme of impersonation in the specific manner through which Lilith attempts to capture the "small faces" [אנפי זוטרי]: seeking to "cleave to them and to portray herself through them" [לאתדבקא בהו ולאצטיירא בגווייהו].[605] I described this in Chapter 2 as a monstrous prosopopeia, portraying Lilith as an abject, formless being who needs the "small faces" to give herself form; it might, alternatively, be described as ethopoeia in the sense I describe here. In either case, it does not use the trope of enclothing to describe Lilith's attempted aggression.

By contrast with their benign portrayal of enclothing, Zoharic texts describe aggression against, and capture of, the divine by the demonic with words like "domination,"[606] "cleaving,"[607] and "suckling."[608] The description of capture as an aggressive "cleaving" or "suckling" also conveys that it entails a perverse erotic intimacy. When the Shekhinah succeeds in bringing a halt to this intimacy, as on the Sabbath or in a future messianic time, the Zoharic text describes her as "separating" herself from the Other Side [איהי אתפרשת מההוא סטרא].[609]

The *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, however, construct a sinister composite of these two sets of Zoharic myths: on the one hand, the "enclothing" of one level by another, a process always portrayed in Zoharic texts as benign, and, on the other hand, the "cleaving" of the Other Side to the divine, a process always portrayed as malign. This composite yields a novel use of "enclothing" to portray hostile capture, a composite associated with a specific set of cognitive and religious dangers. These cognitive and spiritual dangers are related to those involved in the "sisters" allegory and the seductive powers of *nogah*: above all, the possibility that a person might perceive the demonic as divine, and thence to worship it or draw on its metaphysical powers. In the case of enclothing, moreover, the danger is far more acute than in those two other examples, for this religious perversion has a basis in ontology, not only

605 *Ibid.* I note that this desire of Lilith seems ultimately to derive from the midrashic notion of the *shedim* as spirits without bodies. This notion is also alluded to in the assertion, at *Zohar* III, 143b, that *shedim* desire Torah sages in order to be "included in the Body."

606 E.g., *Zohar* I, 210b.

607 E.g., *Zohar* II, 134a.

608 E.g., *Zohar* II, 125a.

609 *Zohar* II, 134a.

in perception or genealogy. We confront not a covert alliance between opposites/twins, nor a phenomenal resemblance between antagonists, but rather, impersonation brought about through aggression, capture, and ontological hybridization.[610]

The *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar* often employ the trope of the enclothing of the Shekhinah by the *kelipot*, and the Shekhinah's effort to "disrobe" herself from them, at precisely the kind of textual moment whose equivalent in Zoharic texts evoke the "cleaving" of the Other Side to the Shekhinah and her efforts to "separate" herself from it:

> בגין דביומין דחול שכינתא תתאה אתלבשת באלין קליפין דמיתה דדינא, ובשבת אתפשטת מנייהו
>
> For during the week, the lower Shekhinah is enclothed in these *kelipot* of death, of judgment, and on Shabbat, she disrobes herself from them.[611]
>
> שכינתא איהי פרדס בגלותא, ואיהי מוחא מלגו, אגוז קרינן ליה, כמה דאמר שלמה מלכא, אל גנת אגוז ירדתי, ואיהי שכינתא איבא מלגאו, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים מ"ה) כל כבודה בת מלך פנימה ממשבצות זהב לבושה, וקליפין הן כמה רשויות נוכראין, ובשבת מכלא אתשפטת, ואתלבשת בלבושין שפיראן....
>
> The Shekhinah is an orchard in exile. And she is the *moḥa* within. She is called a "nut," as King Solomon said, "I went down into the garden of nuts" [Song of Songs, 6:11]. And she, the Shekhinah, is the fruit within, as it is written (Psalms 45:13), "The king's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold." And the *kelipot* are the several alien domains. And on Shabbat, she disrobes from all, and dresses in beautiful clothes.[612]

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610 The impersonation of the divine by the demonic exists in some other sources, sometimes in order to test whether a person can see through the disguise. Thus, Moshe of Burgos declares that the angel who fought Jacob was a holy angel, "enclothed in the image of Sama'el" [נתלבש בדמותו של סמאל]. Scholem, 'Hosafot me-Ibud Ma'amaro shel R. Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen al Ha-Atsilut', 191. See also 'Ma'amar 'al Ha-Atsilut Ha-Semalit,' 91, where Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen states that because this impersonation was done to test Jacob, the angel was forbidden to tell Jacob whether his name was "Israel" or "Sama'el." In a classic Ḥasidic transformation of these themes, Ya'akov Yosef Ha-Kohen of Polnoye tells us that the "essence of redemption" is to see that the "enemy" is really the "lover" [אויב, אוהב – words that in eastern Europe would have been pronounced nearly identically]. *Toledot Ya'akov Yosef*, 250. The Zoharic allegory of the prostitute sent by the king to test his son may also be added to this series of texts. *Zohar* II, 163a.

611 *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 243b.

612 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 69a–b.

ובההוא זמנא מתפשטא סיהרא מאלין קליפין חשוכין, ומתחדשא בלבושין שפירין, והאי איהו חדושא דסיהרא, הדא הוא דכתיב ותסר בגדי אלמנותה מעליה.

> And in that time, the moon will disrobe herself from those dark *kelipot*, and will be renewed in beautiful clothes. And this is the renewal of the moon. And this is as it is written, " And she put her widow's garments off from her." [Genesis 38:14].[613]

Such passages employ enclothing as the key medium of perverse intimacy between the Shekhinah and the Other Side. "To enclothe" [לאתלבשא] has come to take the place of "to cleave" [לאתדבקא], as the central verb portraying this intimacy; "to disrobe" [לאתפשטא], rather than "to separate" [לאתפרשא], as its undoing.

Nevertheless, despite the clear description of enclothing in some texts as the subjugation of the divine, we also find explicit declarations of the diametrically opposed view, as in the following passage from the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*.

כתרין תתאין אינון קליפין לגבי כתרין עלאין, דמתלבשין בהון עשר אתוון בגלותא[614], למהוי כפויין תחותוי כתרין תתאין

> The lower crowns are *kelipot* in relation to the upper crowns. In them [the lower crowns], the ten letters are enclothed in exile – so that the lower crowns may be subjugated beneath them.[615]

Enclothing of the divine by the demonic proves to be a covert tactic by the divine to subjugate the demonic.

In another, lengthy, passage, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* propounds a wide range of heterogeneous interpretations of aggressive enclothing, including: the establishment of divine omnipresence and omnipotence, the solicitous accompaniment of Israel into exile, the demonic-theurgical effect of human sin, and the utilization of the demonic as an instrument of punishment for the wicked. The establishment of divine omnipresence and omnipotence, the first interpretation in this passage, is closely related to the subjugation theme:

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613 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 36b.

614 Some textual variants read "in prayer" [בצלותא] rather than "in exile" [בגלותא]. The former does not suit the context at all. Cordovero (*Pardes,* I, 80c) also uses the latter variant.

615 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 26a. Cordovero emphasizes this function of the enclothing of the divine by the demonic. See *Pardes,* I, 80c-d.

ואינון כתרין תתאין אינון קליפין לעשר ספירן, ועשר ספירן מוחא בגווייהו, ואלין קלי־
פין אינון מחיצה בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים, באלין קליפין מתלבש קודשא בריך
הוא ושכינתיה, לקיימא בשכינתיה ומלכותו בכל משלה

And these lower crowns are *kelipot* for the ten Sefirot, and the ten Sefirot are the *moḥa* within them. And these *kelipot* are a barrier between Israel and their Father in heaven. In these *kelipot*, the blessed Holy One and his Shekhinah are enclothed, in order to fulfil, through the Shekhinah, "and his kingdom ruleth over all." [Psalms 103:19][616]

The triumphalism of the end of this excerpt is, to be sure, somewhat undermined by the immediately preceding declaration that this supposed method of establishing divine supremacy constitutes a barrier between Israel and God.

The passage then declares that enclothing stems from divine solicitude for Israel in exile, incidentally exploring the complex relationship between "*kelipot*" and "garments":

קליפין דיליה לעילא אינון לבושין מכמה גוונין שפירין דנהורא, דמנהון אתפשט
קודשא בריך הוא בגלותא, ואתלבש באלין אחרנין, בגין לנטרא לישראל, דאינון
מתלבשין באלין קליפין, ודא איהו בכל צרתם לו צר[617]

His *kelipot* above are garments of several beautiful colors of light, from which the blessed Holy One disrobes in exile – and puts on these others, in order to protect Israel who are enclothed in these *kelipot*. And this is "In all their affliction he was afflicted" [Isaiah 63:9].

Here we are told that there are two kinds of *kelipot*, of which the upper variety are benign, indeed beautiful, "garments." The blessed Holy One disrobes from these beautiful garments and dons the demonic *kelipot* in order to follow Israel into exile with the goal of protecting them. Far from omnipresent and omnipotent as in the first interpretation, the God who follows his people into exile is explicitly portrayed as a suffering deity, precisely due to his donning the demonic garments.

Finally, and still within the same passage, we learn that enclothing the divine in the demonic is designed to mete out punishment to the wicked – but in a manner that, paradoxically, seems to diminish divine omnipotence, perhaps even more so than in the "self-exiling deity" interpretation. I note that I

616 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 108b.
617 *Ibid.*

translate the verse from Exodus in the following excerpt in accordance with its Zoharic interpretation, though it is more familiar in its KJV version of "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain":

> ההיא קליפה דגרים בר נש לאתלבשא שם ה' ביה נטיל נוקמא, ובגין דא לא תשא את שם ה' אלקי"ך לשוא[618]
>
> This *kelipah*, in which the person has caused the name of God to be enclothed, takes revenge. And therefore, "Thou shalt not deport the name of YHVH your Elohim to the Vain" [Exodus 20:7].[619]

With this third interpretation of enclothing, we have come almost full circle. Rather than an act of divine omnipotence, as in the first interpretation, or divine sorrowful empathy, as in the "self-exiling deity" view, the human sinner causes the divine to be enclothed in a *kelipah*: enclothing as a humanly instigated, coercive act of demonic theurgy.

This succinct narrative also explicitly associates aggressive enclothing with coercive ethopoeia. The sinner causes a linguistic deportation from divine to demonic, in accordance with a hyper-literal reading of the Third Commandment as "Thou shalt not deport the name of YHVH your Elohim *to* the [realm of the] Vain." The divine "name" is literally deported into the realm of the "Vain," the realm of demonic language and being.[620] And, as ever in Zoharic writing, the sinner's linguistic crime entails immediate ontological consequences. The sinner is punished by the demonic-theurgical consequences of his own act, delivered into the hands of a demonic entity that he himself has empowered. In what would colloquially be called "poetic justice," the sinner's coercive perversion of the divine name brings about his punishment at the hand of the monstrous being created by that very perversion.

Yet we only grasp the full horror of the situation created by the sinner when we realize that this avenging monster is indistinguishable from its divine counterpart. Just before the transition to this third interpretation, the passage stresses the rhetorical homonymy and structural homology between the divine and the demonic realms. The two share the name "solitary" [בדד *Badad*], whose Hebrew letters have the numerical value of ten, the number

618 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 109a. I note that a bit earlier in the same passage, the punishment of sinners is also described as rendered possible by an intentional divine entrusting of the ten Sefirot of the Other Side to Sama'el. *Ibid.*

619 I explain this translation of the verse below.

620 For the Zoharic precursor of this usage, see *Zohar*, I, 5a.

of Sefirot possessed by each realm. By bringing together antithetical homonymy with aggressive enclothing, the passage portrays the latter as a strictly imperceptible process: the covering over of the divine by its identical demonic adversary. The horror of this situation consists in the convergence of the worst aspects of the "concentric" and "homologous" demonic: the demonic is both contiguous to the divine, blocking and crippling it, and identical to the divine, a formidable adversary.

One may interpret the deportation of the divine into the demonic in at least three ways: the bestowal of new powers on a pre-existing demonic entity by inserting the divine name within it, the creation of a new demonic entity through enclothing the divine name with lifeless matter, or, finally, most provocatively, the transmogrification of a divine being into a demonic being through deporting it to the demonic realm. However scandalous, this last interpretation is the most persuasive: the denomination of the sinner's punishment as "revenge" by the *kelipah* strongly suggests that the sinner is submitted to the retributive wrath of a monstrously transformed divine being whose language and being he has forcibly expatriated from the divine to the demonic realm. The "revenge" would, in this view, emanate from a god furious at being transformed into a devil. The shared name, *Badad*, would, in this reading, not be merely a case of homonymy, but a sign of the horrifying ontological identity of ostensible opposites. The Self has become coercively transformed into the Other; its rage at its alienation wreaks a terrible vengeance on the agent of its torment.

The ontological and rhetorical dangers of impersonation are made even more explicit in another passage in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, also relying on a hyperliteral reading of the Third Commandment as a proof-text.[621] The text recounts the story, adapted from a midrashic source, of the idol of Nebuchadnezzar, into whose mouth he inserted the divine name.[622] This very literal instantiation of the deportation of the divine name into the demonic empowers the idol to utter the words, "I am YHVH your Elohim." Rather than viewing it as some kind of magic trick, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* interprets the speaking idol as an ontological intermixture of the divine and demonic: an intermixture of "the name of the blessed Holy One and idolatry," producing the hybrid "Tree of Good and Evil." On the rhetorical level, the idol who speaks in the name of God is a strikingly clear, as well as openly sacrilegious, image of ethopoeia.

621 *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 97a–b.

622 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 97b. The source I have found for this story is *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabah*, III, 61a (7:15). The biblical basis for the story is in Daniel 2 & 3.

The *Tikune Ha-Zohar* passage continues, moreover, by proclaiming that such monstrous mixtures are not exceptional, but pervade the world in its fallen state, the latter enduring for at least the whole of human history. After Adam sinned in the Garden, "he fell from his place, and became intermixed with the Tree of Good and Evil." In the condition of fallenness, both of the human being and of the cosmos, it is not possible to avoid such divine/demonic mixtures, even in religious worship:

> ובזמנא דישראל אינון בגלותא, כאלו הוו מעורבין באילנא דטוב ורע, ובגין דא אוק־מוהו קדמאין, ישראל בגלותא עובדין עבודה זרה בטהרה הם[623]

> And when Israel is in exile, it is as though they are intermixed with the tree of good and evil. And it is because of this that the ancient ones taught, "Israel in exile are idol worshippers in purity" [Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Avodah Zarah, 8b].

The Talmudic passage which is the source of the phrase, "idol worshippers in purity," applies it to the social conditions of exile, specifically participation by Jews in feasts held by idolators.[624] Despite what would seem to be the implication of the phrase, the Talmudic text does not suggest that the Jews in question actually worship idols or undergo any other distortion of religious experience or practice. The *Tikune Ha-Zohar*'s interpretation, by contrast, seems more consonant with the phrase's wording. The "worship of idols," in the kabbalistic sense of enmeshment with demonic forces, becomes an ontological inevitability despite one's pure intent.[625] The post-lapsarian world, our world, is the domain of the "Tree of Good and Evil," in which the demonic and divine are intermixed. In such a world, even the most intense acts of true religious engagement – specifically, theurgical practices involving the "use of any angel" or "any [holy] name" – inevitably enmesh one with this lethal "mixture" or "confusion."[626] The objectively ambivalent meaning of such religious acts – expressed in the Talmudic phrase "idol worshippers in purity" – is the ultimate menace posed by aggressive enclothing.

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623 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 97b. The internal quote is from *bAvodah Zarah*, 8a.

624 *bAvodah Zarah, 8a.*

625 Cordovero elaborates on this phenomenon in several places. See, e.g., *Pardes*, I, 44c-d and *Or Yakar*, XVI, 122b.

626 לאשתמשא בשום מלאך ... בשמא בעלמא ... דאית ערבוביא. *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 97b. To be sure, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* declares that those who truly "know" are able to avoid this consequence.

I have thus far traced the development of the myth of enclothing from its necessary and salutary role in Zoharic texts to its emergence in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* as a rhetorical form of monstrous ethopoeia and an ontological weapon of demonic theurgy. These developments are crucial for the unfolding of divine/demonic relations in later kabbalistic history. Aggressive enclothing occupies an important place in the 16th century teachings of both Moshe Cordovero and Yitsḥak Luria. As kabbalistic history proceeds, aggressive enclothing becomes ever-more prominent as a portrayal of the dangerous intimacy of divine and demonic, undoubtedly accelerated by its distinctive appearance in Sabbateanism.

It is striking, therefore, that post-Zoharic texts also preserve and further elaborate the Zoharic notion of enclothing as a benign and necessary aspect of divine unfolding. In some passages, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* portrays the lower divine *personae*, the blessed Holy One and the Shekhinah, as garments for the upper ones, their Supernal Father and Mother,[627] and the lower world of *Beri'ah* [Creation] as a garment for the upper world of *Atsilut* [Emanation].[628] Lurianic texts abound in such usages, in accordance with the maxim, "everything that is higher than its fellow enclothes itself in it to illuminate it and give it life" [וכל דבר שהוא גבוה מחבירו מתלבש בחבירו להאיר בו ולהחיותו].[629] The garment in its beneficial and inevitable senses thus coexists side by side with its usage in its antagonistic and horrifying senses.

In the latter contexts, and in direct opposition to the Zoharic "benign *kelipah*" passage, it is the very geographical proximity and structural concentricity of the garments that facilitate antagonistic divine/demonic confrontations, with reciprocal attempts at capture and subjugation. The coexistence of the benign and malign portrayals of enclothing may partly explain the religious dangerousness of the latter: the ability of the demonic to deceive when it aggressively enclothes the divine may stem from the fact that such enclothing is a perverse form of a holy and necessary process.

The fact that aggressive enclothing acquires such prominence in post-Zoharic kabbalah calls out for further reflection on the relationship between this kind of intimate divine/demonic relationship and some of the others I have discussed. The connotations of "garments" may seem, at first, far more neutral than those of the "husks" surrounding the *mo'aḥ*, the "red hair" of the *Ish*, and the foreskin of the divine phallus, let alone the rapacious "suckling" by the demonic – though, again, it may be their initially non-threatening

627 *Ibid.*, 63b.
628 *Ibid.*, 116a.
629 See, e.g., *Ets Ḥayim*, 63d.

appearance that makes the garments so dangerously deceptive. They also seem less integrally linked to the holy entity that they cover, in contrast with the other myths, which all relate to organic processes.

This more contingent relationship of the garment to the covered entity or *persona* lends itself to a variety of divergent consequences. On the one hand, theurgy would seem more effective if one is merely dealing with external garments rather than an organic covering; garments are far more easily removed than husks or hair, let alone foreskins.[630] On the other hand, garments are also more easily donned or forcibly wrapped on than their organic counterparts, making demonic theurgy seem more possible and dangerous.[631] The greater contingency of garments in contrast with organic coverings makes them more vulnerable to all kinds of human action, for good and ill, with effects that may be far more easily reversible. By contrast with re-donning garments, the notion of re-growing husks and foreskins runs contrary to the physical sense of the image (even though, to be sure, counter-factual uses of images are commonplace in the kabbalistic imagination). Even hair requires a good deal longer to grow back than garments require to be put back on.

One might also have imagined that the non-organic connection between garments and that which they cover would mean that they pose a lesser degree of contamination, that their effect on holy entities would be more superficial than that of the organic contaminants. Nonetheless, portrayals of aggressive enclothing in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* and *Ra'ya Mehemena*, with their distinctive blending of the Zoharic notions of enclothing and erotically charged "cleaving," at times depict enclothing as causing the deepest kind of contamination. Repudiating any impression that enclothing is merely external, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* uses the verse, "he hath defiled the Temple of YHVH" (Numbers 19:20) [את מקדש יהוה טמא] to describe the effects of demonic garments on

630 Thus, a late attempt to mitigate the consequences of enclothing is articulated by Shlomo Elyashiv who declares that a donned garment never becomes a part of the enclothed person. *Sefer Sha'are Leshem*, 482. To be sure, the same text also highlights the danger of impersonation, declaring that the *kelipot* attempt to use the fact of enclothing to "call themselves divinity" [הנה עי"ז מכנים את עצמם ג"כ בשם אלהות]. *Ibid*., 483. In any case, the danger of contamination is clearly expressed in other texts, both in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* and in Lurianic kabbalah.

631 The contingency and reversibility of the "enclothing" image is highlighted by the early 19th century Yitsḥak Isaac Ḥaver. Ḥaver contrasts two images of the development of the universe: *unfolding* [השתלשלות], which he see as linear development, associated with the Lurianic model of *igulim*, and *enclothing* [התלבשות], which he sees as subject to reversibility due to the theurgical effects of human action, associated with the Lurianic model of *yosher*. See *Sefer Piṭḥe She'arim*, 11, 14a–b.

the divine.[632] The passage associates that contamination with transgression of the prohibition of "*kil'ayim*" [כלאים], the mixing of seeds from different species, and, even more pertinently, "*sha'atnez*" [שעטנז], the mixing of linen and woolen materials in a garment.[633] By associating the seemingly external notion of enclothing with the "defilement of the Temple," and then with a garment composed of an illicit mixture, the passage implies that aggressive enclothing brings about a monstrous ontological hybrid between divine and demonic. This implication is reinforced when we recall that Zoharic texts often use the image of the "defilement of the Temple" to portray the illicit sexual union of the Shekhinah with Sama'el, depicted as the "casting of filth" into her.

This association of enclothing with sexual contamination brings us to the relationship between aggressive enclothing and the two processes described in Chapter 3, abjection and crystallization. I recall that, in the fullest elaborations of the emergence of the demonic, Zoharic texts narrate these two processes as successive stages. The construction of the holy realm only becomes possible after the abjection of inassimilable "refuse," "dregs," "smoke," and so on, from the divine. The demonic realm, in turn, emerges from these inchoate elements as they crystallize in their "place." The rhetoric of such transitions is disjunctive, indeed catachrestic. The texts refuse any narrative link, let alone a phenomenally plausible causal relationship, between the abjected miasma and the crystallization of a mighty structured realm of evil.

By contrast, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*'s "contamination of the Temple," tightly associating the Zoharic "casting of filth" with aggressive enclothing, provides not merely a link between abjection and crystallization but their simultaneity, even identification. In aggressive enclothing, crystallized "garments" paradoxically converge with miasmic filth. Far from constituting a superficial contiguity, the enclothing of the divine Sefirot by already-constituted demonic Sefirot simultaneously contaminates the interior of the divine, forcing it to undergo the experience of abjection. As a result of this "enclothing/contamination," a monstrous hybrid then forms, the agricultural "*kil'ayim*" or sartorial

632 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 109a. The *Tikune Ha-Zohar* also attempts to mitigate such consequences. Shortly after describing the enclothing of the divine name in the demonic, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* declares that, at the level of *Atsilut*, contamination by the demonic garments only affects the divine garments and not the *moḥa*. These garments, however, are the divine Sefirot themselves. From the level of *Beri'ah* downward, moreover, the contamination can affect the *moḥa* as well. *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 109a. This kind of reasoning is restated in some passages in Lurianic kabbalah with its notion that the *kelipot* of *Atsilut* are to be found in *Beri'ah*. See, e.g., *Ets Ḥayim*, 1, 17b. In any event, the very attempts at such mitigation suggest the seriousness of the perceived threat of contamination from enclothing.

633 Leviticus 19:19.

"*sha'atnez*." Confrontation with the abject and assault by crystallized entities, contamination at a deep level and enclothing at a surface level, can no longer be separated.

The *Tikune Ha-Zohar*'s identification of sexual contamination with enclothing, as well as the convergence it depicts between the Zoharically distinct processes of abjection and crystallization, yield formulations that are just as catachrestic as their Zoharic counterparts. I note that the term "*sha'atnez*," which stands here catachrestically for the monstrous hybrid of the divine and demonic, is also linguistically marked as monstrous in the biblical text itself, standing out as apparently non-Hebraic in origin and semantically obscure.

Lurianic texts give a central role in the cosmic divine/demonic battle to the convergent processes of abjection and crystallization entailed in some versions of aggressive enclothing. They portray the consolidation (or more precisely, reconsolidation) of divine and demonic female *personae*, the Shekhinah and Lilith, as rival enclothings of the same vital core of identity. It is a zero-sum game: only one of these figures can complete herself by violently wresting away that core and enclothing it. Moreover, each figure must destroy the core of the other, reduce it to abject ruin, in order to take possession of those very ruins to construct herself.

Specifically, I refer here to the Lurianic portrayal of a combat in which one set of entities, the nine upper Sefirot of *Malkhut*, shift violently between the divine and demonic female *personae*. In the *Ets Ḥayim*, Vital describes the demonic theurgical consequences of Adam's sin as the enclothing of the nine upper Sefirot of the Shekhinah by Lilith. Although Lilith was originally composed of "one point," these "nine Sefirot have now become enclothed in her and have become in her ten complete Sefirot" [והיתה תחילה בבחי' נקודה ... ועתה אלו הט"ס נתלבשו בה ונעשין בה י"ס שלימות].[634] Tishby explains this process as the "transformation of the holy Sefirot themselves into the Sefirot of the female of the *kelipah*."[635] In Vital's portrayal, aggressive enclothing destroys the Self by expropriating its vital core and imposing upon it the identity of the antagonistic Other.

Vital cites the rabbinic dictum, "Tyre was only filled from the ruins of Jerusalem" [לא נתמלאה צור אלא מחרבנה של ירושלים],[636] to describe this construction of Lilith through her forcible enclothing of the nine upper Sefirot

634 *Ets Ḥayim*, 11, 57b. See Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra*, 89.

635 Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra*, 89.

636 E.g., *Ets Ḥayim*, 11, 57d, 48:3. The earliest source I have found for the dictum in this form is in Rashi, Genesis 25:23, commenting on Ezekiel 26:2. It appears to be a modification of two Talmudic dicta, one from *bMegilah*, 6a and one from *bPesaḥim*, 42b.

of the Shekhinah. He thereby identifies the ruins of "Jerusalem," a common kabbalistic name for the Shekhinah, with her nine upper Sefirot, "destroyed" by being taken from her and deported to the demonic. The "filling" of Lilith, in turn, consists of her appropriation of these "ruins," which then become the core of her own selfhood.

Destruction and construction, abjection and crystallization thus become identical processes in Vital's portrayal of aggressive enclothing. He portrays the repeated expropriations and re-expropriations of the nine Sefirot as their violent wresting away first by one "garment" (the "one point" of the Shekhinah or Lilith), then by its rival. The identification of these crystallized entities, the solid core of selfhood, with "ruins" completes the convergence of abjection and crystallization. Both the Shekhinah and Lilith construct their rival, ontologically incompatible selfhoods out of a crystallized core which is at the same time an abject ruin.

While the "Tyre/Jerusalem" dictum may suggest only the construction of the demonic through its enclothing of the ruins/crystallizations of the divine, the Lurianic "enclothing" is thoroughly reversible – and, indeed, the shifting vicissitudes of this battle constitute much of cosmic history. It is not surprising, therefore, that a late text written within the Lurianic framework, the *Sha'are Haleshem* of Shlomo Elyashiv (1841–1926), formulates a reversal of the rabbinic dictum: "for the construction of Jerusalem is from the destruction of Tyre" [כי בנין ירושלים הוא מחורבנה של צור].[637] Elyashiv associates the two cities, respectively, with the Garden of Eden (like Jerusalem, a common kabbalistic name for the Shekhinah) and Hell, with the former built from the ruins of the latter. Elyashiv thus completes the narrative by proclaiming that the divine is constructed from the ruins/crystallizations of the demonic, as well as the converse.

We can, moreover, read the employment of the Tyre/Jerusalem dictum by Vital and Elyashiv as elaborations of an allusion in the *Ra'ya Mehemena*. This passage portrays the conditions of the Shekhinah and Lilith as inversely related, "for if *this* is replete, *this* is desolate" [דאי מליאה זו חריבה זו][638] – an implicit reference to the Tyre/Jerusalem dictum. Indeed, the *Ra'ya Mehemena* makes this statement precisely in the context of comparing the clothing of the two female *personae*: on Friday night, the Shekhinah is adorned with crowns

637 *Sha'are Leshem*, 184b–185a. For Elyashiv, the construction of Hell precedes that of the Garden, just as the Zoharic "Kings of Edom" preceded the stable Sefirot. Although this is a somewhat different context from the shifting back-and-forth of the nine Sefirot between the divine and demonic females, it reflects a closely related kabbalistic theme.

638 *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 272b.

and fully constituted with her ten Sefirot, with her devotees dressed in beautiful garments, while Lilith is dressed in the black clothes of the widow, weeping alone in darkness. The banishment of Lilith to the darkness comports with her abject state after the Shekhinah's (momentary) triumph in the perennial battle. The degradation of Lilith's garments manifests the expropriation of her core by her divine rival, the depletion of her vital selfhood.

In sum: aggressive enclothing gradually becomes the crucial weapon of divine/demonic combat, the means by which each rival seeks to take possession of the vital core of identity – the core essential to the selfhood of both and yet which they cannot, or refuse to, share. The construction, the "filling," of one figure depletes the other, as the nine Sefirot ricochet from one realm to the other. These Sefirot are both disintegrated, abject ruins, and the crystallized essence of identity. The ruins/core are repeatedly, and simultaneously, destroyed and rebuilt throughout cosmic history. These cycles of mutual expropriations seem inevitably to yield rival *personae* who are increasingly indistinguishable from each other. Contrary to what one might have expected in accordance with every theological and even mythological principle, the divine and demonic personae are here distinguished only by virtue of their "garments," not at their core!

In retrospect, the theme of aggressive enclothing gradually developed in post-Zoharic texts seems tailor-made, as it were, for its later use in Sabbateanism. Sabbatai Tsevi's conversion to Islam was often described as putting on a "garment," that of Ishmael, specifically the Turkish turban.[639] Nathan of Gaza cites two post-Zoharic passages to explain the necessity of Sabbatai's apostasy and the contempt with which he was treated by most Jews as a result. One is a passage in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* about a person who is "good on the inside, but his garment is evil" [טב מלגו ולבושיה ביש],[640] in a context to which a messianic reference might be imputed.[641] In the same text, Nathan associates the apostasy with a passage in the *Ra'ya Mehemena* which portrays the Shekhinah "imprisoned" by Lilith, also described as a "grave."[642] Reading these two proof-texts together, Nathan associates the abject social and religious condition of Sabbatai after the apostasy both with his enclothing by the "evil garment," the turban, and his enclothing by Lilith as "grave" and "prison." The crystallized

639 On the "garment of Ishmael," see Nathan of Gaza, 'Igeret Natan Ha-Azati al Shabetai Tsevi ve-al hamarato', 244. On the turban, see, e.g., Nathan of Gaza, 'Letter to Shemu'el Primo', 270–271. See also the numerous documents cited in Wolfson, 'The Engenderment of Messianic Politics: Symbolic Significance of Sabbatai Sevi's Coronation', 203–258.

640 *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 93b.

641 'Igeret Natan Ha-Azati', 244. See also 'Letter to Shemu'el Primo', 270–271.

642 'Igeret' 243; *Ra'ya Mehemena*, at *Zohar* III, 282a.

persona of the post-apostasy Sabbatai, viewed by Nathan as fulfilling a holy mission in the realm of the Other Side, is nonetheless also abjectly degraded, a paradox whose necessity and meaning is illuminated by the dynamics of enclothing in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* and *Ra'ya Mehemna*.

Moreover, in further accordance with the convergence in aggressive enclothing between crystallization and abjection, the *Ra'ya Mehemna* passage portrays Lilith not only as a mighty, imprisoning "grave" but also as mere refuse, as "filthy dung" [אשפה מטונפת], composed of every manner of repulsive matter, including putrefying carcasses. This rotting mass serves as a kind of fertilizer for the "Garden," the Shekhinah, and facilitates its fruitfulness, even if only in the dimension of the "Tree of Good and Evil." The image of the abject-as-fertilizer provides an organic explanation for the link between abjection and crystallization – a link left completely unexplained in Zoharic texts. It also prefigures Elyashiv's portrayal of the construction of the Garden from the ruins of Hell. Most strikingly, the passage's images of the demonic starkly identify abjection and crystallization: Lilith as impregnable grave *and* miasmic filth, constraining prison *and* disgusting, if productive, fertilizer.

Two additional features of Nathan's citation of the *Ra'ya Mehemena* passage should be noted. First, the association of the covering over of the Shekhinah by Lilith with Sabbatai's donning of the turban links this image to the association of the turban with Lilith in the 13th century Moshe of Burgos text discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Second, the *Ra'ya Mehemna* passage, which sees Lilith as the Shekhinah's forcible enclosure, also stresses that these two *personae* are structurally homologous, each composed of seven levels. The passage, like the "avenging monster" passage from the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* discussed above, would thus also be portraying a process whereby the demonic that covers over the divine is identical to it, a convergence of concentricity and homology characteristic of aggressive enclothing. That the passage refers to Lilith by the name "Sabbatai" (also the Hebrew word for Saturn) reinforces this convergence at a linguistic level: Nathan's messiah would thereby be simultaneously identified with the divine Shekhinah and the demonic Lilith – a quintessential example of the hyperbolic ambivalence discussed in Chapter 2.

Sabbatean writings are famously replete with paradoxical tropes. Nathan's early post-apostasy writings describe Sabbatai's turban as both a "bad garment" and a "holy turban."[643] Another Sabbatean writer quotes Sabbatai Tsevi himself as declaring that the meaning of the turban is indeterminate, that both the turban and the traditional Jewish head-covering can signify either good or

643 'Igeret Natan Ha-Azati', 244; 'Letter to Shemu'el Primo', 270–271.

evil.[644] The reversals and convergences of identities that inhere in ethopoeia and aggressive enclothing here yield a world of thoroughly uncertain meanings and affiliations.

According to Moshe Ḥayim Luzzatto (1707–1746), it was precisely the cognitive and spiritual dangers inherent in the ontological enclothing of the divine by the demonic that led directly to Sabbatean error. In the following passage from his anti-Sabbatean tract, *Kin'at Hashem Tseva'ot*, Luzzatto elaborates:

> דע לך אחי, כי כאשר חטאו ישראל, גרמו לשכינה להיות מתלבשת בקליפות בעבורם ... והנה המקום הזה מקום סכנה הוא מאד, כי בו יכולה הס"א לאחוז העינים אשר לא נפקחו היטב, להחליף להם בין קדש לחול, ובין חול לקודש, ותראה להם המר למתוק, והמתוק למר, מקריבות הדברים. ועל זה המקום נאמר "וינס משה מפניו", כי הוא ענין המטה, המתהפך ממטה לנחש, ומנחש למטה,... כי המקומות בקדושה שמשם ניתן מקום לקליפות – הם מסוכנים מאד להסתכל בהם,.... ובאמת, זהו המקום שמשם יצאו וטעו הזונים האלה. כי הס"א מראה להם שקר כאמת, אשר מרוב התקרבה שם אי אפשר לראות ההבחנה היטב.[645]
>
> Know my brother, that when Israel sinned, they caused the Shekhinah to be enclothed in the *kelipot* because of them.... And this place is a place of great danger, because it is there that the Other Side can delude eyes that have not been thoroughly opened, by swapping between the holy and the profane, and between the profane and the holy, and it will show them the bitter as sweet and the sweet as bitter, due to the proximity of these things. About this place it is written, "And Moses fled from before it" [Exodus 4:3], for this is the matter of the staff, which changes from a staff to a snake, and from a snake to a staff.... For the places in the holy [dimension] from which room is given for the *kelipot* are very dangerous to contemplate.... And this is really the place from which these strayers [i.e., the Sabbateans] went forth and erred. For the Other Side shows them falsehood as truth, and due to its close proximity in that place, it is impossible to see clearly the distinction [between them].

As an illustration of this danger, Luzzatto depicts an instance of ethopoeia very similar to that cited by the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, though this time the speaking idol is not that of Nebuchadnezzar but of Jeroboam. In its Talmudic source,

644 Scholem, *Meḥkerei Shabta'ut*, 111.

645 Luzzatto, *Kin'at Hashem Tseva'ot*, 91–93.

Jeroboam engraves the divine name on the mouth of the idol, empowering it to speak.[646] Luzzatto comments:

> ועתה אודיעך בזה סוד גדול מאד מאד. כי ירבעם הלביש את הקדושה בס"א בעבו־
> דתו, וזה גרם אח"כ שהעגל היה אומר "אנכי ה' אלהיך"
>
> And now I will let you know a very, very great secret. For Jeroboam enclothed the holy [realm] in the Other Side through his [idol-]worship and this caused the calf[-idol] to say, "I am YHVH your Elohim."[647]

Luzzatto also declares that it was from this sort of dynamic that other arch-villains were able to derive their power, like Jesus and the "evil Armilus," in both of whom the Messiah-son-of-Joseph was enclothed.[648]

Moreover, drawing on the Lurianic portrayal of the construction of Lilith as a complete *persona* by means of enclothing the nine Sefirot expropriated from the Shekhinah, Luzzatto offers a brief, but vivid, fable.[649] Luzzatto's tale begins with a Lilith who has achieved completion through enclothing, empowered by human sin. It is notable that Luzzatto depicts Lilith enclothing the Shekhinah herself, not just the "nine Sefirot." Demonic creatures crowd around Lilith, baying for her capture, because they perceive that the Shekhinah is enclothed within her. The Shekhinah succeeds in escaping from total capture by these demonic forces only at the last moment, throwing off her demonic garment and taking flight.

Luzzatto's exposition immediately after this fable links it to the convergence of abjection and crystallization that is the theme of this section. He associates

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646 *bSotah,* 47a; *bSanhedrin*, 107b.

647 Luzzatto, *Kin'at Hashem Tzeva'ot*, 91–93.

648 *Kin'at Hashem*, 104.

649 *Ibid*., 96:

> כשגרמו העונות, ירדה השכינה ונתלבשה בלילית שפחה רעה. והשפחה הרעה הזאת, שהיתה נקודה אחת לבד, נתפשטה לעשר נקודות, ונקראת פרצוף. והנה כל מדרגות הקלי־
> פות, כיון שרואים השכינה שם מלובשת, הנה הם חושבים שח"ו יוכלו לשלוט עליה. ובאמת הם מתקבצים בשאון גדול על לילית זונה בעבור השכינה אשר שם. ואז ברגע אחד השכינה מסתלקת ובורחת משם, והם נשארים בטומאתם, ואינם שולטים כלל.
>
> As a result of sin, the Shekhinah descended and was enclothed in Lilith, the evil bondwoman. And this evil bondwoman, who had been only one point, expanded to ten points, and was called a *partsuf* [*persona*]. And all the ranks of the *kelipot*, when they see that the Shekhinah is enclothed there, think, heaven forbid!, that they can dominate her. In truth, they gather in a great tumult around Lilith the whore for the sake of the Shekhinah who is there. And then, in one moment, the Shekhinah gets out of there and escapes and they remain in their impurity and do not dominate at all.

his fable with the midrashic-style gloss found in the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar* about the biblical Esther, a figure he identifies with the Shekhinah.[650] These works declare that it was a demonic twin, and not Esther, who had sex with the Persian king, Ahasuerus. Luzzatto declares that this demoness was constructed from the "filth of Esther herself," from a "defect" in her that "required purification."[651] By declaring that the demoness was constructed from the "filth" of Esther, and associating this story with the construction of Lilith from the nine Sefirot of the Shekhinah, Luzzatto implicitly identifies the abject (the "refuse" of Esther) with the core of the subject (the nine Sefirot), the identification characteristic of aggressive enclothing. The ability of the demoness to pass herself off as Esther to Ahasuerus also suggests an act of skillful ethopoeia. I note, finally, that the Esther/demoness narrative is something of a twist on the "sisters" myth discussed above (and both may be somewhat mischievous re-tellings of the story of Rachel, Leah, and Jacob).[652]

These passages from Luzzatto bring together a variety of themes I have discussed in this section, not only the convergence of abjection and crystallization, but also both with splitting. On the one hand, the relationship between garments and that which they enclothe resembles splitting, with the garments both surrounding and doubling that which they enclothe; on the other hand, and ever-increasingly in the later texts, aggressive enclothing involves the casting of elements from one realm to another, with all the subject-disintegrating effects that are the hallmarks of abjection, as well as the subject-constituting effects that are the hallmarks of crystallization. Both the Esther/demoness myth and Luzzatto's own fable bring together these two.

The full unfolding of this dynamic required two steps beyond the Zoharic literature. First, the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* developed the notion of enclothing as capture of the divine by the demonic – or, conversely, as the hidden domination of the demonic by the divine. The second stage occurs in Lurianic kabbalah, in which one set of already-constituted elements, the nine upper Sefirot of *Malkhut*, are cast back and forth between the two realms – specifically between the Shekhinah and Lilith – through violent acts of expropriation of the Other that are simultaneously acts of the constitution of the Self.

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650 *Ra'ya Mehemena*, at *Zohar* III, 276a; *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 58a.

651 *Kin'at Hashem*, 96:

והנה השידה הזאת היתה מבחינת הזוהמה של אסתר עצמה...איזה פגם שצריך טהרה

652 On the Sabbatean use of Esther's complex identity in Jewish myth, see Elkayam, 'Masa Dumah: Esther Ha-Malkah ke-Av-Tipus Meshiḥi shel Ha-Zehut ha-Nezilah ba-Mitopoetika ha-Shabta'it'.

In the later texts, we thus see Self and Other constructed not through a two-stage process of abjection-and-crystallization, but rather through a convergence of the two processes: the simultaneous destruction/construction of filth/essence as it is cast back and forth between divine and demonic. The imagery of enclothing also facilitates reversibility, a permanent potential for oscillation between rival constructions of the two realms. The donning and doffing of garments, those seemingly inconsequential and easiest of actions, become transformed into a violent history of expropriations and re-expropriations – and the stakes are the very existence of divine and demonic selfhood.

It is significant that these developments occur after the original Zoharic literature. Aggressive enclothing emerges, by definition, after the initial abjection and crystallization of the two realms, for it is only then one can become enclothed in the other – even if that enclothing then becomes a renewed medium of abjection and crystallization. Although nothing, as far as I can tell, necessarily prevented the Zoharic writers from imagining these dynamics, it makes (mythological) sense that they emerge only in the later texts. Aggressive enclothing is thus a belated development both in the human history of kabbalah and in the mythical history of the cosmos.

This belated development, produced through a series of convergences of opposed processes and images, also hints at the ultimate convergence: that of catastrophe and redemption. On the one hand, aggressive enclothing becomes the key weapon in the fierce combat between divine and demonic subjects, in which the stakes are nothing less than life or death: the construction of the (divine or demonic) Self depends on the destruction of the (demonic or divine) Other. On the other hand, the core of both Self and Other, the "nine upper Sefirot," is identical. The characterization of a *persona* as divine or demonic depends only on the garment placed upon this core. The lethal stakes of the combat are due precisely to the extreme kinship shared by the mortal adversaries. Indeed, in Luzzatto's fable, in which it is the Shekhinah herself, rather than only the nine Sefirot, who is enclothed by Lilith, the difference between the divine and demonic *personae* becomes a superficial matter indeed, that of a thin mask consisting of a mere "one point."

As we have been tragically reminded over the past generation, civil wars are almost always the most brutal – precisely because they oppose the closest kin. Some of the most brutal of all have opposed groups defining their adversaries as radically Other on ethnic or linguistic grounds, but whose genealogies, cultures, and languages diverged only relatively recently from a common source – that is, when they have not been utterly or nearly indistinguishable. And yet, or precisely therefore, civil reconciliation, celebrating the common origins of erstwhile adversaries, promises the greatest redemption – even if

at the cost of the relinquishment of the aspiration for hermetically sealed, bounded identities. The texts discussed in this section portray the fragility, and superficiality, of those separate identities in the image of the "one point" that distinguishes divine and demonic, Self and Other. Indeed, all too often, only "one point" separates catastrophic war and redemptive reconciliation.

II The Abyss

> שבכל פעם שהקב"ה עושה נס גדול, בורר מסוד הטהירו הזה בירורין.... ועל התהום הזה עומדים סמאל ובת זוגו
>
> For each time that the blessed Holy One works a great miracle, he sifts siftings [clarifies clarifications/purifies purifications] from the mystery of this *tehiru* ... And on this abyss [*Tehom*] stand Sama'el and his female consort.
>
> NATHAN OF GAZA[653]

A world whose fate depends on the vicissitudes of the battles of aggressive enclothing is a thoroughly reified world, in which creativity has ceased and triumph is only achieved by the ricocheting back and forth of long-standing elements. As Luzzatto warns, a world in which the divine is doubled by the demonic, and in which the construction of each takes place through the capture of already constituted elements from the other, is a world in which familiar measures to defeat the demonic may no longer suffice.

Such a world is one where the production of dualism, to recall my discussion at the beginning of Chapter 3, can no longer achieve its goal. The phenomenon of aggressive enclothing thoroughly undermines the possibility of a clear separation between divine and demonic. The strategy of purification-through-abjection becomes meaningless if the Other Side builds itself precisely through capturing fully constituted structures of the divine, and if, conversely, the divine builds itself through re-capturing those structures. Short of the utopian abandonment of the quest for bounded identities, evoked at the end of the last section, a world pervaded by aggressive enclothing is a world of endless and barren conflict.

This dilemma demands a quest for a different path away from reification: rather than seeking to build the divine through the back-and-forth movement of already constituted elements, this alternative would aspire to re-build it by

653 Nathan of Gaza, 'Derush Ha-Taninim', 19.

means of new crystallizations, requiring a preliminary plunge back into the abyss. This path to mythic renewal depends on the identification of the locus of formlessness in such a world, either through identifying any remaining primordial, pre-crystallized regions or through the de-construction of crystallized forms back into the abyss. And yet, precisely thereby, the abyss is also the locus of the ultimate danger, especially to the Self, that of dissolution. This alternative to the infernal cycle of capture and re-capture of old, reified elements, the alternative of new crystallizations, indeed of unlocking new paths to creativity, an alternative which also poses the ultimate danger, is the theme of this section.

In the *Derush Ha-Taninim* [*Discourse on the Dragons*], the Sabbatean prophet Nathan of Gaza asks, "why has the abyss [*Tehom*, תהום] remained in this world [מדוע נשאר התהום בעולם הזה]?"[654] The question, at its simplest, concerns the persistence of the abyss, the *Tehom*, of the second verse of Genesis after it seemed to have been replaced by an ordered cosmos through the Creation story. Nathan's question, of course, does not refer to the literal persistence of the oceans after Creation, but to a locus of mythical formlessness.

Specifically, Nathan associates the Genesis abyss with the empty space that is the outcome of the Lurianic myth of the primordial contraction [*tsimtsum*] of the ultimate divine, the *En-Sof*. The empty space yielded by this contraction is an indispensable prerequisite for the Creation of a cosmos that could exist in relative autonomy from the divine. Creation occurs by means of the emanation of divine light into this empty space. Nathan sees the persistent abyss as that part of the empty space into which the divine light has not yet emanated. Nathan also refers to the empty space as the "*tehiru*," in a reversal of its Zoharic meaning as the highest level of the divine, closely associated with the *En-Sof* itself.[655]

Nathan also associates this region with the term "*golem*,"[656] used in medieval philosophical writings to refer to unformed matter,[657] as well as Zoharically associated with the *tehiru*.[658] These associations are consistent with Nathan's dictum that, "from this *tehiru*, all the worlds were emanated [מהטהירו הזה נאצלו כל העולמות]"[659] Taken together, this series of associations teaches that

654 'Derush Ha-Taninim,' 19.

655 See my discussion of this term in Chapter 3.

656 *Ibid*.

657 Nathan's identification of the *Tehom* with the golem is undoubtedly a distant progeny of Naḥmanides' identification of Tohu with "hylic matter" in his commentary to *Bereshit* 1:1.

658 *Zohar* 1, 15a. I note that these terms, particularly *tehiru*, have a very different sense in the Zoharic context.

659 'Derush Ha-Taninim', 18.

the abyss is indispensable to creativity after the initial Creation of the cosmos, just as it was prior to that Creation. Indeed, the abyss is the perennial site of true creativity.

Nathan further heightens the startling nature of that proposition by his association of the abyss with the Other Side. The *golem* is not only in need of form, but of the separation of its good from its bad elements, its "sifting/purifying/clarification" [*berur* בירור]. And Nathan explicitly associates the *golem* with the *kelipot*: "for all the *kelipot* are called *golem*, something which is not sifted/purified/clarified [כי כל הקליפות נקראות גולם דבר שאינו מבורר]."[660] The abyss is thus both the locus of the *kelipot* and also at least partially identified with them.[661]

Nathan's question – "why has the abyss remained in this world?" – thus concerns not only the persistence of a formless region of the cosmos after the Creation, but the very existence of the *kelipot*, the Other Side. Nathan's response to this question is quite different from the more theologically safe answers (the necessity of evil forces to punish the wicked) and goes beyond even the mythologically bold answers (the expulsion from the divine of primordial evil or proto-evil elements). Rather, he focuses on the intrinsic connection between creativity and the *kelipot*-suffused, formless abyss:

> הטעם הוא שבכל פעם שהקב"ה עושה נס גדול, בורר מסוד הטהירו הזה בירורין וגולם זה נתהוה ממנו יצירות שיוצר האל ית' ע"י נפלאותיו וזה סוד הכתוב קפאו תהומות בלב ים. גם מלך המשיח כבר בירר כמה פעמים ממנו.[662]

> The reason is that each time the blessed Holy One works a great miracle, he sifts siftings [clarifies clarifications/purifies purifications] from the mystery of this *tehiru*. And from this *golem* come into being creations that the blessed Name creates through his wonders. And this is the mystery of "the abysses were congealed in the heart of the sea" [Exodus 15:8]. Also the King Messiah has already sifted [clarified/purified] several times from it.

660 *Ibid.* 17.

661 This identification of the abyss and the *golem* with *kelipot* in need of *berur* seems like a distant progeny of the distinction made by the Neoplatonist Avraham bar Ḥiya between the two "parts" of hylic matter, the "pure and clean" part and the part containing "filth and dross." Avraham bar Ḥiya, *Hegyon Ha-Nefesh*, 2a: שני חלקי ההיולי יש ממנה זך ונקי ויש ממנה טינופת ושמרים.

662 'Derush Ha-Taninim', 19.

The abyss, the locus of the Other Side, thereby functions as a reservoir upon which the most creative and innovative subjects can draw to produce wondrous, even miraculous novelties. The two creative subjects Nathan mentions here are the blessed Holy One and Sabbatai Tsevi, the creative subjects *par excellence* for this prophet of Sabbateanism.

This deep link between the highest divine creativity and the lowest, demon-ridden depths is strikingly prefigured in a passage from the late midrash *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ca. 9th c.), though I have not found explicit reference to it in the relevant kabbalistic texts. Foreshadowing Nathan's interpretation of the abyss as both the remnant of formless, pre-cosmic being and the locus of the demonic, this text reads:

> רוח פנת הצפון ברא ולא גמרו אמר שכל מי שיאמר שהוא אלוה יבא ויגמור את הפנה הזאת שהנחתי וידעו הכל שהוא אלוה ושם הוא מדור למזיקין ולזוועות לרוחות ולשדים לברקים ולרעמים ומשם רעה יוצאת לעולם שנאמר (ירמיהו א) מצפון תפתח הרעה[663]

> The direction (literally "wind," *ruaḥ*) of the corner of the North: he created but did not finish it. For he said, "anyone who will say he is a deity, let him come and finish this corner which I have left over – and all will know he is a deity!" And there is the dwelling place for the destroyers, and the horrors, the spirits, the *shedim*, the lightnings, and the thunders. And from there evil goes forth to the world, as it is said, "Out of the north an evil shall break forth" (Jeremiah 1:14).

In stark mythological fashion, the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* passage does not explain from where the demonic spirits come to take up residence in the unfinished "North." Rather, it implies that their existence is due precisely to the unfinished quality of this corner of the cosmos. In the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, as much later in Nathan, associations between the unfinished quality of the cosmos and the demonic may be distantly related to the older midrash which portrays the demons as not fully finished creations, which I discussed in Chapter 3. In Kristeva's terms, the unfinished "North" with its not-fully-constituted demonic denizens is the realm of the abject, the inassimilable remainder after the constitution of bounded entities and *personae*.

Moreover, as in the Nathan passage, the distinguishing feature of the divine, the ultimate fully constituted subjectivity, is the ability to engage the abject in order to produce new creations. The challenge issued by God – that only

663 *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, 8b.

another deity could complete the unfinished North – is issued in this text in a sarcastic tone, with the presumed inability of anyone to meet that challenge serving as proof that there is no other god. Nonetheless, if we suppress the sarcastic tone, there is another possible reading of this challenge, which may make this passage a source of both the glories and terrors of kabbalistic experience.

Engaging with the demonic realm to perform creative *tikunim* is precisely the kind of bold theurgy that makes a kabbalist a partner with the divine – indeed, able to participate in the very construction of the divine *personae*. We can thus read the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* passage, no doubt against its intentions, as a precursor of these boldest claims of kabbalistic theurgy. Yet, the passage also contains the potential for the darker side of kabbalistic experience. It only takes a slight Zoharic gloss on the passage to infer that the one who is successfully able to create out of this unfinished corner without divine cooperation must be the diabolical deity, the *El Aḥer*, the "Other God." Nathan of Gaza makes this possibility explicit in his dictum, "and on this abyss stand Sama'el and his female consort."[664]

In between the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* and Nathan of Gaza lies the period of classical kabbalah, especially the Zoharic literature. The portrayal of creation as requiring engagement with the abyss after battle with a diabolical being is the subject of the lengthy Zoharic passage to which I referred in Chapter 2, the so-called *Treatise on the Dragons* [*Ma'amar Ha-Taninim*], whose exegesis forms the basis of Nathan's *Discourse on the Dragons*. The key Zoharic text is the following:

> בגין דהא תהומא לתתא לא הוה נהיר. מ"ט לא הוה נהיר בגין דהאי תנין הגדול הוה נשיב על תהומא ואחשיך ליה ... ורוחא אחרא דלעילא נשיב ובטש בההוא רוחא ושכיך ליה הה"ד ורוח אלהים מרחפת על פני המים, והיינו דתנינן דקב"ה בטש רוחא ברוחא וברא עלמא ויאמר אלהים יהי אור ויהי אור, נהיר נהירו דלעילא ובטש ע"ג רוחא דנשיב ואסתלק מעל תהומא ולא חפא ליה. כיון דתהומא אתנהיר ואיהו אסתלק כדין הוה נהירו[665]

> For the abyss [*Tehoma*] below did not illumine. Why did it not illumine? Because this Great Dragon was blowing upon the abyss, darkening it.... Another wind/spirit [*ruaḥ*], from above, blew, striking that wind/spirit,

664 This image, as well as that of the *tanin* who covers the *Tehom* in the Zohar, may have as its rabbinic source the divine killing of the "ruler of the sea" as a prerequisite to the creation of the world. *bBava Batra*, 74b.

665 *Zohar* II, 34b–35a.

> subduing it, as is written: "and the wind/spirit of Elohim hovering over the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2). This is as we have learned, that the blessed Holy One struck wind/spirit against wind/spirit and created the world. "Elohim said, Let there be light. And there was light" (Genesis 1:3): Light from above illumined, striking against the wind/spirit that blew, and he [the Dragon] departed from upon the abyss, and did not cover it. Once the abyss was illumined and he departed, there was illumination.

This text, indeed the entire extended passage, portrays the defeat of the abyss-blocking Dragon as the necessary prerequisite to the creative act of the third verse of Genesis ("let there be light"). The text proclaims that the illumination of which that verse speaks is the illumination of the abyss. Engagement with the abyss is thus key to the Creation of the cosmos. Nathan of Gaza, as mentioned above, will later identify this abyss-blocking Dragon with Sama'el and his consort.

Another Zoharic passage proclaiming that the full construction of the divine requires engagement with the abyss takes its imagery from the re-construction of Jerusalem, implicitly identified with the Shekhinah, at the time of the final redemption.

> זמין קודשא בריך הוא למבני יסודי ירושלם, מיסודין אחרנין דישלטון על כלא, ומאן אינון, ספירים, דכתיב (ישעיה נד יא) ויסדתיך בספירים, דאלין אינון יסודין וסמכין עלאין ותקיפין, דלית בהו חלישו כקדמאי, מאי טעמא, בגין דאבנין קדמאי מאינון יסודין יכילו שאר עמין למשלט עלייהו, מאי טעמא, בגין דלית בהו נהירו עלאה כדקא יאות, אבל אלין יהון נהירין מגו נהירו עלאה, ומשקען גו תהומי, דלא יכלין לשלטאה עלייהו, ואלין אינון ספירים דינהרון לעילא ותתא.[666]

> The blessed Holy One will one day build the foundations of Jerusalem out of other foundations that will rule over all. What are those? Sapphires, as is written: "I will … lay thy foundations with sapphires" (Isaiah 54:11), for these are supernal mighty foundations and pillars, who have no weakness like the first ones. Why? Because other nations could rule over the original stones of these foundations. Why? Because they did not have supernal illumination as is fitting. But these will illumine from within supernal illumination and plunge into the abysses [*Tehome*], so that they [presumably the nations] cannot dominate them [i.e., the sapphires]. These are sapphires that will illumine above and below.

666 *Zohar* II: 240a–b.

The strength of the renewed cosmic structure will lie in the fact that the new "supernal foundations and pillars" will "plunge into the abysses." It is only such a structure that is immune from domination by the forces of the Other Side, here figured as the "other nations." By contrast, the passage implies, the initial "pillars" did not engage with the abyss and therefore were vulnerable to demonic assault.

The figuration of these "pillars" as "sapphires" [*sapirim*, סַפִּירִים] highlights the crucial stakes in this passage, for "sapphires" is one of the terms Zoharic writers use to designate that which most other kabbalists call Sefirot (implicitly punning on the graphic and phonemic resemblance of the two terms). The passage is thus proclaiming that the divine realm itself, the holy Sefirot, can only be constituted through engagement with the abyss. And only thus is it safe from domination by the Other Side. Speculatively, perhaps against the grain, I add the following gloss: creative engagement with the abyss divests the Other Side of its adversarial alterity, a variant of a lesson we saw in the "clean hands Job" passage – one central, if often implicit, Zoharic moral (coexisting in the Zoharic literature with its opposite), embraced openly by Sabbatean and, in a different way, Ḥasidic writers.

The valence of the abyss in these two passages is not altogether clear. They both portray Creation (in the first passage), or the re-construction of the cosmic structure (in the second passage), as predicated on the illumination of the abyss. Both require the defeat of the forces of evil (the Dragon in the first passage, the "other nations" in the second) in order to accomplish this illumination. These passages, however, leave a good deal of ambiguity concerning the question of whether the abyss is itself a neutral, potentially good domain that needs to be linked to the divine light, or, alternatively, is an ally of the forces of evil which must be subordinated by that light. One may read the first passage as more in line with the former interpretation and the second with the latter, but the ambiguity remains. A more plausible view, confirmed by reading other passages, is that the Zoharic abyss is resistant to univocal interpretation, appearing in a number of divergent and sometimes indeterminate roles.

At times, particularly when it appears in the phrase "the crevice of the great abyss" [נוקבא דתהומא רבא], the abyss is clearly the dwelling-place of the demonic, the place from which evil forces emerge and to which they retreat when defeated.[667] Indeed, when the demonic forces retreat to the abyss, they may even be viewed as undergoing de-crystallization to abject formlessness. In this role, the abyss is not only the locus of the abject, it is the abject itself, the condition of demonic entities in their disintegrated state.

667 E.g., *Zohar* I, 48a.

On the other hand, at least one passage clearly associates the abyss with the Shekhinah. In this passage, the "six supernal days" [שיתא יומין עלאין] (evoking the six Sefirot of the blessed Holy One) bring the "waters of the streams" [מיא דנחלי] (evoking the divine vitality from the upper levels of the Sefirot, particularly *Binah*) into the "great abyss" [תהומא רבא] (which, following these associations, must be the Shekhinah).[668] In a Zoharic pun, the passage associates this conveyance of vitality by the divine male "six [שיתא, *shita*] days" to the divine female abyss with the rabbinic account of the conveyance of fluids to the abyss by the "pits" or "drains" [שיתין, *shitin*] below the altar in the Temple.[669]

Indeed, the association of the abyss that lies below the altar's drains with the drama of Creation is a theme central to several midrashic sources.[670] Such midrashim posit the restraint of the abyss – here clearly an overwhelming force of disintegration – as required either for the initial Creation of the cosmos or for its ongoing preservation.[671] Such motifs appear several times in Zoharic texts, at times with a very similar sense as in the earlier sources.[672] However, other Zoharic texts emphasize the creative transformation of the abyss, rather than its restraint. Some passages explicitly weave the midrashic motif of the destructively rising abyss into their portrayal of transformation, as in the following brief excerpt:

> לבתר תהומא רבא הוה סליק בחשוכא, וחשוכא חפי כלא, עד דנפק נהורא ובקע בחשוכא, ונפק ואתנהיר, דכתיב (איוב יב כג) מגלה עמוקות מני חשך ויוצא לאור צלמות.[673]
>
> Afterwards the great abyss arose in the darkness, and the darkness covered all, until light issued forth and pierced the darkness, and issued forth and shone, as it is written, "He uncovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death" (Job 12:22).

The excerpt's use of the verse from Job suggests, not the restraint of the abyss, but the emergence of forms from it. This passage anticipates Nathan of Gaza's image of the creation of wonders from the inchoate stuff of the abyss itself: "the mystery of 'the abysses were congealed' [קפאו תהומות]."[674]

668 *Zohar* I, 30a.
669 See, e.g., *bSukah* 49a.
670 See, e.g., *Midrash Tehilim*, 200b.
671 *bSukah* 53a–b; *ySanhedrin* 52b; *Midrash Shemu'el*, 41a.
672 E.g., *Zohar* II, 91b.
673 *Zohar* I, 30b.
674 Nathan of Gaza, 'Derush Ha-Taninim', 19.

A lengthy passage in Zohar *Noaḥ* provides the most elaborate portrayal of the transformation of the abyss.[675] In this passage, the operation of light on the abyss leads not only to the latter's illumination but to its becoming pervaded by complex structures facilitating the transmission of light and water, sources of divine vitality. The passage proliferates the lights as well as the "abysses" [תהומין] involved in this process. It begins with the action of seven lights on seven abysses as "each knocked on its own abyss" [כל חד בטש בתהומא דיליה][676] – perhaps evoking the crystallization of the seven lower Sefirot. The influence of the lights on the abysses leads to the construction of an elaborate system of "channels" [צינורין], "veins" [גידין], and "nets" [רשתין], overseen by two "thrones" [כורסוון], to conduct the various flows and interactions among light, darkness, and water. The passage proclaims the goal of this structuring effect of illumination at the outset: "and they blend as one, lights, darknesses, and waters, and they become lights whose darkness is not visible" [ואתערבן כחדא נהורין וחשו־כין ומיין ואתעבידו מנייהו נהורין דלא אתחזאן חשוכאן].[677] Formlessness becomes so completely permeated by structure until it is no longer perceptible as such.

While this passage devotes itself to a highly elaborate portrayal of the structuring, rather than the restraining, of the abyss, it still accords the abyss a rather unequal, passive role compared with the light. Another passage, which I call the "dance of Creation" passage, gives a very different portrayal. This passage portrays a "drop" from the abyss as one of two indispensable poles in the process of Creation. The other pole is a flame from the Dark Lamp, which emerges, as we learn at the beginning of Zohar *Bereshit*, from the *tehiru* – the latter, in Zoharic writing, a name for the highest level of the divine or proto-divine, associated with the Sefirah of *Keter* or its proto-form, or even the *En-Sof*. This passage is remarkable for its lyrical evocation of a veritable dance between the two poles, marked by ascents and descents, crossings and unifications:

> תא חזי כד סליק ברעותא דקב"ה למברי עלמא אפיק חד שלהובא דבוצינא דקרדי־נותא ונשף זיקא בזיקא, חשכא ואוקידת. ואפיק מגו סטרי תהומי חד טיף וחבר לון כחד וברא בהו עלמא.
>
> ההוא שלהובא סליק ואתעטרא בשמאלא, וההוא טיף סליק ואתעטר בימינא. סלקו חד בחד, אחלפו דוכתי, דא לסטרא דא ודא לסטרא דא, דנחית סליק, דסליק נחית, אתקטרו דא בדא. נפיק מבינייהו רוח שלים, כדין אינון תרין סטרין אתעבידו חד, ואתייהיב ביניהו ואתעטרו חד בחד. כדין שלם אשתכח לעילא ושלם לתתא[678]

675 *Zohar* I, 51b–52a.
676 *Zohar* I, 51b.
677 *Ibid.*
678 *Zohar* I, 86b–87a.

> Come and see: when it arose in the will of the blessed Holy One to create the world, he brought forth one flame from the Dark Lamp, and blew spark against spark. It darkened and flamed up. And, from the dimensions of the abysses, he brought forth one drop. And he joined them as one, and created the world through them. The flame ascended, and was crowned on the left; the drop ascended, crowned on the right. They arose, one in one; they exchanged places, this to this side, this to this side. That which descended ascended, that which ascended descended. They became linked, this to this. A perfect spirit issued forth between them. And then these two dimensions became one. And it was placed between them, and they were crowned, one with one. Then was found peace above, peace below.

The creation of the world proceeds from the dance between the "flame" and the "drop," the *tehiru* and the abyss, the highest and lowest cosmic levels. The dance of the two poles, entailing exchanges of places and reversals of roles, is evoked with erotic resonances and leads to the birth of a "perfect spirit" as the fruit of their union. The intimacy, exchanges, and reversals between these two poles sheds light on the otherwise puzzling phenomenon that the Zoharic *tehiru*, the highest level of the cosmos, could come eventually to signify, in the version of Lurianic kabbalah adapted by Nathan of Gaza, the lowest level of the cosmos, identified with the abyss.[679] It can also make sense of the fact that the term, "abysses," in some post-Zoharic kabbalistic texts, can signify the highest reaches of the divine, the Sefirot of *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*.[680]

Indeed, several Zoharic texts portray the two cosmic poles, the abyss and the *tehiru*, with quite similar imagery. Both are limitless regions about which little can be said beyond their limitlessness; both need to be limited to make possible a structured, particularized cosmos. I note the significance, in this context, of the portrayal by the "dance of Creation" passage of the "flame of the Dark Lamp" as that which engages the abyss – for it is this same Dark Lamp that, in the beginning of Zohar *Bereshit*, sets a limit on the *tehiru* to yield particularity, there in the form of determinate colors. I will return to the "dance" passage at the end of this chapter.

I now turn to portrayals of the threshold between the abyss and the cosmos. Like their rabbinic precursors, Zoharic texts portray this threshold as guarded by a hard slab, either stone or pottery, that controls access in either direction.

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679 On this transformation of the Zoharic *Tehom* in some strands of Lurianic kabbalah, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 29.

680 Cordovero, *Pardes*, 1, 15c; Horvitz, *Sefer Shefa Tal*, 48b.

Zoharic texts construct their accounts of this liminal slab by merging and adapting a number of distinct rabbinic narratives. As one would expect in light of the ambivalence of Zoharic and post-Zoharic portrayals of the abyss – ally and enemy of form-giving light, highest and lowest region of the cosmos – one finds the liminal slabs controlling access to it portrayed in both beneficent and maleficent imagery.

I briefly sketch three rabbinic precursors to the Zoharic portrayals. The first, of which several versions exist, is particularly important here for its combined evocation of both linguistic and ontological power.[681] It portrays King David's excavation of the Temple Mount, preparing the channels to serve as drainage for the altar. At a depth of 1500 cubits, he finds a slab of pottery. The slab speaks to him, declaring that it descended to that point, sealing up the abyss, as a result of an act of divine power, either the Sinai epiphany or the "splitting of the earth," the latter perhaps alluding to the Koraḥ cataclysm. Undeterred, driven on by an erotically charged hubris,[682] David removes the pottery and the abyss rises up and threatens to destroy the world. David inscribes the divine name on another slab of pottery and casts it into the abyss, thereby taming it and saving the world.

A second rabbinic narrative concerns the Foundation Stone [*even ha-shtiyah* אבן השתיה], a stone which God casts, or kicks, into the abyss to serve as the foundation of the world, also called the world's "navel [טבור]."[683] A third source is the Talmudic definition of the *Bohu* of the second verse of Genesis: "smooth (or slimy) stones, submerged in the abyss, from which water issues forth" [אבנים המפולמות המשוקעות בתהום שממנו יוצאין מים].[684] Note the divergent appraisals of the abyss in the three sources: in the first, as a mortal threat that needs to be coercively blocked; in the second, as more neutral and amenable to discipline; in the third, rather obscure, source, perhaps as subject to the influence of the flow from the "stones."

These three narratives reappear, variously intermingled and revised, in a number of Zoharic texts. One short passage in the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* on *Bereshit* restates all three in barely altered form without much attempt to

681 I am presenting in this paragraph a composite of three sources: *Midrash Shemu'el*, 41a; *bSukah*, 53a–b; *ySanhedrin*, 52b.

682 The *Midrash Shemu'el*, 41a, declares that David wanted to reach the "foundation of the Earth" [משתיתה של ארץ], associating it with a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi that refers to land that has never been worked as the "virgin of the Earth [בתולת הארץ]." *yNidah* 2b.

683 *Midrash Tehilim* 91.

684 *bḤagigah*, 12a.

synthesize them.[685] The more elaborate Zoharic passages, however, transform these rabbinic narratives, though in divergent, sometimes incompatible ways. Most significantly here, they often refuse to take for granted a static dichotomy between the formed and the formless, slab and abyss, but rather, set these poles in narrative motion in a variety of ways. First, they provide a genealogy for the slab, suggesting that it is a congealment of the abyss itself. Second, as in the reversible portrayals of abjection-and-crystallization analyzed in Chapter 3, they portray congealment, de-congealment, and re-congealment as recurrent processes. Third, they suggest that Creation requires engagement with the abyss. Finally, they all emphasize the overlap of linguistic and ontological processes, a theme already contained in the rabbinic sources, particularly in the King David narratives.

I begin with an account of which variants appear in the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* to Ruth (mostly in Hebrew) and in Zohar *Yitro* (in Aramaic). The *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* portrays the stone that disciplines the abyss as originating in the divine casting of snow into the waters – an image whose source, as I discussed in Chapter 3, is the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*. This act freezes one region of the abyss, yielding a stone "plunged in the center of the abyss" [אבן אחת משוקעת באמצא התהום] that rises up to become the "point of the world" [נקודת העולם].[686] Another sage picks up the narrative, declaring that when the earth began to congeal from the freezing of the waters, the waters rose up and again covered it, and were only pacified when God took a "*tseror*" [צרור][687] of pottery, inscribed his "name of 72 names" [שמו של ע"ב שמות] upon it, and cast it into the waters.[688]

The Zohar *Yitro* version picks up the story at this point. Like the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam*, it portrays the *tseror* as highly susceptible to the ontological effect of language. This susceptibility particularly concerns oaths, performative linguistic acts, words by which language binds being. When a human being makes an oath, the *tseror* "ascends and receives that oath" [ההוא צרורא סלקא ומקבלא ההוא אומאה]. If it is a true oath, the power of the *tseror* to "prevail on the abyss" is reinforced and the world's existence is preserved [ואתקיים על תהומא, ועלמא אתקיים]. If, however, the *tseror* greets a false oath, it undergoes a simultaneously linguistic and ontological process of disintegration:

685 *Zohar Ḥadash*, 2d.

686 *Zohar Ḥadash*, 76a.

687 צרור. The semantic range of this word in rabbinic literature includes knot, bundle, pebble, stone, and a piece of earthenware. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1300.

688 *Zohar Ḥadash*, 76b.

ובשעתא דאומו בני נשא אומאה דשקרא, ההוא צרורא סלקא לקבלא לה ואיהי דשקרא, כדין ההוא צרורא דהוה סליק תב לאחורא, ומייא אזלין ושאטן, ואתוון דההוא צרורא פרחן גו תהומי ואתבדרן, ובעאן מיא לסלקא לחפייא עלמא, ולאהדרא כמלקדמין [689]

> At the moment when human beings swear an oath of falsehood, that *tseror* rises to receive it – and it is of falsehood. Then that *tseror*, which had arisen, retreats backwards, and the waters start surging, and the letters of that *tseror* fly into the abysses and scatter. And the waters seek to rise up to cover the world and to return it to its primordial state.

Upon seeing the false oath, the *tseror* falls backward, apparently horrified, and is swept away by the steadily rising waters. Moreover, it does not merely retreat, but its very identity dissolves, as it loses linguistic capacity and thus ontological power: its "letters," the center of its identity, "fly into the abysses and scatter." This dissolution of identity, triggered by an encounter with a linguistic perversion, a false oath in the name of God, is a paradigmatic experience of abjection, as Kristeva teaches us. The *tseror*'s experience of abjection is both linguistic and ontological: with the dissolution of its language, it decrystallizes to become part of the abyss itself.

Salvation from this danger can only proceed from a new crystallization of the *tseror*, again portrayed in simultaneously linguistic and material terms:

... עד דזמין קודשא בריך הוא לחד ממנא יעזריאל, די ממנא על שבעין מפתחן ברזא דשמא קדישא, ועאל לגביה ההוא צרורא, וחקיק ביה אתוון כמלקדמין, וכדין אתקיים עלמא, ואתהדרו מייא לדוכתייהו[690]

> ... until the blessed Holy One summons one officer, *Ya'azri'el,* who is appointed over seventy keys in the mystery of the holy name. And he enters into that *tseror*, and engraves on it the letters as before. And then the world endures. And the waters return to their place.

The remedy for the dissolution of the *tseror* is the reconsolidation of its interiority through the reconstitution of its language. God calls upon a linguistic official, he who holds the keys to the divine name, to "enter" into the *tseror*, and to re-engrave "letters" within it. This linguistic reconstruction of identity has ontological consequences: "and then the world endures." The reconstruction

689 *Zohar* II, 91b.
690 *Ibid.*

of the *tseror* after its disintegration in the abyss is strongly reminiscent of the reconstruction of the "sapphires" through their "plunging" into the abyss in the passage discussed above. It also suggests that the *tseror*, like the "stone" it succeeds in the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam*, is a congealment of the abyss – for since its material and linguistic substance dissolves into the abyss, its reconstruction requires a re-assemblage and re-congealment from there.

A very different, indeed inverse, appraisal of the abyss and the slab appears in two closely related Zoharic texts, both printed in the pericope *Va-Yetse*, though the second version is in the *Sitre Torah* section.[691] In this configuration, the limitless flow of waters is a *beneficent* outpouring of vitality from the uppermost reaches of the divine, perhaps originating from something like the *tehiru*, the supernal twin of the abyss. Consequently, in direct contrast to the passages discussed above, the slab here poses a threat to cosmic life, rather than its preservation. The passage presents this configuration as a reading of the biblical story of Jacob's arrival in Ḥaran. Jacob finds the shepherds awaiting the arrival of their fellows to "roll the stone from the well's mouth" in order to "water the sheep" (Genesis 29:8). In the Zoharic reading, the "stone" had interrupted the flow of the divine vitality (the "waters"), to those heavenly and earthly creatures (the "sheep") sustained by the cosmic well.

The first Zoharic version tells us that the stone is a product of the sinister cosmic "North" that causes the waters to "congeal" [למקרש].[692] The stone is also described as "the strong form of hard judgment, that which freezes and congeals waters" [תקיפו דדינא קשיא ההוא דגליד וקריש מימין].[693] The "North" that is identified with "hard judgment" is here either a hypertrophied aspect of *Gevurah* [Might] which is very close to the demonic or is actually demonic. This stone can only be dissolved when the "South," the locus of *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness], "strengthens" and the cosmic flow resumes – "like a river when its waters are great" [כהאי נהרא כד מימוי סגיאין], which "do not freeze and congeal" [ולא גלידין וקרשי], unlike those of "a river whose waters are lesser" [כנהרא דמימוי זעירין].

The *Sitre Torah* version brings out the demonic dimension more clearly. It refers to the stone as that "upon which the inhabitants of the world fail, 'a stone of stumbling' that always stands on the mouth of the well" [Isaiah 8:14]" [אבן דמינה כשלי בני עלמא אבן נגף דקיימא תדיר על פי הבאר].[694] Even more explicitly than the first version, it equates Jacob's removal of the stone from the well

691 *Zohar* I, 152a (*Guf Ha-Zohar* version); I, 151b–152a (*Sitre Torah* version).

692 *Zohar* I, 152a.

693 *Ibid.*

694 *Ibid.*,151b (*Sitre Torah*).

with triumph over the demonic, the "confusion of Satan" [ערבוביא דשטן].[695] The positioning of Satan on the well recalls the positioning of the Dragon on the abyss in the Zoharic "Treatise on the Dragons," as well as the positioning of Sama'el on the abyss in Nathan of Gaza.

It is significant, however, that the word used here for the personification of the demonic, Satan, is not the usual name for the Devil in the Zoharic literature, that honor being reserved for Sama'el. The name Satan evokes the pre-kabbalistic notion of a figure who serves as a prosecutor in the heavenly court: in other words, a figure whose main activity is linguistic. The stone, like the *tseror* but with an inverse valence, is thus both a material object, here a material impediment to the flow of vitality, and also a personified linguistic agency, a prosecutorial figure standing "on his word to demand judgment on the whole world, in order that nourishment and good not descend upon the world" [על מימריה למתבע דינא דכל עלמא, דלא יחות מזונא וטב לעלמא].[696]

The Zoharic texts discussed here thus give us two diametrically opposed slabs, each set up as barriers to unlimited flows of metaphysical water. Both are congealments of flows that are themselves split between good and bad forms, the sources, respectively, of the supreme cosmic danger and the supreme cosmic blessing. Another passage concisely expresses this doubling of the slab by means of rhetorical parallelism, alluding to the Ecclesiastes phrase "this confronted with this": "*this* stone is called 'stone of stumbling, rock of offense, and *this* stone is called 'a tried stone, a precious cornerstone' (Isaiah 29:16), rock of Israel, and all stands this corresponding to this" [האי אקרי אבן נגף צור מכשול, והאי אקרי (שם כח טז) אבן בחן פנת יקרת, צור ישראל, וכלא קיימא דא לקבל דא.][697]

Each of these stones is portrayed as the congealment of fluid forces, with the valence of the congealment in each case the opposite of the other. In the context of the baleful stone, one passage makes explicit the notion I broached above that the waters of divine vitality themselves freeze, becoming their own blockage: "When the north wind blows, the waters freeze and do not flow out, and do not irrigate, because judgment is hovering, and the cold of the north freezes the water" [בשעתא דרוח צפון נשיב, מייא גלידין ולא נגדין לבר, ולא אתשקיין,

695 *Ibid*., 152a (*Sitre Torah*).

696 *Ibid*., 151b (*Sitre Torah*). To be sure, both versions also state that the stone is returned to the well after the "watering," because the world is in need of judgment. *Ibid*., 152a. The ambiguity of the line between the fierce forms of *Gevurah* and the demonic here and elsewhere, and the explicit association of the stone with the demonic in the *Sitre Torah* version, is one more reflection of the ambivalence towards the demonic that is one of my major themes.

697 *Zohar* II, 249b. The "precious corner stone" is explicitly associated elsewhere with the *even ha-shtiyah*. *Zohar* I, 231a–b.

בגין דדינא תליא, וקרירו דצפון גליד מיא].[698] For its part, the beneficent stone may be a congealment of the abyss, as in the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam*, or may congeal from a variety of formless sources: "this stone is created from fire and from wind and from water, and congeals from all of them, and is made into one stone and stands upon the abysses" [האי אבן אתברי מאשא ומרוחא וממיא, ואתגליד מכלהו ואתעביד אבנא חדא, וקיימא על תהומי].[699]

In light of these features of the two "stones," particularly their doubling of each other and their formation as a congealment of fluid forces, I return to the suggestion I proffered at the beginning of this section: in a reified world, the secret to renewed creativity may lie in dissolution into the abyss followed by a new crystallization therefrom. Indeed, the continuation of the passage cited above about the "freezing" of the divine waters by the "north wind" makes explicit this path to unlocking creativity.

> וכד אתער רוח דרום, מתחממי מיא ואתעבר גלידו דלהון ונגדין, כדין אתשקיין כלא, בגין דחמימו דדרום שראן מיא וכלא מתחממי [700]
>
> And when the wind of South is aroused, the waters warm up and their ice passes away, and they flow. Then all is watered – because the heat of the South releases the waters and all becomes heated.

The de-crystallization of the frozen waters is accomplished by the "wind of the South," the force of *Ḥesed* [Lovingkindness], which releases the waters and bestows vitality on the cosmos. The text overtly gives this "warming" a sexual sense, a "heat" that leads to procreation, by associating it with the biblical tale of the propagation of Jacob's flocks.[701] The very substance that posed a barrier to life, the waters in their frozen state, thus becomes the source of the renewed creation of life upon its de-crystallization.

An important, though obscure, passage in Zohar *Bereshit* brings together many of the themes broached in this section, a passage whose very difficulties shed light on the preceding discussion.[702] This passage is yet another reading of the first three verses of Genesis. It is implicitly a dark tale of violence and resistance, in many ways the very opposite of the gracefully role-reversing and place-shifting "dance of Creation" discussed above. Like the other passages

698 *Zohar* I, 161b.
699 *Zohar* I, 231a.
700 *Zohar* I, 161b.
701 Genesis 30, 37–41.
702 *Zohar* I, 30a–b.

discussed in this section, this text, which may be called the "entry under the crevices" passage, bears clear traces of the rabbinic narratives sketched above, particularly the King David narratives.

The passage portrays the initial creation of the world as effected by the letters of a signet, perhaps impressing themselves on something like hylic matter. After this initial creative act (presumably an allusion to the first verse of Genesis), they penetrate deep into the earth, causing the abyss to rise up and darken the world (presumably an allusion to the second verse). We then arrive at the passage's version of the third verse, the disciplining of the abyss by light, an excerpt I quoted above. The English version of the excerpts that follow consists of a slightly modified rendition of the Matt translation, with two alternative translations of the fourth and fifth sentences italicized in brackets.

> סלקין אתוון לעילא ונחתין לתתא ...טופסרא דקילטא בהני שכיחי בחותמא דגושפ־
> נקא, עאלו ונפקו את ואת ואתברי עלמא, עאלו גו חותמא ואצטרפו ואתקיים עלמא
> בקולפוי דחויא רברבא מחו ועאלו תחות נוקבי דעפרא אלף וחמש מאה אמין לבתר
> תהומא רבא הוה סליק בחשוכא וחשוכא חפי כלא עד דנפק נהורא ובקע בחשוכא
> ונפק ואתנהיר דכתיב (איוב י"ב) מגלה עמוקות מני חשך ויוצא לאור צלמות[703]

> Letters ascend and descend ... Scribal patterns of impress appear here by the seal of the signet. They entered and emerged, letter by letter, and the world was created. They entered the seal, permutated, and the world endured by the cudgels of the mighty Serpent. They struck and entered 1500 cubits underneath the crevices of dust. [*Alternative translations of the previous two sentences: 1*) *"They entered the seal, permutated, and the world endured. They struck against the cudgels of the mighty Serpent, and entered 1500 cubits underneath the crevices of dust."; 2*) *"They entered the seal, permutated, and the world endured. With the cudgels of the mighty serpent, they struck and entered 1500 cubits underneath the crevices of dust."*] Then the immense abyss [*Tehoma*] ascended in darkness, and darkness covered all, until the light issued forth and pierced the darkness, and illuminated, as is written: "He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death." (Job 12:22).[704]

703 *Zohar* I, 30a–b.

704 Matt Translation, I, 182–183. The first alternative translation would line up this passage with the knocking away of the dragon from the *Tehom* in the "Ma'amar Ha-Taninim" and of Satan from the "well" in the *Va-Yetse* passages. I have borrowed the parsing of the two sentences, though not the details of the translation, from Soncino I, 116. The second alternative translation reads בקולפוי as "with the cudgels," and links it to the verb מחו, "they

The passage consists of a complex interweaving of the biblical Creation narrative, the rabbinic David/abyss tales, and Zoharic myths of divine/demonic relations. Through the inscription of letters, the signet accomplishes a seemingly complete act of Creation: "and the world was created." Yet, like the rabbinic David, the letters are driven on to "enter 1500 cubits under the crevices," an act that leads to "darkness covering all," endangering that world. The text does not clearly explain this "entry," although it associates it in some way with the demonic, the "mighty Serpent." The alternative translations I have given of two of the sentences in this excerpt express some possible interpretations of the role of the demonic in this "entry."

In the Matt translation, the world as initially created "endures" by "the cudgels of the mighty Serpent." In this reading, the "entry under the crevices" appears to be necessary, despite the grave risks it entails, because the vitality of the primordial cosmos was blocked by its premature reification in the form of the "mighty Serpent." The Serpent's presence would thus resemble the blockage of the abyss by the Dragon in the "Treatise on the Dragons" and its blockage by Sama'el and his consort in Nathan of Gaza, as well as the blockage of the "well" by "Satan" in the *Va-Yetse* passage. The first alternative translation I have given above – in which the letters strike against the Serpent in order to gain access to the abyss – directly aligns this breaking of the demonic blockage with those other passages. In either case, the signet must burrow down to the abyss, even at the risk of the darkening/flooding of the world. Only then can the light split the darkness, illuminate it, and prepare the way for a world of multiple forms, the "deep things brought out of the darkness." The need to break the blockage of the abyss is thus something of a composite of the two options concerning the flow of water discussed above: the block must be done away with, but the waters thereby released are far from unequivocally beneficent. Rather, they are quintessentially ambivalent: both mortally dangerous *and* indispensable for the further unfolding of the creative process.

A final interpretation of this passage presents an even more radical possibility. The parsing of the text in the second alternative translation given above associates the "cudgels of the might Serpent" not with the place where the "world endured" but rather with the "entry under the crevices." Specifically, it identifies these demonic "cudgels" as the means by which the letters accomplish their "entry." This interpretation, which makes the demonic a necessary

struck." I base this reading on Talmudic usages that link this verb to this noun in at least three places. See *bBerakhot* 58a; *bKetuvot* 65a; *bSotah* 13a.

partner in the process of Creation, proves particularly unsettling when considered in relation to the rabbinic David narrative.

David's insistence on digging below the divinely implanted pottery, an act of hubris to which the *Midrash Tehilim* implicitly attributes a desire for sexual conquest, seems almost mad, "demonic" in the colloquial sense of the word. The noun *kulfa*, קולפא, the instrument of the "entry under the crevices," which in its plural genitive is translated here as "cudgels of the Serpent," has an explicitly phallic meaning in other Zoharic texts, indeed in a context of sexual impropriety.[705] The term "crevices," moreover, is here denoted by the genitive of the term נוקבא, *nukva*, which can also simply mean a female being. In this reading, the "entry under the crevices" is a demonically and erotically charged act, which threatens to destroy the cosmos. This demonic act is, nonetheless, indispensable for the unfolding of the creative process. Read in this way, the passage becomes extremely disturbing, a tale of violence and counter-violence, with the force of the phallic "scribal impress" resisted by the implicitly female "crevices." The signet then enlists the demonic "cudgels" to reach the "abyss," whose counter-force threatens to overturn the entire Creation. It is only by a renewed "splitting" by the "light" that the abyss is finally disciplined, and brings forth the forms hidden within it.

This "entry under the crevices" passage may be read, as I hinted above, as the opposite of the "dance of Creation" passage. In the latter, the interaction between the fluid abyss and the phallic Dark Lamp takes the form of a dance between their avatars, the "drop" and the "flame." The key to the difference between the two passages lies in the reified oppositions that structure the "entry under the crevices" passage and the rhythmic exchanges of roles and places in the "dance of Creation" passage. The former lacks any narrative exploration of the opposition between the "scribal impress" and "cudgels of the Serpent," on the one hand, and the "crevices" and "abyss," on the other, portraying their relationship purely as one of violence; the latter, by contrast, consists entirely of kaleidoscopic movements between the "drop" and the "flame." The rhetorical techniques of the "dance of Creation" passage emphasizes these movements, with their continual reversals, and eventually ceases to refer to its two protagonists by name, employing only the identical pronoun "this" to refer to both:

> The flame ascended, and was crowned on the left; the drop ascended, crowned on the right. They arose, one in one; they exchanged places, this

705 *Zohar* I, 57b.

> to this side, this to this side. That which descended ascended, that which ascended descended. They became linked, this to this.

Nor does the "entry under the crevices" passage provide an etiological backstory to the opposition, as portrayed, for example, in such otherwise opposed narratives as the "*tseror*" and "stone on the well" passages. In such passages, the Zoharic texts narratively teach the common origin of abyss and slab, and attributes their opposition to some cosmic misfortune.

I conclude this section, then, as I concluded the first section of this Chapter, with the redemptive potential of a condition of extreme danger, here that of the dissolution of meaning and being by the abyss. The danger proves not only to lie in victory *by* the abyss, but, especially to a contemporary reader, in violent victory *over* it. The redemptive potential of many of the Zoharic etiological myths lies in their portrayals of the inextricability of the abyss and its liminal sentry, in whatever allocation they find themselves between the two poles of the divine/demonic divide.

This inextricability takes a variety of forms. Most obviously, passages portray this inextricability differently in accordance with their divergent appraisals of the abyss and the slab. But it is also portrayed differently in passages concerned with the initial Creation and in those concerned with the resumption of creativity in a reified world. Moreover, passages that differ in their emphasis on the genealogical kinship of the slab and the abyss portray their inextricability differently. Finally, the "entry under the crevices" and "dance of Creation" passages show that, while creativity requires engagement with the abyss, this engagement can take radically different forms, from the violent to the erotic and even the balletic.

These variants of the myth of the abyss-and-the-slab bear a number of different implications for the broader theme with which I opened this chapter, the problem of a reified world. For example, we can see them as corresponding to different states of such a world. A world whose forms are thoroughly ossified might require vigorous force to open up the channels of creativity. Such force can be described as revolutionary, whether directed at political structures, artistic conventions, or ossified religious practices that have lost touch with their spiritual wellsprings: a King David refusing the blockage of the abyss, a Picasso overturning Western art, an Emma Goldman challenging all manner of political and cultural authority. At other historical moments or cosmic conditions, however, an emphasis on the deep kinship of the abyssal wellsprings of creativity and the shaping, limiting agency that gives them form might be more appropriate. Force gives way to understanding, aggression by eros, the "entry under the crevices" by the "dance of Creation." The Self sees

the infinite Other not as a monster to be conquered but as sharing its own primordial source, encountering it not as a warrior but as a dancer. When read together with the passages stressing genealogical kinship, a text like the "dance of Creation" becomes a utopian portrayal of a fluid, yet fervent, eros in which diverse beings intermingle and exchange identities, a dance whose fruit is a "perfect spirit," producing "peace above, and peace below."

Conclusion: the Divine/Dunghill, or, the Self Is the Other

In a world, *our world*, in which intransigent positions and putatively impermeable identities ever-increasingly frame political, cultural, and existential dilemmas, the rupture between Self and Other can seem like the primordial crisis of the human condition. When we read mythical narratives, even those drawn from widely divergent times and places, we often cannot help but find elaborations of the pain and confusion, the hopes and longings, of the crisis in whose midst we live. This book can be read as a demonstration of the distinctive, powerful, and profound ways Zoharic mythology expresses this primordial crisis, the welter of incompatible passions and desires it provokes: love and hate, tenderness and violence, longing for healing and zeal for triumph, despair in the face of irremediable division and quests for redemptive potential in secret complicities and palpable, yet unrecognized, affinities. Zoharic mythology's twists and turns, its ambivalences and contradictions, its extravagant proliferation of heterogeneous images and juxtaposition of incompatible notions: all seem symptomatic of the irreducibility of the rupture between Self and Other and the primal scream of protest against it, the impossibility of writing from an Archimedean point outside the primordial crisis and the complicity of language itself with the broken world.

And yet: this book has also been informed throughout by the contention that one cannot reduce Zoharic mythology (indeed, any mythology) to a mere expression of something that pre-exists it. Rather, I have shown how Zoharic writing *constructs* the rupture between Self and Other in distinctive ways, through polysemous rhetorical techniques and paradoxical ontologies. Schemes and tropes, parallel structures and reversible transitions, yielding ontologies of concentricity and homology, an absolutely split cosmos and one perpetually set in motion by irresistible attractions and repulsions: all of these, and, above all, their startling juxtapositions and baffling textual inter-weavings, construct the Zoharic world. And perhaps the most distinctive paradox of all: the very techniques that construct that world continually destabilize its structures, as the absolutely divided Self and Other become indistinguishable, long for each other, traverse the boundaries dividing them, sustain each other even while maintaining their enmity. Zoharic mythology produces, and unsettles, distinctive experiences of Self and Other and cannot be reduced to their expression or symptom. Rather than merely expressing a primordial crisis which exists independently of it, Zoharic textuality may be called a *rhetoric*

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of crisis that yields an *ontology of crisis*, provided we understand "crisis" in all of its senses: an emergency situation, an urgent turning-point, fraught with intense danger and possibility, demanding a fateful decision upon which everything depends and yet for which there are no guarantees.

Understanding Zoharic textuality as constructive does not entail attributing to it demiurgic mastery. Zoharic writing does not dispassionately diagnose the love and hate, mercy and severity, attraction and repulsion that pervade the broken world. On the contrary, it takes an active part in them, sometimes even losing itself in them. It does not philosophically decree, with Maimonidean or Kantian fastidiousness, the limits of human language to express the ultimate reality. On the contrary, it works from within language to evoke that which linguistic convention conceals, inventing endless rhetorical stratagems to evoke that which makes language possible and which, in turn, is generated, as well as undermined, by those stratagems. Its triumphs and failures in this quest cannot be measured by *a priori* criteria of philosophical regulation but by the performative effectivity of a literary artifact.

The central theme of this book – divine/demonic relations – underscores Zoharic writing's lack of an Archimidean point outside of the crisis it portrays and in which it participates. If even the divine is beset by the stormy dialectics of Self and Other, where could one position oneself to write outside of them? As we have seen, the Dark Lamp itself, the primordial cosmic stylus, is an instrument set into motion before its wielder comes into being, the divine subject who will only take form as a result of the actions of its supposed instrument. If even the divine Writer only comes into being within a writing already underway, indeed generated by that writing, surely no human author could pretend to stand outside the text, dominating it from a place not subject to its dynamics!

The lack of an Archimidean standpoint thoroughly pervades Zoharic portrayals of the divided and dynamic cosmos, portrayals always composed within its divisions and dynamics, always *in medias res*. The situatedness of Zoharic writing within the ruptures it constructs and longs to overcome drives its poetic features, its stylistic audacities, its defiance of linguistic propriety, its drive to articulate a crisis in which language itself is a protagonist.

The notion of thorough enmeshment, which describes Zoharic rhetoric's relationship to the broken world, also applies to the ontology it generates. The numerous Zoharic reinterpretations of the first three verses of Genesis both symbolize and explicate this ontological enmeshment. Conventional readings of the first chapter of the Bible find in it a linear narrative of divine omnipotence, particularly of divine speech. If, however, language is thoroughly enmeshed in the ruptures between Self and Other, every construction

by the speaking Self also provokes the destabilization of that construction by the Other. The troubling shadow over divine acts of creation-through-speech, cast by the second verse's divine brooding on the abyss, becomes central to the Zoharic re-readings.

Indeed, from a Zoharic perspective, as we saw in Chapter 3, it is highly significant that God does not speak in Genesis until the third verse ("And Elohim said, 'Let there be light' …). In the Zoharic reading, the second half of the second verse ("and darkness was upon the face of the abyss …") silently alludes to the primordial battle between two of the key mythical antagonists, the blessed Holy One and the Great Dragon. Moreover, even this battle is belated, only made possible by the abjection-and-crystallization of the primordial "slime" to which the first two words of the verse ("And the Earth was …") allude. And even then, it is only after the blessed Holy One has turned the tide in his epic battle with the Great Dragon that the fully constituted, speaking divine Self comes on the scene.

Furthermore, as we saw, when God finally does speak, he cannot help reproducing the cosmic rupture. In this Zoharic reading, the third verse's primordial speech-act – "*Yehi Or Va Yehi Or*" ("Let there be light, and, there was light") – both establishes and undermines the relationship between language and being, for the second "light" is actually the darkness that will generate the Devil. The very identity of the repeated words "light" constructs their opposition; the rhetorical devices of antithetical homonymy and repetitive anaphora construct the ontological dichotomy (Chapter 2). The speaking divine Self who emerged through defeat of the demonic Other is undermined by the very split in language that that defeat constructed. The divine Self is fated to participate in, indeed to reproduce through its own speech, the perennial replication of its rupture with the demonic Other – despite, and because of, their primordial kinship and their simultaneous birth in the crisis that will divide them, and link them, forever.

If the possibility *of* language is inextricably bound up with such struggles, any attempt to portray them *in* language necessarily puts one in a paradoxical, if not impossible, position. The stylistic distinctiveness of Zoharic writing – the heterogeneous imagery that defies phenomenal coherence, the trance-like schemes that shatter hermeneutic decoding – can be traced to this paradoxical condition. These features, straining at linguistic norms, are not simply due to some general ineffability of the deepest secrets, but rather, to the perennial obstacles posed by the Other to the articulation of a stable meaning by a coherent subject. Zoharic texts portray these obstacles, as I have shown, in terms of specific hazards, all of which have their rhetorical and ontological dimensions, including doubling, indeterminacy, deception, and dissolution. But they also

insist that engagement with the demonic is indispensable for linguistic and ontological creativity.

I have shown how the diversity of Zoharic constructions, and destabilizations, of Self and Other are all inseparable from the rhetorical techniques that bring them forth. Studying these techniques reveals the manifold forms of the inextricability of Self and Other, particularly as embodied in two key and destabilizing paradoxes. In relation to the initial construction of the subject, abjection of the Other is both the precondition of the Self *and* poses an everlasting threat of its dissolution; in relation to the already-constituted subject, the encounter with the Other confronts the Self with its terrifying *and* fascinating double. The tropes of limitation and representation, the scheme of anaphora, and the figure of antithetical homonymy are some of the key vehicles by which the intertwined subjects, the divine and the demonic, Self and Other, are at once constructed *and* destabilized.

This approach to reading Zoharic texts sheds considerable light on one of its most remarkable features: its seemingly inexhaustible drive to textual proliferation. This proliferation shapes much of modern scholarship, both text-critical research and interpretive work. It notably takes the form of "parallel passages," texts that are manifestly adaptations, revisions, or expansions of other texts. I contend that this drive to textual proliferation can be partly explained by those aspects of Zoharic rhetoric and ontology concerned with divine/demonic relations I have discussed in this book. The destabilization of the split cosmos by the very same rhetorical techniques that construct it generates a need for a re-enactment of the split, with its inevitable undoing, and the cycle repeats. Indefinitely extendible anaphoras and dividing, doubling, and indeterminate tropes, for example, continually lead to the construction of nearly or utterly indistinguishable divine/demonic twins, thus threatening to collapse the nonetheless crucial split between them – impelling further rhetorical stratagems to re-establish the split. My approach to Zoharic textuality thus reveals it to be partly driven what I call its "*demonic textuality*." The perennial transgressive mischief wrought by the demonic *personae* and the divine desire for intimacy with them, with the subsequent need for rectification of the ensuing horrors or scandals are ontological correlates of this demonic textuality.

This demonic textuality thus constantly threatens to expose the covert kinship, or even identity, of divine and demonic subjects. This covert kinship, and the ever-repeated efforts to deny or undo it, means that the overt battle can never end, and must be continually resumed and recounted, until the final redemption, the final reunification of the ruptured world. This covert kinship defies direct articulation for texts writing from within the experience of the destabilizing confrontation with alterity, not describing it from the outside. It

also defies direct articulation for texts writing from within a tradition ceaselessly proclaiming the unity of the divine, and more proximately for the Zoharic writers, heavily marked by the philosophical denial of divine enmeshment with any kind of alterity whatsoever. The covert kinship of the divine with its own demonic obstacle can only be evoked through allusions and inference, and, as we shall see, at the cost of destabilizing the foundations of the cosmos and human subjectivity.

In the remainder of this Conclusion, I will show some of the stages in the paradoxical evocations of this covert kinship, taking as my guiding thread a Talmudic allegory and its kabbalistic re-interpretations. These texts evoke deep intimacies between divine creative power and some instantiation of the abject, whether repulsive, ruined, broken, or all three. Just as importantly for this book, they are all concerned with the possibility of articulating this relationship in language: asking whether this articulation is normatively permissible, psychologically possible, or even compatible with cosmic stability.

The allegory appears in the Babylonian Talmud's discussion of the opening Mishnah of the second chapter of the tractate *Ḥagigah*. While this chapter is replete with the boldest mythological and mystical expositions of the entire Talmud, its opening Mishnah proclaims restrictions on speech about precisely such inquiries, announced by its initial words, "One may not expound …" [אין דורשין]. The Mishnah's most well-known rules concern the severe restriction on the number of people to whom one may teach the esoteric mysteries, the Work of Creation [מעשה בראשית] and the Work of the Chariot [מעשה מרכבה]. The allegory to which I refer, though, explains a later part of the Mishnah:

> [משנה]: … כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים רתוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם מה למעלה מה למטה מה לפנים ומה לאחור … [גמרא] … בשלמא מה למעלה מה למטה מה לאחור לחיי אלא לפנים מה דהוה הוה רבי יוחנן ורבי אלעזר דאמרי תרוייהו משל למלך בשר ודם שאמר לעבדיו בנו לי פלטירין גדולין על האשפה הלכו ובנו לו אין רצונו של מלך להזכיר שם אשפה[706]
>
> [Mishnah]: Anyone who contemplates four matters, it would have been better if he had not come into the world: that which is above, that which is below, that which came before, that which will come after … [Gemara] … Granted: in relation to that which is above, that which is beneath, that which will come after, fine. But as regards that which came before: what happened, happened! – Rabbi Yoḥanan and Resh Lakish both said: It may be compared to a king of flesh and blood who said to his servants: "Build

706 *bḤagigah* 11b, 16a.

> for me a great palace upon the dunghill." They went and built it for him. It is against the king's will to have the name of the dunghill mentioned [thenceforth].

The Talmud offers its "dunghill" allegory as an explanation of the Mishnah's prohibition against inquiring "what was before" the world, in addition to prohibiting "what is above, what is below, and what will be after." It points out that, in contrast to the other three prohibitions, which restrict human knowledge, it is useless to prohibit knowledge of the past, because "what happened, happened." The allegory implies that the prohibition does not intend to restrict knowledge, but to censor speech, indeed to define the proper boundaries of human speech. On the temporal plane, those boundaries begin subsequent to the "dunghill" stage; on the structural, or architectural, plane, they begin above it.

In a performative contradiction, violating the very prohibition it announces, it is the allegory itself that tells us that God desired to build the cosmos on a dunghill. Moreover, if, as seems probable, the "dunghill" of the allegory is a reference to the *Tohu* of the second verse in Genesis, then the allegory also implies that the Bible itself engaged in such a violation.[707] As with many restrictions on speech, it seems impossible to establish the prohibition without transgressing it.

The allegory's interpretation by the anonymous *Sefer Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* [*Book of the Arrayal of the Divinity*, late 13th-early 14th c.] radically transforms its meaning – a transformation particularly striking when one recalls the general desire of this work to reconcile kabbalah and philosophy.

> ודע כי האי' סוף אשר זכרנו איננו רמוז לא בתורה ולא בנביאים ולא בכתובים ולא בדברי רז"ל אך קבלו בו בעלי העבודה קצת רמז ... ואמרו עוד דרך משל לאדם שבנה פלטריא באשפה. המשילו הענין לאשפה מפני שאם בא אדם להשתכל בו ישתומם ויסוג ממנו אחור כמו האשפה כי כל ענין שאין המחשבה גודרת וסובלת כלל חוזר להיות מאוס כאשפה.[708]

> And know that the *En-Sof* that we have mentioned is not hinted at in the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, or in the words of our rabbis.

707 The implicit association of the dunghill with the biblical *Tohu* in this Talmudic passage is made explicit in a closely related text in *Bereshit Rabah*, 1, 1d (1:5).

708 *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, 131a.

> Nonetheless, the masters of the [divine] service have received a small allusion concerning it.... [Here the Mishnaic passage above is cited]. And, moreover, they spoke in the manner of an allegory, comparing it to a man who built a palace on a dunghill. They compared the matter to a dunghill because if a person comes to contemplate it, he will be overwhelmed and will retreat backwards from it as [from] a dunghill. For every matter that thought cannot at all circumscribe and withstand becomes as repulsive as a dunghill.

In a startling retelling of the Talmudic passage, the "dunghill" of the allegory here becomes identified with the most primordial level of divinity, the *En-Sof*. The creator-king of the allegory no longer precedes the "dunghill" but is either identified with it as the *En-Sof* or, perhaps, is identified with a lower level of divinity than the dunghill/*En-Sof*. This reading requires a reinterpretation of the Talmudic phrase "that which is before": for the *Sefer Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*, the "before" refers to the most primordial divine stage, the stage of the divine-as-dunghill, prior to the crystallization of the divine in forms amenable to human experience.

The consequences for the relationship between language and being are no less significant than for ontology itself. The prohibition on speaking of the "dunghill" here becomes virtually irrelevant. No prohibition is necessary, for instinctively turning away from the highest level of the divine is a natural human reflex. That which human thought cannot "circumscribe and withstand" is, by its very nature, as "repulsive as a dunghill." If a person attempted to contemplate it, he would become "overwhelmed and retreat backwards." This interpretation transforms the meaning of the allegory from a *restriction on a human desire to speak* about the primordial actions of the divine into a *description of the human revulsion from speaking* about the primordial essence of the divine.

The assertion that the highest level of the divine can only appear to human beings as a "dunghill" converts rabbinic normativity into kabbalistic anthropology, a portrayal of the threat posed to the subject when confronted with the abject genealogy of all subjects, even divine subjects. Taking the human and divine implications of the allegory together, one arrives at the following: the primordial divine, the abject, must crystallize in a bounded form in order to become the God of religion, the divine that can be an object of human worship rather than of revulsion.

To be sure, one may well read the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* as attributing the "dunghill" quality of the divine solely to the human incapacity to *perceive* the

divine rather than to the divine itself. The latter step, however, is overtly made in both the Lurianic and Zoharic readings of the allegory.

Several late Lurianic texts contain explicit interpretations of the Talmudic allegory.[709] These texts read the "dunghill" in relation to the myth of the primordial catastrophe, the "breaking of the vessels." In Lurianic kabbalah, the first act of Creation after the primordial divine contraction, the *tsimtsum*, consisted of the emanation of light into ten "vessels," the initial form of the Sefirot. The light, however, was too strong for the vessels and shattered them, particularly the lower seven. The demonic realm emerged from the monstrous recrystallization of the broken shards of these primordial vessels.

Several accounts of the "breaking of the vessels" associate the Talmudic "dunghill" with refuse present in the primordial seven lower Sefirot, refuse which is expelled when they shatter. The cosmos is "built on the dunghill" in the sense that it can only be durably established after this purging of the refuse.[710] Such readings combine aspects of the "dunghill" image in both the Talmud and the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*. They preserve the notion that it is an affront to the dignity of God to speak about the impurities that precede the Creation, as in the Talmudic allegory. They also proclaim that the "dunghill" may be identified with an aspect of the divine itself, as in the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*, but now in a clearly ontological sense. These texts provide compelling readings of their rabbinic and kabbalistic precursors. Indeed, they even raise the speculative possibility that the entire Lurianic notion of cosmic history as a *tikun* of broken vessels can be traced to an ancient tradition hinted at by the Talmud's "dunghill" allegory.[711]

How should we situate the Zoharic literature among these options? Zoharic texts contain no explicit mention of the dunghill allegory or any association of the word "dunghill" with the divine. Nonetheless, one may find an allusion to it in Zoharic texts, particularly those recounting the myth of the "death of the Kings of Edom," whose most elaborate form may be found in the *Idra Raba* [Great Assembly] section. The Zoharic texts base this myth on a seemingly superfluous digression in Genesis, reporting the names of eight kings who "reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned a king in Israel" and the

709 Gaon of Vilna, *Tikune Ha-Zohar Commentary*, 32b (*Tikune Ha-Zohar Ḥadash* section); Ḥaver, *Sefer Afike Yam*, 205; Yosef Ḥayim ben Eliyahu, *Sefer Ben Yehoyada,* III, 49b.

710 I am using this verb here as convenient shorthand for differently conceived processes in different texts.

711 The midrash about the divine creation and destruction of worlds before the creation of the present world would also form a link in this tradition. It does not, however, explicitly state the notion that the present world is constructed out of, or on, the refuse of the destroyed worlds.

deaths of all but the last one (Genesis 36:31–39). The Zoharic texts read this account as a portrayal of a cosmic catastrophe, the demise of seven primordial Sefirot. The "kings of Edom" myth is the direct precursor to the Lurianic myth of the broken vessels, whose repair is associated with the construction of our cosmos.

When one reads the *Idra Raba*'s "Kings of Edom" passage in light of its narrative and homiletical frame, one sees that that it is closely related to, perhaps modeled on, the Talmudic passage containing the "dunghill" allegory. The "kings of Edom" passage comes near the beginning of *Idra Raba*, one of the boldest mystical and mythological sections of the Zoharic literature. In the preface to the passage, Rabbi Shim'on expounds upon the dangers of revealing the deepest cosmic mysteries as well as the necessity of doing so: "Woe if I reveal, woe if I don't reveal!" [ווי אי גלינא ווי אי לא גלינא],[712] he exclaims. Following this discussion, a narratorial voice informs us that Rabbi Shim'on was about to begin revealing the mysteries when, at once, the "Earth quaked and the Companions swooned" [אזדעזע ארעא, וחברין אתחלחלו].[713] This cataclysm suggests that the mysteries about to be expounded will cause the cosmos to regress back to its primordial state, prior to its stable foundation – and will cause the Companions to regress to the primordial, unstable stages of their own subjectivities.

Rabbi Shim'on then commences the *Idra*'s first substantive exposition by quoting the first biblical verse about the reign of the Kings of Edom (Genesis 36:31) and proclaiming that it contains the deepest mysteries. In a seemingly ironic reversal, however, he then exclaims that the verse seems pointless: "this verse is difficult and it should not have been thus written, since we see how many kings there were, prior to the arrival of the Israelites and prior to there being a king for the Israelites!" [דלא הוה ליה למכתב הכי, דהא חזינן כמה מלכים הוו, עד לא ייתון בני ישראל, ועד דלא יהא מלכא לבני ישראל].[714]

The passage's order of exposition thus closely tracks that of the Talmud. The passage prefaces some of the Zoharic literature's boldest mystical and mythological pages by expounding upon the dangers of revealing mysteries – just as the restrictive Mishnah, "One May not Expound," is the preface to some of the Talmud's boldest mystical and mythological pages. The specific matter which induces this overwhelming effect concerns the archaic past, the primordial Kings of Edom – echoing the Talmudic "what came before." Although the Zoharic challenge to the import of speaking about the past is the converse in

712 *Zohar* III, 127b.
713 *Zohar* III, 128a
714 *Ibid.*

form to that posed by the Talmud, it is very close to it in substance. Since the past is known to all, the premise explicitly stated by both texts, there seems no point in either restricting speech about it (the Talmudic objection) or even speaking about it at all (the Zoharic objection). In the *Idra*, there then follows a narrative explanation of how the past, here the death of the "kings," concerns the most primordial divine processes – echoing the Talmud's proceeding to its dunghill allegory. Moreover, the two stories seem to pose a closely related puzzle: how is it possible that the divine Creation does not begin in majesty, but, on the contrary, in a dunghill (the Talmud) or a catastrophe (the *Idra Raba*).

And here the Zoharic story diverges from that of the Talmud in a direction similar to the *Ma'rekhet Ha-Elohut*, but emphasizing the ontological dimension – and in a way that brings out the darker side of the Talmudic allegory itself. The allegory tells us that the "dunghill" is *linguistically* concealed by the divine prohibition to speak of it, out of respect for the honor of the king. By contrast, the *Idra* tells us that the "kings" who perished were *ontologically* hidden away by the Holy Ancient One, *Atika Kadisha*, the highest divine *persona*, as a prerequisite to the construction of a durable cosmos.[715] Most strikingly, and scandalous theologically, the *Idra* attributes the defective initial Creation, resulting in the death of the "kings," to the defective, initial state of the Holy Ancient One himself:

> מנא לן, מעתיק יומין, דעד לא אתתקן הוא בתקונוי, לא אתקיימו כל אינון דבעא לתקנא, וכלהו עלמין אתחרבו, הדא הוא דכתיב (שם) וימלוך באדום בלע בן בעור[716]
>
> Whence [do we know this]? From the Ancient of Days, for until he received *tikun* in his *tikunin*, all those who needed *tikun* did not receive *tikun*, and all the worlds were destroyed. This is as is written, "And Bela the son of Be'or reigned in Edom" [Genesis 36:32].

This proclamation clarifies a mystery in the Talmudic allegory I have so far left unexplored: its silence about the reason that the King desired to build his palace on a dunghill, a desire of which he is ashamed. This desire, key to the Talmudic allegory, itself hints at an archaic intimacy of the divine Self with the abject Other. The Zoharic passage, for its part, implies an intimacy so deep that the proper divine Self can only be constructed belatedly, after the suppression

715 *Ibid.*:

עד דאנח להו ואצנע לה

Until He put them aside and hid them.

716 *Zohar* III, 128a.

of this Other, even as this truth must be royally censored (in the Talmud) or ontologically concealed (in the *Idra*).

In making explicit the primordially defective state of divine subjectivity implicit in the "dunghill" allegory, the Zoharic text clarifies the shame portrayed in its Talmudic precursor. It recounts that when the Holy Ancient One began to create, the Torah, portrayed as a female *persona*, reproached him: "He who wishes to do *tikun* [on others] and to act, should first do *tikun* on his own *tikunin*!" [מאן דבעי לאתקנא ולמעבד יתקן בקדמיתא תיקונוי].[717] Reading these texts together, we find that the most destabilizing secret of this strand of the Jewish esoteric tradition, first broached in the Talmud, converges with the central theme of this book: the intimacy, intermixture, or even indistinguishability of the primordial divine and the abject – and that a key effect of this inextricability is the simultaneous divine desire for the abject and its revulsion both from the abject and from its desire for it.

This primordial ontological intimacy with the abject Other is "unspeakable"; the Talmudic King, in his shame, forbids us to speak of it; the *Ma'rekhet Ha-Elohut* describes the dissolution of any subject who would approach it; the *Idra Raba* tells us that the Holy Ancient One thoroughly concealed the byproducts of his pre-*tikun* primordial Self.[718] As I have shown throughout this book, this unspeakability, far from some mystical ineffability, is due both to the abject's miasmic state and to the horror it evokes. Encounters with it provoke linguistic as well as ontological dissolution. The effort to segregate it, however pyrrhic, is indispensable for the construction of the bounded divine Self and thus of the cosmos. Nevertheless, the Zoharic literature teaches us, such efforts also yield a crystallized form of the abject, the structured realm of the demonic Other Side with its own Sefirot and *personae*. The two realms then come to double each other, as Self and Other proceed to engage throughout cosmic history in fraught relations of enmity, nurturance, seduction, and impersonation.

I, therefore, now turn from the most radical articulation of abjection, the primordial divine-as-dunghill, to the most radical consequence of its crystallization. And here, drawing together a number of hints scattered throughout this book, I suggest that this consequence is that the demonic, even in its crystallized, separately nameable state, is another dimension of the divine. Or, to put it as starkly as possible, the Devil is another face of God. Or, to articulate it in a manner that should by now be familiar, the demonic is the Other Side of the Divine Side. And yet they are also radically opposed. The Self ~~is~~ the Other.

717 *Ibid.*
718 *Ibid.*

I have already given several examples of this possibility, including Lilith as the Shekhinah in her initial, defective state, the red-haired Lord of the Underworld as the twin of the blessed Holy One, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*'s image of the vengeful *kelipah* as the transmogrified God. One could also add images I have described from Lurianic kabbalah, particularly the notion that the nine Sefirot of Malkhut shift back and forth from divine to demonic forms (Chapter 4).

I note one more image, proposed by Yehudah Liebes in his reading of the *Idra Raba*'s "Kings of Edom" passage. Liebes suggests that this passage implicitly identifies Edom, the name of the realm of the doomed "kings," with the pre-*tikun* Holy Ancient One himself.[719] I recall that the passage explicitly attributes the production of a defective cosmos, the domain of the Edomite "kings," to the Holy Ancient One in his pre-*tikun* state. In accordance with Liebes' reading, we should read the "of" in the phrase "Land of Edom" (implicit in the Hebrew, ארץ אדום), as a possessive, the land belonging to a *persona* called "Edom" – who must be none other than the (defective) creator of the "kings," the pre-*tikun* Holy Ancient One. Like the inference drawn by Wolfson that the red-haired Lord of the Underworld may be associated with Esau, this reading is quite shocking, given the close associations in Zoharic myth between Sama'el and both Esau and Edom. Nevertheless, although Liebes can only cite a Sabbatean work for explicit support for this reading,[720] it is firmly rooted in the Zoharic text. Given the *Idra Raba*'s insistence that the defective state of the Edomite "kings" reflects the defective state of their creator, the reading seems barely "one step" beyond the explicit text, as Liebes declares. Taken together, these readings by Wolfson and Liebes signify that the metaphysical Edom, who is the quintessential adversary of the divine, *is* the divine itself in its primordial state, a state it both desires and seeks to repress. Transposed to the human domain, the notion that the earthly Edom, Israel's quintessential symbolic adversary, is just another face of Israel, bears vast political and ethical consequences for national identity and utopian hope.

The ultimate teaching about the Other Side is thus that the demonic Other is the primordial condition of the proper Self (human, national, or divine). As the very name "Other Side" indicates, alterity haunts the subject as its archaic secret, defying efforts to definitively lock it away in a temporal or geographical elsewhere, rendering forever impossible both its full annihilation and its wholehearted embrace. It is thus highly significant that both the Talmudic and Zoharic writers attribute the deepest secrets to "that which came before":

719 Liebes, 'Ha-Mythos Ha-Kabbali be-fi Orpheus', 30.

720 *Ibid*., n. 89. The text is R. Jonathan Eibeschütz, *And I Came this Day unto the Fountain*, 27.

for in that primordial past lie secrets that can make the "Earth quake and the Companions swoon." It is the secret, to use a favorite Zoharic rhetorical scheme, that "there is a Self, and there is a Self," that "there is an Other, and there is an Other," and that splitting both makes the cosmos possible and forever shakes it to its core.

The Zoharic literature, I declared at the outset, is the poetic mythology of a broken world. It is not a theory, not a metaphysical system, not a program. It is a literature, a collection of audacious texts, defying rhetorical convention and theological proprieties. Its paradoxes, ambivalences, uncertainties, and inconsistencies are as jolting as the primordial catastrophes it portrays, the split cosmos it constructs and destabilizes, the abjections and crystallizations whose indispensability and impossibility it elaborates endlessly.

Writing from within the split cosmos rather than from some Archimedean point outside of it, the Zoharic authors defy language and logic to evoke that in the midst of which they wrote. The extravagance of style and the excessiveness of passion reveal this situatedness of Zoharic writing. The literature does not merely describe the love, hate, desire and revulsion of Self for Other; it participates in them. There is no such thing as neutrality in the Zoharic cosmos or in Zoharic writing, and often the Zoharic writers express views on national and gendered differences which cannot but be ethically unacceptable to a contemporary reader. Yet reading the Zoharic literature, not neutrally, but against the grain, can yield the profoundest insights into difference and alterity, even in our own time. There is no historical moment in which any human being with a moral, spiritual, or aesthetic sense can neutrally stand outside the crisis of a broken world, or the crisis of a literally and normatively fragmented textual tradition.

To be sure, the Zoharic literature's participation in the struggles it describes is of a highly ironic and dialectical character. One passage declares that Aramaic, the language in which most of the Zoharic literature appears, is the language of the Other Side [לישנא דסטרא אחרא].[721] The passage is ostensibly concerned with the Aramaic of the Kaddish prayer, rather than with the Aramaic of the Zoharic literature, including the passage itself. The passage declares that only by reciting the prayer in Aramaic "will the power of the Other Side be broken and the blessed Holy One will ascend in his glory above all" [דיתבר חילא דסטרא אחרא ויסתלק קודשא בריך הוא ביקריה על כלא]. I find it impossible, however, to read

721 *Zohar* II, 129b. See Liebes, 'Ivrit ve-Aramit ki-leshonot ha-Zohar'. Elliot Wolfson has also discussed this passage in an unpublished lecture, 'Translation and Bridging the Unbridgeable: Zoharic Language and the Mystery of the Other Side'.

this passage (in Aramaic!) without understanding it as a meta-commentary on the entire Zoharic enterprise. Chapter 4 has shown the ontological gravity, and hidden utopian hope, of the linguistic impersonation of one side of the divine/demonic divide by the Other. If Aramaic is the language of the Other Side, then the writing and studying of the Zoharic literature is a linguistic and ontological engagement with the Other, indeed a transformation *into* the Other, without which no Self, divine or human, can be fully constituted.

I conclude with a 16th century kabbalistic myth *about* the Zoharic literature, a myth structured like many of those discussed in this book. In his indispensable Zohar commentary, *Ketem Paz* (ca. 1571), Shim'on Ibn Lavi declares that the texts that we call the "*Sefer Ha-Zohar*" constitute a tiny remnant of the "original great composition" [החיבור הגדול הראשון].[722] "We have heard," Ibn Lavi recounts, that the size of this original work was equivalent to "the loads upon forty camels" [משא מ' גמלים]. Over the generations, due to the travails of the exile, and the consequent "diminution of the hearts" [שנתמעטו הלבבות], the original work was neglected, became a "sealed book" [ספר חתום], and abandoned in dirty corners. Ultimately, it became so withered and desiccated that it could be destroyed by a mere moth or an annoying drip of water [עש אכלם או דלף טורד נפל עליהם]. The last word of the verse Ibn Lavi cites as a proof-text for this destruction, "they are utterly consumed with terrors" [ספו תמו מן בלהות] (Psalms 73:19) has been traditionally interpreted, at least from Rashi onwards, as referring to *shedim*, demonic spirits.

Eventually, Ibn Lavi continues, a new generation arose, gathered a small portion of widely scattered fragments, and assembled them as best they could. This genealogy, Ibn Lavi explains, accounts for the fact that one often finds disorder in the Zoharic materials. At times, one Zoharic discussion follows another without any apparent connection; at others, the beginning of a discussion may be found in one place and its end in another. For Ibn Lavi, this etiological myth explains the state of "the composition that is found with us today."

Ibn Lavi's narrative is a quintessential Zoharic myth as described in this book: a primordial, awesome plenitude, a book of impossible perfection and fantastic dimensions, gives way to the most abject of conditions, abandoned, decomposing manuscripts, disintegrating at the slightest touch, at the mercy of a moth or a drip of water. And while Ibn Lavi attributes this abjection to the general travails of the exile, the specific cause of its neglect and destruction is the "diminution of the hearts," the decay of the subjectivity of the Jews. There is, moreover, another, secret cause: for the destruction of the "original

722 Shim'on Ibn Lavi, *Sefer Ketem Paz*, 102a.

great composition" is the work of the demonic, hinted at in the word "terrors" [בלהות] in the verse from Psalms, that traditional synonym for *shedim*.

The abjection of *Sefer Ha-Zohar* is followed by its re-crystallization: the new kabbalists (presumably Ibn Lavi is here referring to the Spanish writers of the 13th century) heroically, impossibly, gather the fragments of this destroyed plenitude and reconstruct it, yielding the work in its current form. The sacred mythology, the Zoharic literature, can only be re-assembled by engaging with the abject, descending into the realm of the moths and the drips, in order to gather the fragments, at once destroyed and yet surviving.

Ibn Lavi's myth also provides a prospective etiological myth for the current state of Zohar scholarship: with some engaged in the text-critical work of disentangling and identifying heterogeneous textual fragments, others engaged in novel interpretations of the crystallized work, whether based on the 16th century print editions, newer forms such as Daniel Matt's critical edition, or specific passages in their critical reconstructions. Ibn Lavi shows how abjection-and-crystallization can serve not only as way of understanding Zoharic myth but also of those mythologists we call "academic Zohar scholars."

The scriptural verb that Ibn Lavi uses to describe the collection of the fragments, "and they gathered" [ויצברו, *va-yitsberu*] appears twice in the Bible (though vowelized slightly differently each time): once in the context of gathering life-giving nourishment, once in the context of gathering disgusting corpses. The first occurrence appears in Joseph's advice to Pharaoh to gather up grain during the good years in order to provide for the lean years;[723] the second occurrence, in the aftermath of the plague of frogs, describes the Egyptians gathering up the dead amphibians in piles, as a result of which, the verse reports, "the land stank."[724] Life and death, blessing and abjection, the associations of the biblical verb "gathering" render Ibn Lavi's employment of it, as a description of engaging with the abject in order to re-crystallize the holy book, concisely expressive of the ambivalences with which my own book has been concerned.

Nevertheless, this new crystallization remains shadowed by the previous abject state, the destructive appropriation of the plenitude by the demonic. The perfected cosmos of Zoharic mythology, like the wholeness of the great composition *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, can only be reconstructed by locating the missing fragments of being and language – fragments that can only be found in the abject "corners," requiring engagement with those denizens of the abject, the moths and drips, and, above all, the demonic "terrors."

723 Genesis 41:35.
724 Exodus 8:10.

And it is only in engagement with these Others, in descending to these Other Places, in re-uniting with this Other Side, that one can achieve full knowledge and redemption, both of the Self and the Cosmos, as well as of the *Sefer Ha-Zohar*.

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substitute a transliterated form of the Hebrew name of God even when using the KJV (e.g., YHVH, Elohim, El) because of the importance of these specific names in the Zohar. Note that I cite the Masoretic chapters and verses, even when I present the KJV translation.

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