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"מעלות תאומיות שאינן מתאימות"

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"Improper Twins":
The Ambivalent "Other Side" in the Zohar
and Kabbalistic Tradition

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<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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וסלקא שכינתא על ההוא טורא

ותשתמע תלת קלין

And the Shekhinah ascends upon that mountain

and makes three voices resound …

Zohar Ḥadash, 56a

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<u>Declaration</u>

I, Nathaniel Berman, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.
Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been
indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores the portrayals of the demonic, the *Sitra Aḥra*, the "Other Side," in the Zohar and closely related texts. Such portrayals form a key theme in the Zohar, a collection of 13th century mystical, mythological, and homiletical texts, written in Spain. In proposing new approaches to this theme, the thesis also advances new ways of understanding the work's literary virtuosity and ontological innovativeness.

At the rhetorical level, the thesis focuses on close readings, attending to the distinctive ways Zoharic texts employ "schemes" and "tropes" (Quintilian) in a manner that constructs and manages ambivalence about the divine/demonic relationship. This methodology grows out of a rejection of past scholarly approaches, which tended to read such texts as reflective of large-scale cultural-historical phenomena, such as the putative divide between Gnosticism and Neoplatonism. Such approaches bypass the distinctiveness of Zoharic writing, in which all precursor texts, be they scriptural, rabbinic, or theological, become transformed into elements of novel literary works.

At the ontological level, the thesis rejects the unreflective notions of "catharsis" that have often guided past Zohar scholarship's understandings of the relationship between the divine and the demonic. The inadequacy of such notions appears particularly when Zoharic texts' literary specificities are foregrounded. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, the thesis illuminates the phenomenon that Zoharic texts continually portray the recurrent emergence, collapse, and re-consolidation of divine subjects and structures as inextricably bound up with that of demonic subjects and structures. The approach taken by the thesis highlights the centrality of "abjection" (Kristeva) for the emergence of differentiated subjects, human or divine.

Reading the Zohar in this way facilitates a comprehensive embrace of the distinctiveness of its textuality and an explication of its vision of the ways the differentiation of divine and human subjects from their "Others" is both indispensable and yet ultimately impossible.

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Technical Note

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

I.   <u>Bibliography and Footnotes</u>

The bibliography contains the complete publication information for all sources. For brevity's sake, the footnotes contain only abbreviated information, 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. The style in both footnotes and bibliography follows the *Style Sheet* issued by the UCL Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies.

II.   <u>Texts</u>

Zohar: There are no standard critical editions of the *Zohar, Ra'ya Mehemena,* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*. I have generally employed the most widely-used editions, edited by Re'uven Margoliot (see bibliography for details). I have occasionally selected variants that this text provides in parentheses, noting in the footnotes the basis for my choice – at times buttressed by reference to the Cremona or Mantua editions (see bibliography). Moreover, I have occasionally adopted the textual variants offered by Daniel Matt in his *Aramaic Texts* (see bibliography), when the Margoliot text seems corrupted, and have so noted in the footnotes.

Bible: I have used the standard Masoretic text for the original Hebrew and the King James Version (KJV) for the English translations (see bibliography for details). Due to the importance of the specific names of God in the Zohar, I generally substitute transliterations of those names for the KJV's translations. Where I otherwise depart from the KJV, due to the way particular passages are understood by the *Zohar*, I so note in the footnotes.

III.   Translations

All translations from non-English works not marked by a footnote are my own. When I
have composed my own translations of the *Zohar* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, I have drawn on a
wide variety of sources, including the Hebrew translations in Yehudah Ashlag's *Sulam* and
Daniel Frisch's *Matok Midevash*, and, rarely, the *Soncino* translation, as well as
commentaries such as Moshe Cordovero's *Or Yakar* and others (see bibliography for details
on all sources mentioned here). I have also quoted extensively from the new translation by
Daniel Matt (see bibliography for details), and have so noted in the footnotes. Where I
quote Matt's translations but have modified them, I so note.

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 (')
פּ: p
פ: f
צ: ts
ק: k

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ר: r
שׁ: sh
שׂ: s
תּ, ת: 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

Introduction

<u>A. *The Demon, the Modern, and the Text*</u>

In its *Hekhalot* sections, the Zohar describes a series of palaces through which prayers pass on their way upwards through the divine realm, and through which the soul ascends after death.[1] These palaces also form progressively ascending stages in the human quest for divine secrets. The Zohar declares that the first of these palaces, the site of the "beginning of the secret of faith," stands on the threshold between the realms of holiness and contamination – and thus provides a unique vantage point from which to perceive both the divine and the 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, דאיהו שירותא דכל דרגין לסלקא לעילא, וסופא דכל דרגין לנחתא לתתא. ובגין דהושע חמא מגו שירותא דא, סופא דכל דרגין, אצטריך לנטלא האי אשת זנונים[2]

> 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 this beginning, the end of all levels, he had to
> take that "woman of whoredom" [ibid.].[3]

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[1] I note at the outset 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 inter-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 author or even a unified group of authors. For some prominent examples of such critiques, see Yehudah Liebes, 'Ketsad Niṭḥaber Sefer Ha-Zohar', 1-87; Daniel Abrams, 'The Invention of the Zohar as a Book', 7-142. A more accurate, if somewhat clumsy label for the texts in the printed editions may be something like "the Zoharic literature" or, even more clumsily, "the texts written in the mid to 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.
[2] *Zohar,* II, 245a.
[3] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

Like the prophet Hosea, figured here as the paradigmatic kabbalistic debutant, 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 "left side" for understanding kabbalah, a fascination that persisted throughout his life. From his early research into the "Castillian Gnostics,"[4] to his enduring passion for Sabbateanism in all its permutations, to his meticulous research into the genealogy of particular demonic personalities,[5] Scholem implicitly positioned the field squarely within the "first palace." Or, to put it another way, much of modern kabbalah studies may be viewed as having been always already inscribed in the Zohar's "first palace" text – a text that would thus have adumbrated the modern field's possibilities and limitations and prefigured its triumphs and dangers.

A vantage point analogous to that of the "first palace" – a place from which one can perceive two opposed dimensions simultaneously – also deeply informs the Scholem tradition's general characterizations of kabbalistic writing. Scholem portrayed such writing as filled with tension between "inexhaustible symbolic images" and "speculative justification and conceptual interpretation" of those images.[6] In Isaiah Tishby's pithy formulation, these two dimensions of kabbalistic writing are those of *hagshamah* [הגשמה, loosely, "corporealization"] and *hafshatah* [הפשטה, "abstraction"] – the former that of "visionary-mythical images and narratives," the latter that of "speculative-philosophical concepts and reasoning."[7] For Scholem, this tension, internal to kabbalistic texts, replayed a broader, historical tension between kabbalah as a whole and the anti-mythological Judaism he viewed as its historical rival. Kabbalah, for Scholem, represented the "vengeance of myth against

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[4] Scholem used the notion of the "Gnostics of Castille" as a way of describing a group that includes Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, Moshe of Burgos, and Todros Abulafia. See 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 array 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 limit my use of Scholem's "Castillian Gnostics" to: 1) providing a convenient label for the specific group of figures Scholem has in mind; and 2) providing an example of Scholem's meta-historical conception, which recent scholarship has compelled us to critically examine.

[5] See, e.g., Scholem, *Shedim, Ruḥot u-Neshamot,* 9-102.

[6] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism,* 96.

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

its conquerors"[8] – the latter term referring to the rationalistic Judaism that had supposedly crystallized in the centuries prior to kabbalah's emergence. The "source of the countless inner contradictions" in kabbalistic symbols was the tension between their mythical content and the language of pre-kabbalistic normative Judaism which kabbalists continued to employ.[9] 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[10] – the term "gnosis" associated loosely with mythology and "Platonism" with the aspiration for harmonization with philosophical theology.

This framework pervades the perspective of those writing within the Scholem tradition even at the level of detailed textual analysis, nowhere more so than in reading texts portraying the relationship between the divine and the demonic. 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 – deeply colors 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 reflecting the dominance of one or the other of such models.

Although the mythological dimension of kabbalah is by no means limited to the demonic, there is something mythological *par excellence* in texts that portray the demonic as a reality, rather than as an absence or a subjective projection – provided that we divest the term "myth" of all pejorative connotations. Tishby declares that the relationship between the divine and the demonic is the "cornerstone in the conflict that opposes the mythological tendency and the theological imperative" in kabbalah.[11] Scholem, for his part, quotes Hermann Cohen, whose rationalistic approach serves as the perfect foil for his own, for the

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[8] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism,* 99.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] *Ibid.* 97. See also Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 45.
[11] Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra ve-ha-Kelipah be-Kabbalat Ha-Ari* 47: סלע המחלוקת בין הנטיה המיתית והדרישה התיאולוגית.

notion that "a power of evil exists only in myth."[12] Transvaluing Cohen's intent, we could

say, in the language of the Zohar, *dayka!* [דייקא] – precisely!

Consequently, it is especially in relation to the demonic that the usefulness for textual

analysis of Scholem's notion of "tensions" and "inner contradictions" between "gnosis and

Platonism" must be re-examined. To be sure, the kabbalah of the 13th century, like that of

later periods, was undoubtedly marked by fundamental controversies. Scholem, Yehudah

Liebes, and others have highlighted the way that, at least in the early period of divergences

between Catalonian and Castillian kabbalists, the question of the demonic was a key marker

of difference.[13] We find this phenomenon expressed in a pair of statements from the two

circles to which kabbalistic thinking about the demonic owes its key formulations, the

"Castillian Gnostics" and the "circle of the Zohar."[14] These two texts, as Liebes has pointed

out,[15] contain very closely related language declaring that knowledge of the "left side" was

that which gave its adepts their uniqueness and their superiority over others.

The first of these texts is from the "Castillian Gnostic" Moshe of Burgos:

בענייני סתרי האצילות השמאלי אשר הוא מציאות עולם אחר כללי, נפרד במהות עצמו ...מעטים הם
היודעים ומבינים עיקר מציאות סדר האצילות [הזאת] ...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...[16]

> In the matters of the secrets of the left emanation, which is the existence of an
>
> other, comprehensive world, separate in its own essence. … Few are those
>
> who know and understand the essence of the existence of the order of [this]
>
> 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

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[12] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 36.
[13] Liebes, *Ha-Mashiaḥ shel Ha-Zohar*, 35-38.
[14] On the "circle of the Zohar" [חוג הזהר], see generally, Liebes, 'Ketsad Nitḥaber Sefer Ha-Zohar'.
[15] Liebes, *Ha-Mashiaḥ*, 36-37.
[16] Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 208 & 210.

likeness of the Right. … And the likeness of the existence of the Left is an existence distinct in itself, wondrous and alien.

Aside from the proclamation of the esotericism and the superiority of knowledge of the demonic (the "Left"), two other features of this excerpt broach crucial themes I will pursue in this thesis. The first is that the relationship of the "left emanation" to its holy counterpart is simultaneously one of absolute difference and uncanny sameness: the Left is both an "entire other world," and yet one "in the likeness of the right." The second is that that "other world" is both "alien" *and* "wondrous," an excellent description of something compellingly fascinating and yet also frightening. These two forms of ambivalence – the first an ontological characteristic of the demonic itself, the second a feature of the subjective experience of it – will be discussed at great length below.

The parallel passage in the Zohar links this knowledge to the deepest secrets of creation.

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 17

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

The rhetoric of this excerpt may seem figurative, with the "Great Dragon" intended metaphorically. In this vein, it would be an assertion, in conformity with the excerpt from Moshe of Burgos, that the most esoteric truths are only available to those with *knowledge* of the demonic. Nonetheless, the excerpt also resounds with a more corporeal, more 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

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[17] *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**].

depths, personified by the "Great Dragon." While this reading sounds like a very heterodox, even proto-Sabbatean, conception, it is supported both by the context of the passage and by the midrashic sources upon which this excerpt is based.[18]

With this close 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 Modernist matrix out of which Scholem – and thus modern kabbalah studies – emerged.[19] A central feature of the cultural Modernism of the early 20th century was the "primitivist" quest for the renewal of creativity through drawing on terrifying, yet fascinating forces – forces imagined as residing both in the exotic, mysterious and remote non-European world and in the exotic, mysterious, and remote depths of the unconscious.[20] This "primitivism" was always accompanied in Modernism by an emphasis on advanced virtuosity in specific artistic, cultural or intellectual media. This double movement was captured by one cultural historian with the notion of a paradoxical "alliance of primitivism and abstraction"[21] – a pair of opposite tendencies strikingly close to Tishby's *hagshamah* and *hafshatah.* Scholem himself, like many of the key Modernist innovators of the early 20th century, combined an attraction to fascinating, yet terrifying, primal forces with rigorous disciplinary virtuosity.[22] I believe that this unexpected homology between the characteristic

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[18] 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 נחש בריח מדורו במים**
התחתונים ובין שני סנפיריו הבריח התיכון של ארץ עומד].

[19] I am using "cultural Modernism" here in a relatively 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 geography of the transformations in each domain differed widely, a complexity I need not discuss here.

[20] 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*. My own work has argued that Modernist primitivism was central to the post-World War I transformation of international law. See, e.g., my 'Modernism, Nationalism, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction', 351-380. Scholem's early advocacy of re-conceptualizing the Jews as "orientals" as part of a critique of European culture, was part of this general cultural movement. See Lazier, 'Writing the Judenzarathustra: Gershom Scholem's Response to Modernity, 1913-1917', 33-65.

[21] Middleton, 'The Rise of Primitivism', 194.

[22] Mosse offers a description of Scholem that could be easily transposed to many of the key figures of cultural Modernism, particularly its avant-garde (especially if one substitutes the words "painter," "composer," or "architect" for "scholar" in the following passage):
> Scholem confessed that he had been attracted to anarchism even if it filled him with terror. … [H]e always walked a fine line between his fascination with the unconventional, even bizarre - the attraction for the spontaneous, uncertain dynamic (almost a Nietzschean life force) - and the need for self-discipline as a scholar.

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.

For the purposes of a study of the demonic in the Zohar, three such critiques are particularly important. First, a number of scholars in the last three decades have undermined the historical narrative upon which Scholem's approach was based. Moshe Idel, Charles Mopsik, and others have questioned whether one can speak of a "Gnostic" incursion into kabbalah in any historically meaningful sense, let alone the notion that kabbalah is a battleground between "Gnosticism" and Neoplatonism.[23] Idel and Liebes have also undermined the notion of a historical rupture between a pre-kabbalistic non-mythological normative Judaism and a "revenge of myth" surging up in the 12th and 13th centuries.[24]

Second, Liebes and those writing in his wake have questioned the notion of a single author for the main body of the Zohar, a position that had become axiomatic for Scholem. Liebes projects a "circle of the Zohar," a group of authors who were all improvising on common themes and styles.[25] The notion of a "circle of the Zohar," whose membership and inter-relationships remain subject to debate, has become a guiding assumption of many current scholars.[26]

Mosse, 'Gerschom Scholem as a German Jew', 129. See also Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 129-131, for a brief contextualization of Scholem in his cultural milieu. Wasserstrom notes the interest taken in Shabetai Tsevi by such figures as Georg Lukacs and Ernst Bloch. For an example of the "Orientalist" assumptions that occasionally played a role in Scholem's philological analyses, see Scholem, 'Le-Ḥeker Kabbalat R. Yitsḥak ben Ya'akov Ha-Kohen', 285. Scholem argues for an Eastern source for the *Sidre de-Shimusha Raba*, arguing that its demonic imagery shows an influence of the "imagination of the Arabs" that was "rich and fertile in matters relating to demons" [דמיונם של הערבים בעסקי שדים היה כידוע עשיר ופורה מאד]. For the Orientalist fascinations of German Jewish intellectuals during Scholem's youth, see Mendes-Flohr, 'Fin de Siècle Orientalism, the *Ostjuden,* and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation,' 77-132. I thank Shaul Magid for this reference.

[23] See, e.g., Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 31-34, 156-157; Mopsik & Smilévitch, 'Observations sur l'oeuvre de Gershom Scholem', 6-31. The latter essay also criticizes understanding kabbalah as simply a Jewish application of Neoplatonism.

[24] E.g., Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 156.

[25] See generally Liebes, 'Ketsad Nitḥaber Sefer Ha-Zohar'.

[26] See, e.g., Huss, *Ke-Zohar Ha-Raki'a*, 11-140.

Taken together, these first two critiques demand a dramatic rethinking of how to read the Zohar – particularly those passages marked by paradoxes, contradictions, or ambivalences, key characteristics of texts concerned with the demonic.   The attribution of divergences among and within passages of the Zohar to the relative dominance of one or the other of those putatively perennial historical or phenomenological rivals, "Gnosticism" and Neoplatonism, or to the outcome of the struggle between them within a single authorial "heart," harbors a variety of dangers, including: overestimating the coherence of such vast and internally heterogeneous currents, understating the complex nature of "influence" in relation to a work like the Zohar, ignoring the often hypothetical nature of such influences, underplaying the distinctiveness of the Zoharic materials, and relying on a textually unjustified assumption of a single Zoharic author. Finally, I note that certain aspects of these first two critiques cut in somewhat different directions. Whereas the undermining of the "Gnosticism vs. Neoplatonism" thesis might suggest that we should look for even more coherence in the Zohar than did the Scholem tradition, the undermining of the "single author" thesis might lead us to simply attribute tensions among Zoharic passages to differences among multiple authors.

A third critique, however, indicates interpretive possibilities beyond such conundra. As initiated by Liebes and pursued by those writing in his wake, this critique argues that the Scholem/Tishby approach to the Zohar has given insufficient attention to its literary dimensions and overemphasized its "doctrine."[27] Liebes particularly drew attention to the significance of such large-scale literary aspects as the "frame stories" in the Zohar, as well as to smaller-scale techniques such as exploitation of the polysemousness of key terms.[28] Attention to such polysemousness also allows Liebes to point to other rhetorical techniques such as irony. For example, he discusses the Zohar's designation of the seven cosmic pillars, also identified with the seven lower sefirot, by the term *hevel* [הבל] – a term that, in this context, carries the overt meaning of divine breath, the foundation of all existence, but also retains its antithetical value from Ecclesiastes of mortal "vanity."

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[27] See Liebes' critique of Tishby's focus on the "doctrine of the Zohar" [משנת הזהר] in 'Zohar ve-Eros', 1-4.
[28] See, e.g., his discussion of the word "צניעותא" in *Torat Ha-Yetsirah shel Sefer Yetsirah,* 128-132.

This emphasis on the literary dimensions of the Zohar offers the promise of avoiding a number of the problems brought to light by the critiques of the Scholem tradition, even beyond that envisioned by Liebes. The heterogeneity of elements deployed by Zoharic texts need not be attributed to their reflection of rival models but as a key feature of a complex literary technique – whose textual product should be read as something other than a means of conveying coherent models or even tensions between them. Moreover, an innovative text's relation to the language of its authoritative predecessors need not be limited to either doctrinal rupture or fidelity, but often takes the form of more complex and fraught dynamics, involving unpredictable mixtures of submission, rebellion, trepidation, tendentious misinterpretation, re-appropriation, and so on.[29]

Finally, this emphasis on the literary techniques of the text may relativize the interpretive importance of the question of authorship. Following Liebes' notion of a "circle of the Zohar," Melilah Hellner-Eshed suggests the analogy of a jazz ensemble, whose members produce individualized and contrasting riffs on common musical themes.[30] A related paradigm would be the structuralist notion of a productive "*combinatoire*" – the generation of variants of myths through divergent combinations of certain basic elements or themes, yielding often conflicting narratives and even morals; from this perspective, a myth consists of all its variants, even when they appear on the surface to be incompatible.[31]

Liebes himself devotes much of his crucial essay, 'Ketsad Niṭḥaber Sefer Ha-Zohar,' to a comparative study of 13th century texts with strong affinities to the Zohar. He argues against the notion that they should be seen, stylistically, as imitations or plagiarisms of the Zohar, or, doctrinally, as adhering to or deviating from some supposedly authoritative Zoharic dogma. Rather, they should be read as works by authors who were engaged in producing variations on a shared fund of themes and styles and experienced themselves as freely working on their "own material" as they transformed and improvised on this fund.[32] Liebes

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[29] I refer here to the complex relationships described by Harold Bloom. See, e.g., *The Anxiety of Influence, passim.*

[30] Hellner-Eshed, *Ve-Nahar Yotse me-Eden: Al Sefat Ha-Ḥavayah Ha-Mistit Ba-Zohar,* 231 n. 81.

[31] The classic description is in Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology,* 206-231.

[32] For example, Liebes declares that Yehudah ben David He-Ḥasid felt free to produce variant versions of Zoharic texts, "doing with them as he would with his own" material [כשהוא עושה כבתוך שלו], even though he joined the circle at a relatively late stage, when Zoharic texts were already circulating. Liebes, 'Ketsad', 73.

also makes analogous arguments about variations among parallel texts within the "body of the Zohar" [the *Guf Ha-Zohar*; גוף הזהר] itself.[33]

Nonetheless, I believe that the implications of the three critiques just evoked have not been fully thought through or implemented either alone or in relation to each other – particularly as they affect our reading of Zoharic passages on the demonic. First, the call for attention to the literary dimensions of the text have focused on such aspects as narrative frame and structure, rather than on the functioning of rhetorical structure at a more detailed level – particularly at the level of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs (to which I refer in Chapter One as "constructional schemes") as well as the paradoxical employment of individual phenomenal images to evoke both divine and demonic entities (the distinctive Zoharic use of "tropes"). The Zohar uses both of these quite distinct sets of rhetorical techniques, separately and in tandem, to portray the relationship of the divine and the demonic.

Moreover, Liebes himself generally does not carry through on his seemingly categorical rejection of a "doctrine of the Zohar," and for good reason. I note that he frames this rejection not simply as an assertion of a multiplicity of doctrines, but rather as a more far-reaching claim that identifying such "doctrines" blinds one to the true nature of the Zohar.[34] For Liebes, the Zohar's essence is that of "eros," a term which he even views as the best translation for the word "Zohar" – and, he proclaims, "to define eros is to kill it."[35]

I make two critical observations about Liebes' general stance in relation to his particular analyses. First, despite his rejection of the very notion of Zoharic "doctrine," Liebes' brilliant readings of Zoharic texts, both internally and in relation to other 13th century texts, are replete with the identification of doctrines and their philological significance – in relation to, among other things, the question of authorship.[36] This suggests that doctrinal analysis may be inevitable and that a deeper reflection upon the relationship between

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[33] For example, Liebes argues that, at the time of the composition of the *Idra Raba,* which presents itself in part as a commentary on the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta,* the latter was still "a fluid text, susceptible to variations of versions and editing [מקסט נזיל ונתון לשינויי ניסוחים ועריכות]". Liebes, *Torat Ha-Yetsirah*, 139. He also argues that the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta* shows the influence of the doctrine of the *shemitot,* a doctrine generally absent from the Zohar and explicitly rejected by Moshe de Leon. *Ibid.,* 136.
[34] Liebes, *Zohar ve-Eros*, 1 & n. 107.
[35] *Ibid.*, 4.
[36] This is true throughout 'Ketsad Niṭḥaber'.

doctrine and literary style needs to be undertaken. Secondly, while highlighting the "erotic" nature of the Zohar is intended to assert that it transcends any fixed doctrine, the call for attention to the literary dimensions of the text stands at odds with this rather general and vague notion of a transcendent "eros." I argue, by contrast, that the texts produce the sense of their non-correspondence with any fixed doctrine through identifiable rhetorical techniques, on the level of both schemes and tropes; moreover, the doctrines themselves often function as literary elements deployed and juxtaposed for rhetorical effect. Taken together, these two observations suggest both more attention to doctrine *and* more attention to rhetoric.

In this study, therefore, I proceed along two major axes of analysis, the ontological doctrines about the relationships between the divine and the demonic and the rhetorical techniques used to portray them. I will also highlight the complex, often unexpected, and at times indeterminate relationships between these axes. In the course of so doing, moreover, I will be complicating our understanding of the well-known interweaving in kabbalah (and Jewish tradition more generally) between language and being.[37]

Attention to the complex relationship of these two axes also guides the distinctive way I criticize the notion that one can read Zoharic texts as reflections of competing conceptual or phenomenal models. In particular, I subject the writings of Tishby on the demonic to extensive critical examination. Tishby frames his discussions of the demonic with the positing of competing metaphysical models, models that derive from the Scholem tradition's grand narrative of the tension between "gnosis and Platonism." However, rather than explaining the inadequacy of this approach through Liebes' notion of a general Zoharic transcendence of doctrine, I identify the key textual techniques employed by Zoharic texts in portraying the demonic, techniques that are ultimately responsible for the general impression of a doctrine-defying "eros."   I also show, however, that, though particular techniques may give the impression of being associated with distinct models of the demonic, these techniques may not be reduced to expressing such models. Rather, while the rhetorical

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[37] Cf. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being, passim.*

techniques often create expectations of particular ontological correlates, the texts just as often disappoint those expectations.

The error of refusing to truly *read* a text, of viewing rhetorical structure as a mere vehicle for conceptual doctrine, is known to literary critics as the "heresy of paraphrase."[38] Paraphrase bypasses the pleasures of the text in favor of the abstractions it supposedly reflects. In the Zohar, this error is portrayed in the parable of the "mountain-dweller." 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" of all such luxuries. The Zohar declares that only he who consumes all these luxuries – and by analogy only one who revels in the rich literary delights of the Zohar – can understand their essence, the "wheat" or kabbalistic doctrine.[39]

Conversely, I also show that a number of Zoharic texts thematize the opposite danger, that of simply submitting to the expectations set up by rhetorical techniques. Such texts suggest that the confusion between rhetorically created expectation and ontological truth may lead to the gravest kind of religious error.[40] Taken together, these two dangers highlight the need for a subtle reflection on the relationship between rhetoric and doctrine in the context of a work that operates powerfully on both levels.

Rather than simply reflecting one or another of competing models or even the tension between them, Zoharic texts strategically and overtly juxtapose elements from incompatible conceptual models 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. Rather than reductively reading the heterogeneity of textual elements as evidence of an underlying clash between coherent systems of concepts or images from which the disparate elements supposedly derive, I strive to read the resulting texts as something new and distinct.

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[38] See Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn,* 192-201.
[39] *Zohar* II, 176a-b.
[40] See my discussion of Solomon's error in Chapter One, pp. 86-88.

In rhetorical terms, the Zoharic technique of the juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements might be called a form of *catachresis* – defined by Quintilian as an "abuse" of language, often consisting of unnaturally mixed or extended images.[41] Such "abuse" is "necessary" in order to signify "whatever has no proper term."[42] Significantly for my suggestion of the uncanny convergence of cultural Modernism and 13th century esotericism, catachreses may also be viewed as the most characteristic gestures of the 20th century avant-garde,[43] pithily summarized by Max Ernst in a formulation highly pertinent to analysis of the kabbalistic demonic: "the coupling of two realities that seem incapable of coupling on a plane that seems unsuited for them."[44] The abundance of catachreses in the Zohar – particularly in relation to the demonic, some of whose key activities consist precisely of "unsuitable" and seemingly impossible "couplings" – demonstrates the necessity of beginning with close textual analysis rather than premature recourse to conceptual or phenomenal models. Such models are incapable of capturing the paradoxical phenomena the Zohar wishes to evoke through its catachrestic techniques.

Indeed, the service rendered by rhetorical analysis in drawing our attention to the widespread Zoharic use of catachresis also suggests its utility for the specification of other general terms used in Zohar scholarship. For example, catachresis is a rhetorical technique that can help provide much-needed specification to Scholem's general definition of the mystical "symbol" as that which "makes another reality transparent which cannot appear in any other form."[45] This familiar definition is strikingly similar to Quintilian's definition of the function of catachresis – though the latter, in its specificity, shows one way Scholem's general insight can actually be used in reading particular passages.

Although catachresis may be found throughout the Zohar, its use is particularly suited to the realm of the demonic. As Paul de Man points out, there is something disturbing intrinsic to

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[41] See Preminger, ed., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 104. The quoted phrase is from Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, 132.
[42] *Quintilian, Institutes*, 132.
[43] 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.
[44] Ernst, 'Au-delà de la peinture', 256.
[45] Scholem, *Major Trends*, 27.

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." [46]

These two features of catachresis, "dismemberment" and "reassembling" will be key to
much of what follows.   Particularly in Chapter Two, the baffling process by which the
demonic begins as the inchoate "refuse" of the divine and then becomes a highly structured
and autonomous realm ruled by mighty diabolical personages will be one of my central
themes.   On the rhetorical level, adapting the work of Harold Bloom, I will refer to the
images that embody these two features of catachresis as "tropes of limitation" and "tropes of
representation."[47] Though I discuss these in great detail below, I would here like to mention,
in connection with my discussion of catachresis, the "trope of representation" most
important for my purposes, that of *prosopopeia* – a trope that personifies, or "gives a face"
to something that normally lacks a "face." Prosopopeia is a particularly apt term for
understanding kabbalistic thought, much of which is preoccupied precisely with, to use
Lurianic terms, "*tikun ha-partsufim*," itself almost a literal translation of the term
prosopopeia. As De Man writes, "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."[48] Catachresis thus is particularly suited for portrayals of the demonic,
especially those concerned with its crystallization, the process by which it is "given a face."

With this approach to reading the Zohar, one can vindicate some of the crucial critiques of
the Scholem tradition, while retaining what I believe to be some of its deepest wellsprings.[49]

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[46] De Man, 'Epistemology of Metaphor', 21.

[47] See, e.g., Bloom, *A Map of Misreading,* 88. They have been explained by one scholar 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. In this thesis, the key example of tropes of limitation is irony, of
tropes of representation, prosopopeia.

[48] De Man, 'Epistemology of Metaphor', 21.

[49] 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 thesis of a Gnostic

Zoharic texts on the *Sitra Aḥra* are indeed marked by tension between seemingly incompatible motifs – and yet we need not have recourse either to a grand historical narrative about competing traditions or to a subjective narrative about conflict within the breast of "the author." The provocative and explosive tensions within the Zohar need not be seen as a reflection of competition between models but are immanent in the material itself, both on the rhetorical and ontological levels. For example, the Zohar and much of kabbalistic literature generally are replete with portrayals of the ways the divine and demonic continually enter into dangerous and scandalous relationships with each other. Moreover, some of the most characteristic and profound dimensions of the kabbalistic tradition emerge from the bafflingly never definitively achieved drive to distinguish the divine and the demonic, generating endlessly proliferating discourses and ritual practices. This vast discursive and ritual production, generated by the explosive dynamics between "high" and "low," would have particularly appealed to the Modernist sensibility of a Scholem and must partly account for his fascination with Sabbateanism. This thesis will be concerned, accordingly, with seeking out the rhetorical techniques and ontological doctrines through which the Zohar juxtaposes heterogeneous elements – abstract and concrete, sublime and base, majestic and repulsive. In doing so, I embrace the Scholem tradition's fascination with such phenomena, even while adopting a critical stance in relation to its explanation of them.

B. *Demonic Ambivalence*

From the standpoint of the Zohar's "first palace" – that Janus-faced site which simultaneously looks both upwards and downwards, towards the highest heaven and the lowest hell – the divine and the demonic appear separated by the merest threshold, hardly sufficient for a static foothold, as the ventures of Hosea into the "Other Side" confirm. Unceasing, dangerous movement between the two realms, rather than their definitive and hermetic separation, is thus a central feature of Zoharic ontology. Consequently, just as I seek to identify paradoxical techniques of rhetoric to understand the complex stylistics of

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.

Zoharic discourses on the demonic, so I have sought out a paradoxical and dynamic ontological theory to understand their doctrine.

At this doctrinal level, I will foreground the dynamics of *ambivalence*, 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 often mistaken for the most holy. It is a central contention of this thesis that the dynamics of ambivalence, in a wide variety of permutations, can provide guidance through many of the mysteries of Zoharic texts on the relationship between the divine and the demonic. Though I draw this term from psychoanalytic discourse, I use the notion of ambivalence to include not only the struggles of a subject (or proto-subject) with opposed tendencies, but also the "objective" duality (or proto-duality) of those tendencies themselves – or, more precisely, I show how the dynamics of ambivalence generate both subjects and objects.[50] I will look at these dynamics from two distinct perspectives, *splitting* and *abjection*, the former the focus of Chapter One, the latter of Chapter Two. Taken together, these analyses will, to be sure, elaborate a set of implicit Zoharic "doctrines" – but doctrines that bear within them an intrinsic paradoxicality highly productive for accounting for the texts' baffling formulations and apparent contradictoriness. All three of these notions drawn from psychoanalysis – ambivalence, splitting, and abjection – concern the processes of the formation of subjectivity. As such, however, they are well-suited to explore the formation of those fundamental structures of kabbalistic ontology that are divine and demonic subjects. I will return below to the question of the psychoanalytical provenance of my key analytical terms.

The vicissitudes of the dynamics of ambivalence may be associated with a variety of rhetorical techniques. In Chapter One, the focus will be on rhetorical parallelism; in Chapter

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[50] Freud's elaboration of the dynamics of ambivalence was always intimately related to his dualism, a key, persistent feature of his thought, though taking ever-changing forms. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 53; Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy,* 292. His late 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 dualism, the conflict between "Eros and destructiveness." Freud, 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', 246. In this version, dualism is ultimately located not in the stances of the subject towards the object, but on the level of "*forces*" that precede or transcend the subject. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 293. Almost involuntarily, 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." King, 'Freud's Empedocles: The Future of a Dualism', 24.

Two, on the two-step process of "tropes of limitation" followed by "tropes of representation." I again caution, however, that associations between ontology and rhetoric can be as misleading as they are illuminating. In the remainder of this Introduction, I will foreground the ontological level because introducing its key features requires a substantial discussion of non-Zoharic texts; by contrast, the rhetorical analysis can only be explained in conjunction with the readings of particular Zoharic texts that form the core of the subsequent chapters.

1. Ontological Splitting and Rhetorical Parallelism

Splitting, in psychoanalysis, consists of a set of techniques for the *management* of ambivalence. The experience of acute ambivalence is that of an unbearable tension in which incompatible affects or valorizations are projected onto the same object and/or coexist within the same subject. Splitting may take a wide variety of forms – projection and introjection, idealization and denial, as well as other ways of accomplishing the division between the "good" and the "bad."[51] Such mechanisms not only serve to protect the cherished object from negative valorizations but also serve to protect the integrity of the subject from intolerable contradictions. Thus, on the one hand, the object is doubled into "good" and "bad" forms; on the other hand, the subject is split between its accepted facets, embraced as the true self, and its repressed facets, cast into that space of alterity, the unconscious. Phenomena typical of splitting, most obviously, those of semantic and/or phenomenal doubling, may be taken as evidence of the formative processes whereby coherent subjects and objects, selves and others, come to be. Or, to put it another way, coherent subjects and objects can be viewed as products of splitting.

Ultimately, however, the techniques of splitting are fragile and must be continually re-enacted. The opposed poles of such splits, both internal and external, constantly threaten to flip into one another, producing a sense of unease, a scandalous indeterminacy, an "uncanny" resemblance of things which "should" stand in a relation of opposition.[52] The

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[51] Kristeva, *Melanie Klein,* 107.
[52] 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*

precariousness of "splitting" and the consequent need for its continual re-enactment leads to a proliferation of increasingly menacing doubles.

The pertinence of these phenomena to the demonic was already suggested by Freud, who proposes splitting as the psychological mechanism that generates the Devil. Tellingly, for my purposes, 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" versions, the other concerns the splitting of the self.[53] 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."[54] This single figure was modeled on, or, perhaps more accurately, was a daunting projection of, the human father. The benefit gained by its splitting into two opposite personages was the management of the "ambivalence which governs the relation of the individual to his personal father."[55] 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 instinctual life."[56] 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 thesis. I strongly 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. Splitting may thus be viewed as, paradoxically, both constructing *and* managing ambivalence.

A clear example of the dynamics of splitting, re-enacted with ever-increasing insistence through the history of kabbalah, is the phenomenon of the semantic and/or phenomenal

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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 Levi-Strauss and the philosophers Jacques Derrida and Sarah Kofman.

[53] Rizzuto, 'Freud, God, the Devil and the Theory of Object Representation', 168.

[54] Freud, 'A Seventeenth-Century Demonological Neurosis', 85.

[55] *Ibid.*

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

mirroring between the divine and demonic realms, often associated 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). This association was appropriated and adapted for their own purposes by 13th century kabbalists from a long tradition extending from the Talmud[57] to the *Sefer Yetsirah*[58] to the *Sefer Ha-Bahir*.[59] 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.[60] Indeed, a better Zoharic translation for the Ecclesiastes verse would be "'this' confronted with 'this' hath made the Elohim," since this would retain the semantic repetition [זה...זה] key to this phenomenon whose distinguishing feature is the designation of radically opposed entities with identical, or nearly identical, terms.[61] This insistence on *antithetical homonymy*, with its potential for confusion and indeterminacy, makes the radical distinction that must nonetheless be drawn between these adversarial realms both highly urgent and deeply problematic. As I shall show, the consequent fears of misprision, of taking one realm for the other, which reach their apex in the Sabbatean controversies, already form a key theme in the Zohar and related 13th century texts.[62]

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[57] *bHagigah,* 15a:

שאל אחר את רבי מאיר לאחר שיצא לתרבות רעה אמר ליה מאי דכתיב גם את זה לעמת 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 Holy One blessed be He 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."

[58] *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.

[59] *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.

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

[61] 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 Chapter Two.

[62] On 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.

In the *Sefer Amud Ha-Semali* of Moshe of Burgos, the ominous side of the kabbalistic insistence on correspondences between the two realms is succinctly expressed in its discussion of the first of the ten demonic sefirot.   This text provides two opposed, yet punningly related, traditions concerning the name for this sefirah, which corresponds to *Keter* in the divine realm. The first teaches that its name is *Te'omi'el* [תאומיאל], the "twin God" or "twin of God" – teaching that it and the holy sefirah of *Keter* are "twins in rank" [תאומיות במעלתן].[63] On the other hand, another tradition informs us that it is *Tomi'el* [תומיאל] – which may be translated as "the termination (or death) of God."[64] The text tells us that this second name signifies that it and *Keter* are "not equal in rank and do not match each other [אינן שוות במעלתן ואינן מתאימות]."[65] If we put together these two statements about the relationship between the divine and the demonic, we would obtain the following paradoxical formulation: "מעלות תאומיות שאינן מתאימות," the metaphysical "twins that do not match" or that are "unsuited" or "improper" for each other – which I have taken as my title.

The precariousness of the distinction between the divine and the demonic is reflected in the oscillations in their relative power. Some kabbalistic texts tell us that the demonic "twin" was created for holy purposes, above all to punish the wicked, and thus subordinated to the divine.[66] 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 expressed through 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).[67]

The projection of a normatively inferior realm that rhetorically and/or phenomenally 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

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[63] See Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 211.

[64] 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*.

[65] Moshe of Burgos, *Sefer Amud Ha-Semali*, 212.

[66] *Zohar* I, 146b-47a (*Sitre Torah*). This theme is a minor theme in the Zohar itself and appears more prominently in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*. E.g., *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 10b, 12a, 73a.

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

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 very failure to completely assimilate the colonized that legitimizes the colonizer's power thus also reveals a limit in 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."[68] 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."[69]

Perhaps the clearest instance of the importance of these dynamics of mimicry to divine/demonic relations in the Zohar is the formulation that the demonic is to the divine "as a monkey is beside human beings" [כגוונא דקופא אצל בני נשא].[70] This phrase may be used to suggest the subordination of the demonic and its failure to achieve full resemblance to the

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[68] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* 86.

[69] *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 their 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 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).

[70] See, e.g., *Zohar* II, 148b, III, 189a. The former passage identifies the holy female with the 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 for the Bhabha phrase, "almost the same but not quite." This formulation of the relationship between the 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, rather than between the divine and the demonic. *bBava Batra* 48a.

divine, but it also evokes the destabilizing power of parody.[71] 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. The Zohar highlights the fact that such disturbing homonymy can even affect the highest divine names, such as *El* [אל].[72] The 16th century kabbalist Moshe Corodovero 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].[73] Although Cordovero assures us that this is "no wonder," the Zohar shows us that this homonymy can lead to the gravest form of religious error. Thus, Balaam described himself as one who "heard the words of *El*" [שומע אמרי אל] (Numbers 24:4), intentionally deceiving some into viewing him as a holy prophet, though he secretly intended to refer to the demonic "*El*."[74] Semantic "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 the highest and lowest. Antithetical homonymy – a rhetorical analogue to ontological splitting thoroughly ubiquitous 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.

I note three additional instances of this phenomenon which serve to highlight its generality. First, the Zohar uses the demonstrative pronoun "these" [אלה], the 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 Holy One blessed be He, the *Kudsha Berikh Hu* – and, in some places, the seven sefirot that compose the *Kudsha Berikh Hu* and his

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[71] See, e.g., *Zohar Ḥadash* 8c (*Sitre Otiyot*). In this passage, the letter "ק" is compared to "a monkey which, before a human being, cannot stand" [כקופא קמי בני נשא לית ליה קימא]. 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" [לאתהפכא אתון באומונותא בישא ... עד דנפלי אדם ואתתיה].

[72] Among the many instances of this usage, see *Zohar* III, 193b-194a.

[73] *Pardes*, II, 55a:

<div dir="rtl">ואין תימה מה שנמצא שם אל בדמות הקליפות כי כמו שיש שם אל בצד הקדושה כן יש א״ל אחר</div>

[74] *Zohar* III, 193b-194a.

consort, the Shekhinah.[75] As Cordovero writes, "just as there are 'these' on the side of the *kelipah*, so there are 'these' on the side of holiness"[76] – potentially introducing an element of lethal indeterminacy into any gesture of designation. A second, equally telling, instance may be found in *Sefer Amud Ha-Semali*. According to this text, the word "other" [אחר] – often the very signifier of the demonic in kabbalah – can refer either to the divine or the demonic, again depending on the context.[77] A striking Zoharic example of this is the use in at least one place of the term "*Sitra Aḥra*," "the Other Side," one of the key terms for the demonic realm, to designate the holy realm.[78] A third example, going to the heart of the distinction between the divine and the demonic, concerns the word "left." As Cordovero tells us, "sometimes the Zohar calls the unholy the 'left side' and sometimes the holy – and one needs to distinguish according to the context."[79] Thus, we find in 13th century texts that the words for both the proximate [אלה] and the remote, the other [אחר], are doubled signifiers, rendering a gesture in either direction indeterminate in relation to the distinction between the divine and the demonic – an indeterminacy also found in the word that generally designates the demonic side ("left"). Such instances suggest that the danger of instability and indeterminacy posed by antithetical homonymy goes beyond even the challenge presented by parody.

2. Abjection and Irony, Crystallization and Prosopopeia

As I noted above, Chapter One is largely devoted to exploring the Zoharic construction and management of ambivalence through splitting and its evocation through schemes and tropes. It also shows the ways such splitting is never definitive, indeed, is continually re-enacted, and how the two opposed realms continually threaten to encroach upon each other or to be mistaken for one another. At least in a pre-messianic time, ambivalence thus appears irreducible, as it is the very same mechanisms that construct it, seek to manage it, and destabilize it.

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[75] Compare *Zohar* II, 236b (demonic interpretation) and *Zohar* I, 2a (divine interpretation).
[76] *Pardes*, II, 5c:

וכמו שיש אלה בצד הקליפה כן יש אלה בצד הקדושה

[77] Moshe of Burgos, 'Sefer Amud Ha-Semali', 223.
[78] *Zohar* I, 55a. I note that this passage concerns Abel, as does the example given by Moshe of Burgos.
[79] *Pardes*, II, 42b:

פעמים בזוהר קורא סטרא דשמאלא אל הטמא, ופעמים אל הטהור. וצריך להבחין מתוך הענין

Even though it is a dynamic process, however, splitting is an insufficient frame for reading the Zoharic *Sitra Aḥra*. Splitting and its associated rhetorical techniques are useful for reading Zoharic portrayals of the *Sitra Aḥra* as a mighty, antagonistic realm, a formidable rival to the divine realm to which it bears such a troubling resemblance. Yet equally persistent Zoharic themes concern far more intimate relationships between the two realms. I refer to portrayals of the genealogy, vitality, and nurturance of the demonic as deriving from the divine (or, especially in the case of its initial emergence, the proto-divine) – more precisely, from the (proto-)divine's waste products, filth, malignant growths, fallen desires, and so on.

Passages that bring together these two cardinal notions – the highly organized structure of the mighty realm of the *Sitra Aḥra*, on the one hand, and its emergence from, and dependence on, the flimsy, inchoate, and diseased byproducts of the (proto-)divine, as well as its seductive relationship to the divine, on the other – feature the most provocative catachreses, the most baffling, flagrantly incoherent images. Two examples, both of which will serve as frequent touchstones for my entire analysis, can serve to quickly evoke this technique. The first is the Zohar's assertion that the ten sefirot of the *Sitra Aḥra*, the entire demonic realm, "cling to the *zohama*[80] of the fingernail" [אחידן בזוהמא דטופרא] of the Shekhinah.[81] This portrayal is not merely theologically scandalous (which would not be surprising or unusual in the Zohar), but constitutes an evidently deliberate catachresis, a suturing together of utterly heterogeneous images – not to mention a rather precarious physical situation, if one takes its phenomenal evocation seriously. How can that most flimsy and unstable basis, fingernail filth, support the mighty and highly organized demonic realm, an "entire other world"?[82] A second example comes from the writing of Joseph of Hamadan, a contemporary, perhaps a member, of the circle of the Zohar, in a passage closely related to the Zoharic spirit. This kabbalist portrays the demonic realm as nurtured

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[80] *Zohama,* זוהמא, may be translated as "filth," "slime," "refuse," or "scum," depending on the context. Because, it appears in a number of different phenomenal contexts in Zoharic discussions of the *Sitra Aḥra,* and yet seems clearly intended to evoke a similar set of associations, I will simply transliterate it in this dissertation. The Zoharic usage seems to me intended to evoke its Talmudic provenance in a context evoking perverse and repulsive sexuality. See my discussion below, at pp. 192-193.

[81] *Zohar* III, 70a. See also *Zohar* II, 207b-208b and Dorit Cohen-Aloro, 'Me-Ḥokhmeta Ila'ah Le-Ḥokhmeta De-Tarfe De-Ilana: Ha-Kishuf Be-Sefer Ha-Zohar', 31–66.

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

from the excretory orifice of the divine phallus.[83] This very different image poses an even more theologically shocking notion, as well as an equally baffling image, again especially if one takes its phenomenal evocation seriously. In both cases, the images defy the possibility of accounting for the stable grounding that a persistent, powerful, and highly structured demonic realm seems to require, and of providing for even a minimally theologically acceptable explanation of its relationship to the divine.

Tishby's approach to explaining this paradox, that the *Sitra Aḥra* is at once an independent, adversarial realm *and* intimately related to the divine, serves only to heighten its baffling quality. For Tishby, the dependence of the demonic on the divine, for example at a genealogical level, should be seen as an attempt to mitigate the dualism between them, particularly the stark dualism expressed in the portrayals of their relationship as homologous.[84] This interpretation, however, misses the import of the relationships of dynamic 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 – which may be described as monstrous births, perverse sexuality, and parasitical nurturance – and of the theological scandals they involve (scandals only magnified by the paltriness of the attempts to rationalize them). Rather than a mitigating retreat from a sharply demarcated dualism, such dynamic relationships of intimacy between the two realms suggest a deeper, more primordial, and ultimately more disturbing link than splitting.

Indeed, the ambivalence expressed through the various forms of splitting may even seem like a secondary phenomenon in comparison with this more intimate level. At this deeper level, the Zohar discusses the baffling processes through which various kinds of inchoate refuse emerge from the divine, even from the highest levels of the divine, and subsequently crystallize into a highly structured and powerful demonic realm. Such passages implicitly draw our attention to a level of intimacy between the divine and the demonic that precedes the emission of such refuse, a troubling and mysterious intimacy that can scarcely be named. Dynamic intimacy then persists after the crystallization of the demonic, in the relationships

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[83] *Sefer Tashak,* 267-268 & 278-279. Cordovero discusses these passages in *Pardes,* I, 34b.
[84] Tishby, *MZ*, I, 292.

of desire and nurturance. This deeper level thus not only concerns a "temporally prior" process, but also the generation of ongoing desire and need.

Tishby and other followers of Scholem discuss the emission of refuse from the divine through the notion of "*catharsis.*"[85] There has, however, always been a good deal of imprecision in the way this notion has been used in academic kabbalah scholarship. The Scholem tradition has tended to employ this notion in the form of an unreflective amalgam of a range of meanings bequeathed by the texts of Plato, Aristotle, Freud, and others – and the differences and ambiguities both intrinsic to those texts and accentuated by generations of divergent commentators. While this is not the place to discuss that history in depth, the kinship between the range of meanings of catharsis in the Western tradition and a corresponding range in kabbalah scholarship compels a brief excursus on it.

For my purposes here, some of the key meanings bequeathed by history include the Platonic literal or figurative detachment of the soul from the body,[86] as well as the medical expulsion of toxicities from the body, and the perfection of the body through physical training.[87] 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, the curing of ignorance through instruction.[88] Aristotle, in turn, introduced the use of the term to refer to the effect produced by the theatrical representation of highly charged dramatic situations – a usage whose meaning 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.[89] These two broad categories may be roughly associated with the second and third meanings of catharsis in the *Sophist* cited above. I note, however, that commentators have even debated whether Aristotle's notion of the rectification achieved through dramatic representation concerns the subjectivity of the audience or rather the

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[85] Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra*, 42-43; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 267.
[86] E.g., Plato, *Phaedo*, 67c-68b, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 50.
[87] For the last two of these, see Plato, *Sophist*, 226d-231b, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 970-971.
[88] *Ibid.*
[89] Keesey, 'On Some Recent Interpretations of Catharsis', 193.

objective situation enacted on the stage[90] -- or, alternatively, whether the term has both "internal and external" references,[91] or even was chosen deliberately for its ambiguity, its capacity to bear a range of meanings.[92] 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 itself in the privacy of the analytical situation.[93]

Each of these distinct notions of catharsis has a correlate in kabbalah scholarship, and, a bit more distantly, in the texts it has sought to interpret by their means. Rather than go through those correlates in detail here, I note two key questions about the 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 to the subject, such as a literal or figurative stage, or is it a process that takes place primarily in the interior of the subject? One can associate the former position with an "instrumental" understanding of kabbalistic catharsis, the intentional production of harsh forces by God to punish evildoers, and the latter position with the notion that it is God who is struggling with an internal impurity – or even, the notion which I will develop below, that this struggle is a pre-condition for the constitution of a coherent divine subjectivity, a notion that may take us beyond the limits of the idea of catharsis.[94] Second, if one adopts the latter position, is the impurity which 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 destructively "purged"? One can associate the former of these positions with texts that envision integration of the *Sitra Aḥra* into the divine, the latter with texts that envision its ultimate destruction.

[90] 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.
[91] Paskow, 'What Is Aesthetic Catharsis?', 64.
[92] Sparshott, 'The Riddle of Katharsis', 26.
[93] For a comparison of the Aristotelian and Freudian notions, see Rieff, *Freud, the Mind of the Moralist*, 347-348.
[94] Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra*, 42-43.

In relation to divine catharsis, it is not obvious which of the latter two alternatives is more theologically provocative – the notion 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, whichever of these options is favored, it seems shocking that divine catharsis would be something that needs to be re-enacted repeatedly throughout cosmic history – indeed, that such repetitions would in a way *constitute that history* – rather than being achieved in one gesture. In addition, all the meanings of catharsis cited above seem ill-equipped to account for the kabbalistic account of the ongoing relationship 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. Finally, they shed light on the coexistence in kabbalah of seemingly incompatible views about the nature and fate of the *Sitra Aḥra*. As Scholem notes, the antithetical notions that the fate of the *Sitra Aḥra* is to be annihilated and that it is to be integrated into the holy realm are both equally "plausible" within the kabbalistic tradition;[95] such antithetical views 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 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 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 the Zohar 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.[96] The insistent link in kabbalistic texts between the

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[95] See Scholem, *On the Mystical Structure of the Godhead,* 77.
[96] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'Horreur, passim*, esp. p. 9-67.

constitution, perfection, and purgation 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.

The theory of abjection is a portrayal of the formation of subjectivity which highlights the latter's belated and ultimately pyrrhic 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 ways in which ambivalence towards this "abject" is irreducible. It requires nearly impossible portrayals of the 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 a certain intrinsic paradoxicality which can go a long way to illuminating many of the Zohar's baffling formulations and seeming contradictoriness 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 suited for understanding the generation of the cosmic structures and the divine and demonic personages which are the Zohar's main ontological focus and for the stylistic virtuosities which are its rhetorical hallmark.

Kristeva portrays the emergence of subjectivity out of a primordial space that precedes both the subject and its objects. The literal referent of such an image would be the fused state of mother and child, but its strict description would avoid even such language as too dyadic – and might rather favor a formulation such as "the archaism of the pre-objectal relationship."[97] Out of this primordial space, subjectivity begins to emerge by a process of violent separation between a proto-subject and its proto-object. This proto-object is that from which the nascent subject must be separated as a prerequisite to a separate identity – a

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[97] *Ibid.*, 17.

process necessarily involving "the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be." [98] 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."[99] That from which the proto-subject separates itself, consequently, does not appear either as a neutral or fully constituted "object," and must be negatively charged in the extreme – for it represents the threat of the collapse of the fragile, nascent subject. It appears, therefore, as inchoate stuff, repulsive miasma: the "abject." In sum: the emergence of the subject with a bounded identity must be preceded by the "abjection" of inchoate desires and physical elements, expelled to the 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.

The first proto-object confronted by the proto-subect is a source of terror, for it threatens the subject with disintegration, with collapse back into the state of undifferentiation from which it emerged. The emergence of the subject is thus, for Kristeva, indissociable from the emergence of the terrifying abject – a terror augmented, rather than mitigated, by the latter's inchoate state and by the fact that the proto-subject and the abject have 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.[100]

The abjected elements that are expelled "outside" the subject originate in a primordial undifferentiated space in which no "inside" or "outside" yet exists. Given this primordial kinship, the subject can no more definitively separate itself from the abject than it can completely assimilate it. The abject, therefore, persistently haunts the subject as a continual

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[98] *Ibid.*
[99] *Ibid.*, 20.
[100] *Ibid.*, 11.

source of anxiety about its identity and integrity.   It also poses a persistent temptation for the subject, luring it to plunge into the abyss of non-meaning – a return to that primordial state "as sheltering as it is smothering."

Experiences that evoke the abject, particularly those that put clearly defined boundaries into question, can severely shake the subject's sense of its own bounded identity. Indeed, it is not only the "absence of cleanness/propriety [*propreté*] or health" as such that evokes this experience, but everything that "disturbs an identity, a system, an order."[101]   The experience of the terror of abjection that threatens to collapse the fragile boundaries of the subject can be evoked, at its most archaic, by rot, feces, refuse, all that physical *stuff* that has no boundaries and thereby threatens to erode the boundaries of the "*propre*" (a French word that can signify both cleanliness and the state of belonging to the self). 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."[102]

Horrifyingly, the inchoate elements which the subject must expel to its outer borders in order to achieve a bounded identity eventually crystallize and confront the subject as a definite and antagonistic object. This monstrous object, secretly inhabited by the abject, poses a new and distinct threat to the subject's identity. Kriseva compares these two states of the abject – borderline and object – in this passage on the relationship between refuse and corpses:

> [R]efuse, like the corpse, indicates to me what I must perpetually exclude in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this excrement are what life barely tolerates, and then only on pain of death.   I am there at the boundary of my status as a living being. My body detaches itself from this boundary in order to be a living being. This refuse falls away in order for me to live …. If ordure signifies the other side of the boundary, where I am not, and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most repugnant refuse, is a boundary that has invaded everything. It is no longer I

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[101] *Ibid.*, 12.
[102] *Ibid.*

who expel. "I" is expelled. The boundary has become an object. … That elsewhere that I imagine beyond this present … is now here, cast, abjected, into "my" world. Deprived of world, therefore, I pass out.[103]

This transformation of the "borderline" into an "object" is as paradoxical as it is terrifying. That which begins as part of the undifferentiated archaic state becomes an inchoate abject that emerges to confront a 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 subject. The inchoate has become a lethal adversary – or, to use a Zoharic play on words: the *pesolet* [פסולת; refuse] has become a *pesel* [פסל; an idol, i.e., for the Zohar, a personified diabolical adversary]. [104]

It is from this paradoxical standpoint that Kristeva locates all those cultural and religious attempts to codify, and defend against, the "abject" – codifications that take this transformation of the "borderline" into an "object" as the theme of elaborate discursive classifications and ritual practices, seeking thereby to conjure away its threatening quality. Kristeva offers the biblical laws about impurity, including both dietary prohibitions and impurities arising from sex and death, as a key example. For Kristeva, "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."[105]

Kristeva's portrayal of abjection also shows the ultimate impossibility of a completely successful "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."[106] 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. On the contrary, "re-

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[103] *Ibid.*, 11.
[104] *Zohar* II, 91a.
[105] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 110.
[106] *Ibid.*, 12.

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birth," or any kind of internal or external creative work, can only be achieved "with *and* against abjection."[107]

Indeed, the codifications of the abject are inhabited by the very forces they would conjure away and increasingly come to resemble them, becoming cognitively and religiously menacing doubles: "Defilement now comes to be that which damages symbolic univocality, that is, simulacra, *ersatzes*, doubles, idols"[108] – again recalling the Zoharic *pesolet/pesel* pun cited above, as well as the antithetical homonyms that pervade kabbalistic designations of the relationship between the divine and the demonic.   Such doubles – crystallized out of that which has 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."[109] 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 enemy: it is these paradoxical developments that make Kristeva's portrayal of abjection so productive for grappling with the kabbalistic demonic. 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 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 *Sitra Aḥra* in the 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

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[107] *Ibid.*, 39 (emphasis added).
[108] *Ibid.*, 123.
[109] Freud, 'The Uncanny', 140. Freud is here quoting Schopenhauer.

diverse modes of the purification of the abject, the diverse catharses, constitute the history of religions ….[110]

The weakening, or collapse, of traditional religious codifications of the abject results in its "reappearance" – leading in turn either to new codifications of the abject, or to more daring attempts to give it linguistic form as in, according to Kristeva, the avant-garde writing of the late 19th and early 20th century, a response to the weakening of inherited cultural codes. The upsurge of fascination with the demonic in emerging kabbalistic circles in the 12th and 13th centuries could be viewed as, at least in part, a response to a weakening of such traditional codifications (perhaps partly under the impact of the philosophical critique of the tradition); the interest in this dimension of Jewish religious history by Scholem and others in the early 20th century could, in turn, be viewed as part of the general Modernist fascination with the abject described by Kristeva.

Kristeva's portrayal of subjectivity provides a powerful framework for reading the vicissitudes of the portrayal of the demonic in the Zohar and other 13th century texts – in particular, the emergence of the demonic from the refuse of the (proto-)divine, an emergence that precedes the full constitution of divine structures and personages; the crystallization of this refuse into the mighty realm of the *Sitra Aḥra*; and the ongoing and dangerous relationships of desire, nurturance, and impersonation between the divine and the demonic. Moreover, if we accept Kristeva's portrayal, all constructions of subjectivity – including divine subjectivity – are precarious, due to the fact that they rest on the abjection of elements from which the subject both must and cannot fully separate itself. 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 are all illuminated through this framework. The proliferation of discursive and ritual practices in kabbalah aimed at either assimilating or destroying the demonic can be apprehended as attempts at codification and domestication of the abject in the face of its ever-renewed resurfacing, bringing with it the most severe anxiety about the collapse or corruption of human and divine subjectivity. The ambivalence

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[110] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs,* 17.

about the demonic which is so abundantly expressed in kabbalistic texts, and the techniques of splitting aimed at managing it, may also be viewed as an outcome of the dynamics of abjection. 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 is that which both is and is not a part of the (divine) subject, as well as both subordinate and not subordinate to it.

Thus, 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.[111]

The numerous variations in kabbalistic writings on the genealogy, nurturance, seductiveness, mimicry, and power of the demonic can be seen as attempts to wrestle with this irreducible, indeterminate, and bewilderingly ubiquitous threat that "emanates from an exorbitant outside or inside" – more precisely, from a not-yet-demarcated place, or even non-place, that precedes the distinction between inside and outside. Kristeva's work also thereby sheds light on why the "emanation" (Kristeva's term here)/"*atsilut*" of the "abject"/"left side" was viewed by many kabbalists as the most profound secret. Or, to use the Zohar's image, it illuminates why "few are those who know how to evoke the Work of Creation through the mystery of the Great Dragon," as well as why "the whole world," perhaps including divine subjectivity, "unfolds only" upon this dragon's "fins."[112]

I caution, however, that, although Kristeva's portrayal of abjection will loom heavily in the background of my analysis, I will not simply make a mechanical application of it. Indeed,

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[111] *Ibid.*, 9-10.
[112] *Zohar* II, 34b.

one of the appeals of Kristeva's portrayal is the way some of its aspects pose challenges to univocal narratives, explanations, or even normal 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 Modernist avant-garde (Kristeva's concern) and 13th century kabbalah (my concern).

C. Overview of the Dissertation

In this Introduction, I have suggested two different mechanisms underlying portrayals of the demonic in the Zohar, those of *splitting* and *abjection.* I associated the first with an effort to preserve the integrity of a constituted entity – such as "the father" or "the ego" in Freud or divine figures and structures in kabbalah – from the threat posed by the cohabitation of incompatible values and desires. I associated the second with the primordial dynamics of identity-formation, in which the constitution of a bounded subject requires the dissociation of a primal state of undifferentiation – a dissociation necessarily violent and incomplete, leading to the formation of a proto-subject and an inchoate abject, and ultimately to a subject warding off an invasive abject at its borderline or confronting a powerfully threatening object in the form of a fully constituted adversary.   The literal referent of this process, for Kristeva, is that of the nascent subject's separation from the maternal body – though in this case, as in the first, the process precedes its referents and even constitutes them.   These two mechanisms correspond to what Kristeva calls the "double-faced sacred" [*le sacré bi-face*].[113]

The second of these portrayals, that of abjection, may be taken as the deeper of the two, since it explores the constitution of the subjects and objects whose splitting is the affair of the first portrayal. Portrayals of abjection 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

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[113] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 72-73. I do not intend this correspondence with Kristeva as an exact identification with her description.

"interlaced with fear and repulsion."[114] Nonetheless, the evocation of splitting in the Zohar coexists with the portrayals of the processes of abjection and may not be reduced to them. The Zohar lives within the ambivalences it evokes, rather than masterfully deploying them in the service of a doctrine, even a doctrine as paradoxical as abjection. The textual complexity of passages focused on both sorts of processes forecloses a reduction of one to the other – just as it forecloses the reduction of the rhetorical dimension to its putative ontological referents.

Each of the first two chapters of this thesis takes as its primary focus one of these two mechanisms, although there will, of necessity, be some overlap between them. Chapter One primarily focuses on the construction and management of ambivalence in terms of ontological and rhetorical splitting between the divine and demonic. Chapter Two focuses on the portrayal of ambivalence in terms of abjection, the relationships of genealogy, desire, and nurturance between the divine and demonic, relationships whose paradoxical and recurrent trajectories lead from the abjected refuse of the divine; to the crystallization of the demonic; to a fully structured adversarial realm. At the rhetorical level, this process leads from "tropes of limitation" – such as irony, for example, the irony of the primordial divine plenitude emitting some form of inchoate refuse – to "tropes of representation" – whose fullest expression would be the crystallization of that inchoate refuse into a fully constituted structure, such as the ten demonic sefirot homologous to the divine sefirot, and, even more so, the personages of Lilith and Sama'el. I caution again that the rhetorical techniques and substantive portrayals of the demonic overlap but do not neatly correspond – and at times, their non-correspondence is one of the ways a Zoharic text produces its effects.

In Chapter Three, I turn to two polar consequences of the processes describes in the preceding chapters. First, I turn to the portrayal of a world thoroughly pervaded by the crystallization of a mighty demonic realm denominated by the same names as that of 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 that 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

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[114] *Ibid.*, 73.

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. 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 abyss, the *tehom*. In this section, I show how Zoharic texts on the *tehom* portray it as the ultimate danger to meaning, but also as the ultimate resource for new meaning: a return to the primordial source, a return fraught with the possibility of catastrophe, can also show the way to unlocking reification and re-opening creativity.

Finally, in the Conclusion, through bringing together some of the most radical suggestions about the relationship of the "improper twins" throughout the thesis, I suggest some consequences of Zoharic mythology for thinking about "Otherness" of all varieties.

Two final notes. First, a note of caution about my recourse to psychoanalytic terminology. 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. Scholem's complex and vexed relationship to psychoanalysis has already been discussed by a variety of scholars.[115] Nonetheless, I wish to use the concepts of ambivalence, splitting, and abjection heuristically, as a way of reading, organizing, and making sense of the heterogeneous portrayals of the demonic fundamental to the Zohar and much of kabbalistic literature. Moreover, although a demonstration of this point would go far beyond the scope of this thesis, I think 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 notion that has nothing in common with fanciful notions of the "influence" of kabbalah on Freud). Both terminologies, I would propose, contribute to reflecting on some of the deepest truths and may be used to illuminate each other.

Finally, I note that I generally favor the term "*Sitra Aḥra*," the "Other Side," to designate the demonic. Although the term "demonic" is often used in English-language scholarship, and although I will often also use this term, it raises a number of difficulties. In particular, it can

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[115] See Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*, 187-199.

cause a confusion between the metaphysical structures and the ruling personages of the evil realm, on the one hand, and the everyday "demons" [שדים, *shedim*] who have permeated the everyday life of the rabbinic and popular imagination since at least Talmudic times, on the other. Though I will at times distinguish between "devils" for the former category and "demons" for the latter, the general use of the word "demonic" for *Sitra Aḥra* in the secondary literature makes this distinction impractical to follow consistently. There are, moreover, more affirmative reasons for using the term *Sitra Aḥra*, due to its stressing 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 perhaps the major theme of this study.

Chapter One:
Reading the Sitra Ahra

A. Two Models of the Sitra Ahra? Essence, Geography, Structure

In *Mishnat Ha-Zohar,* Isaiah Tishby structures his overview of the Zohar's vast literature on the demonic by positing a tension within the work between a "dualistic tendency" and "restrictions on dualism."[1]   At the level of the history of ideas, Tishby links these two "tendencies" in the Zohar with, respectively, the "pessimistic" vision he attributes to Gnosticism and the "optimistic" vision he attributes to Neoplatonism. At the hermeneutic level, Tishby uses this general dichotomy to interpret the relationship among Zoharic passages that present dramatically contrasting images of the *Sitra Aḥra*. At the compositional level, Tishby asserts that the "internal contradictions" in the Zohar's portrayal of the *Sitra Aḥra* are a product 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."[2]

Tishby deploys his general framework of two opposing "tendencies" as a way of organizing the Zohar's heterogeneous portrayals of the relationship of the *Sitra Aḥra* to the holy realm.   In the terms I broached in the Introduction, the difference between Tishby's two "tendencies" turns on the sharpness with which the technique of "splitting" between the divine and the demonic is implemented. In Tishby's reading, the "dualistic" tendency works towards a greater implementation of the splitting technique; the tendency engaged in "restrictions on dualism" works to mitigate that implementation.

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[1] Tishby, *MZ*, I, 288 [מגמה דואליסטית...וסייגי השניות]. The overview of Tishby that follows is based on *ibid.*, 285-288.

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

Tishby's discussion of the two "tendencies" in the Zohar's portrayal of the relationship between the *Sitra Aḥra* and the holy realm may be divided along three key axes: the *geography* of the *Sitra Aḥra* in relation to the holy realm, the *structure* of the *Sitra Aḥra* in comparison with the holy realm, and the *essence* of the *Sitra Aḥra* in contrast to that of the holy realm. Though he does not use these terms, Tishby implicitly argues that the Zohar presents competing images of the *Sitra Aḥra* along each of these axes.

The competing *geographical images* concern the site of the *Sitra Aḥra*, its location in relation to the holy realm. According to one set of images, the demonic resides, in normal times, in absolute separation from the holy realm, in the "crevice of the great abyss" [נוקבא דתהומא רבא, *nukva di-tehoma raba*].[3] The denizens of this abyss can approach the holy realm only in times of the *Sitra Aḥra*'s lamentable ascendancy, brought about particularly by human sin. According to a second set of images, the *Sitra Aḥra* normally resides in the closest proximity to some aspect of the holy realm, often the Shekhinah. It is only banished to remote regions when it violates its proper task in relation to the divine. Tishby correlates these two *geographical* images of the *Sitra Aḥra* with two competing understandings of its *essence*: the remote *Sitra Aḥra* with the "dualistic tendency" in the Zohar, its more "pessimistic," "Gnostic" side, in which the *Sitra Aḥra* is absolutely opposed to the divine, and the proximate *Sitra Aḥra* with the more "optimistic," "Neoplatonic" vision, in which the *Sitra Aḥra* is only contingently opposed to the divine and may even come to serve as its ally.

Tishby also correlates these competing notions of the geographical relationship between the divine and the demonic with competing *structural* images of the *Sitra Aḥra*. One set of structural images of the *Sitra Aḥra* in the Zohar stresses the "complete parallelism"[4] between the holy and unholy realms, a structural relationship that I prefer to call "homology," for reasons I will explain below. Tishby highlights a number of Zoharic homologies between the holy and unholy dimensions: each side contains ten sefirot,[5] seven "breaths" [הבלים, corresponding to the seven lower sefirot], three "knots" [קשרים,

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[3] *Ibid.*, 300. This phrase appears numerous times in the Zohar, e.g., II, 163b & 173b.
[4] *Ibid.*, 289 [הקבלה שלימה].
[5] *Zohar* III, 70a.

corresponding, in the holy realm, to the left, right, and central columns of the sefirotic tree],[6] seven palaces [היכלות],[7] a "king and priest" (associated, in the holy realm, with the sefirot of *Binah* and *Ḥesed*), a male and a female personification (a *partsuf*, to use the Lurianic term), and so on.[8] By contrast, a second kind of imagery is unconcerned with such correspondences. Rather, taking seriously the phenomenal image implied in the word *kelipot* ("husks," "peels," or "shells"), the *Sitra Aḥra* is viewed in these passages as a series of layers wrapped around the holy dimension – a structure I call that of "concentricity."[9]

Tishby strongly correlates the structural relationship of homology between the holy and unholy realm with specific alternatives along the other axes I have identified. First, he argues that the geographical notion of the *Sitra Aḥra* as radically distant from the holy realm fits with the structural notion of homology (again, the terms here are mine). He specifically makes a correlation between the remote *Sitra Aḥra* and the notion of ten unholy sefirot parallel to the ten holy sefirot,[10] 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 *Sitra Aḥra*, Tishby associates homology between the holy and unholy realms with dualism, on the ground that it implies direct competition between two comparable realms – the notion of "'this' confronted with 'this'" [זה לעומת זה] (Ecclesiastes 7:14).[11] 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 *Sitra Aḥra* as a series of *kelipot* wrapped around the "*mo'aḥ*," [מח , or Aramaic *moḥa,* מוחא], the kernel,

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[6] *Zohar* II, 38a.
[7] *Zohar* II, 263a.
[8] Tishby, *MZ*, I, 288.
[9] 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, 'Iggulim 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.
[10] Tishby, *MZ*, I, 300.
[11] *Ibid.*, 301.

the essence – or even, the "brain" or, more figuratively, "consciousness"[12] – a term used to designate the holy realm. This structure consists of either three or four *kelipot* surrounding the *mo'aḥ* of holiness. Although the term, "*kelipah*," may be used, especially in later strata of the Zohar, as a general synonym for the *Sitra Aḥra*, the passages that use it to portray a concentric image of the structural relationship of the unholy and holy realms take very seriously the phenomenal image it evokes.[13] This phenomenal image entails geographical contiguity between the holy and the unholy. 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 holiness and unholiness, and, to use Tishby's term, forms a "kind of bridge" between the two realms.[14] A passage in the Zohar Ḥadash even states that it is "joined" or "clings" to the *moḥa* (מתאחד במוחא).[15] 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 *moḥa* means that it is not truly a *kelipah*, an ambivalence I explore below. In any case, though both the homology and concentricity models posit a "split" between the divine and the demonic, that split is far less sharp in the latter model, with *nogah* placed indeterminately in relation to the divide.

Tishby argues 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 three or four *kelipot*, rather than ten levels as in the holy realm, is only one indication of a deeper difference between the two structural conceptions concerning the essence of the *Sitra Aḥra* – viz., that the *kelipah/mo'aḥ* structure portrays it as less "Other." Tishby thus believes that the concentric *kelipot* pose a lesser threat precisely because of their lesser degree of resemblance to the holy dimension – again, recalling the paradoxical

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

[13] 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.

[14] Tishby, *MZ*, 301 [מעין גשר].

[15] *Zohar Ḥadash* 38a-b:

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

And all these are *kelipot* for the *moḥa* that they surround; this within this; and this within this. And this fire, it 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*.

relationship between resemblance and menace.   Even leaving aside geographical proximity, Tishby views structural concentricity as lending itself more to an interpretation of the *kelipot* as subsidiary to the holy, indeed, as potential allies of the holy realm.

Tishby seeks to highlight these differences between homology and concentricity by contrasting the first level of the *Sitra Aḥra* in each of the two structural conceptions. In one passage in the Zohar describing the ten-sefirot structure, the first level is the darkest and most frightening, associated with Sama'el and Lilith, here called "shadow" and "death."[16] In the three- or four-*kelipot* structure, by contrast, the first level is that of *nogah*, the "innermost" of all the *kelipot*. As I have noted, *nogah* contains within itself both good and evil and may, as we shall see, accomplish both holy and unholy acts.   A comparison of these two "first levels" of the *Sitra Aḥra* thus suggests a form of "splitting" that divides the demonic itself into a bad and a less bad, even potentially good, form.

To summarize: Tishby implicitly argues for a correlation between rival positions on three axes: the essence of the *Sitra Aḥra* in relation to the holy (dualism *versus* "restricted dualism"), its geography (remoteness *versus* proximity), and its structure (homology *versus* concentricity).   He thus posits two coherent visions of the *Sitra Aḥra*: 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 different traditions, or two different authors or groups of authors, which have both been placed at some point by compilers within the "*Sefer Ha-Zohar*."[17]

I argue 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*. At the simplest level, one could

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[16] *Zohar* II, 242b.
[17] On the problematic quality of the Zohar as a "book," see above, p. 10, n. 1.

easily show that many of the vast number of passages in the Zohar on the *Sitra Aḥra*
contain elements of both of Tishby's ideal-types. Far from lining up specific stances on
essence, geography, and structure to form a coherent image of the *Sitra Aḥra* in the way
that Tishby's argument would lead one to expect, such passages present a variety of
combinations of such stances 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 as a haphazard yoking together of different perspectives
nor as a strained product of an arduous "mental struggle." Rather, the 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.

Surprisingly, the very passage Tishby gives as his prime instance of the proximity of the
demonic and the divine is itself a text in which the *Sitra Aḥra* is portrayed in accordance
with the ten-sefirot structure – a juxtaposition of structural homology with geographical
proximity. This text, which I cited in the Introduction, declares that the ten demonic
sefirot are attached to the Shekhinah, albeit to a rather unpleasant aspect of her:

תא חזי, קודשא בריך הוא אפיק עשר כתרין עטרין קדישין לעילא, דאתעטר בהו ומתלבש בהו, והוא
אינון ואינון הוא, כשלהובא דאחידא 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 [18]

> Come and see. *Kudsha Berikh Hu* [the Holy One blessed be He] 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 *zohama* of the fingernail of a holy diadem,
> which is called *Ḥokhmah* [Wisdom – here, the *Shekhinah*]. And, therefore, they
> are called *Ḥokhmot* [wisdoms].

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[18] *Zohar* III, 70a.

In this passage, the Zohar's language stresses the homology between the two realms, using a single term, "ten crowns," to describe the holy and unholy sefirot, and two versions of a single term to describe the unholy sefirot and the holy sefirah to which they are immediately joined (Wisdom/Wisdoms; חכמה/חכמות). At the same time, the passage portrays the ten holy sefirot as geographically proximate to the ten unholy sefirot, a geographical stance to which Tishby draws our attention despite its seeming incompatibility, within his general framework, with structural homology. Moreover, this proximity is described in a manner which sets up a homology between the relationship of the divine to the holy sefirot, on the one hand, and the divine to the demonic sefirot, on the other. In the case of the former relationship, that of *Kudsha Berikh Hu* to the holy sefirot, we are told, "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]; in the case of the relationship of the unholy realm to the Shekhinah, we are told, "and they are joined [*aḥidan*] to the *zohama* of the fingernail of a holy diadem" [ואינון אחידן בזוהמא דטופרא דחד עטרא קדישא].

The comparison of the two "joinings" is central to the force of the passage and its elements of similarity and contrast compel our attention. Both portray intimate connections on the phenomenal level – but these connections stand in deep contrast to each other, the one beautiful, the other repulsive. These phenomenal similarities and differences are highlighted, at the rhetorical level, by the use of some of the same terms to describe both connections. The language of the passage thus compels us to ponder the relationship between two "joinings," that of the highest divine level to the sefirot and of the divine to the demonic realms – just as it calls out for us to ponder the shocking fact that the structurally homologous "ten crowns" of the demonic reside in the closest proximity to the Shekhinah. Though the assertion of identification, in the first part of the excerpt, between *Kudsha Berikh Hu* and the holy sefirot is absent from the description, in the second part of the excerpt, of the relationship of the Shekhinah to the unholy sefirot, the use of the same verb to describe the two relationships ("joined", *ahida/ahidan*) calls out for the reader to ponder the extent of the difference between them. These provocative challenges, whose force depends on a paradoxical deployment of heterogeneous images, is a key feature of the literary power of this passage, as well as of Zoharic writing

generally. I would even say that the demand it makes that the reader contemplate these paradoxical relationships may be the very "point" of the passage.

I cited this passage in my Introduction, arguing that it presents a general puzzle, that of the relationship between two sets of cardinal Zoharic portrayals of the *Sitra Aḥra*: those highlighting the power and highly organized structure of the demonic, on the one hand, and those portraying the emergence of the demonic through abjection, that is, from the refuse of the divine, on the other. The "fingernail *zohama*" passage sets forth both of these portrayals, precisely by means of its defiance of Tishby's framework through its juxtaposition of structural homology and geographical proximity. Indeed, it creates a complex form of homology between the divine and the demonic through juxtaposing two homologous images of proximity (*Kudsha Berikh Hu* to the holy sefirot and the Shekhinah to the unholy sefirot), on the level of tropes, and utilizing parallel textual constructions to portray these two images, on the level of constructional schemes. The notion that the weighty and mighty structure of the unholy sefirot maintains itself in a most precarious fashion, clinging to the most flimsy of supports, the dirt under the fingernail of the Shekhinah, expresses the baffling relationship of simultaneous independence and dependence that the demonic bears to the divine.

This passage is neither "dualistic" nor "anti-dualistic," nor does it show a "mental struggle" between them: rather, its paradoxes are a powerful expression of the uncanniness of the concurrent absolute opposition and intimate connection between the two realms. "Dualism" and "anti-dualism," homology and concentricity, remoteness and proximity: all become so many textual devices to provoke this sense of uncanniness. This uncanniness also ultimately expresses the urgency and precariousness of the technique of splitting as a management of ambivalence. That the link between the two realms is that of refuse, the "*zohama* of the fingernail," also powerfully serves to highlight the notion that that which emerges through abjection of refuse can come to take on the form of a highly structured and formidable realm – a notion I broached in the Introduction but will only fully explore in Chapter Two.

Juxtapositions of seemingly contradictory images are no less striking when we come to passages that foreground the "concentric" portrayal of the *Sitra Aḥra*. The Zohar passage that portrays the *kelipot* at their most benign is an elaborate development of the concentricity image, a seeming proof-text for Tishby's understanding of *kelipah-mo'aḥ* imagery. It is, however, immediately preceded by a passage portraying a thoroughly evil, personified female *kelipah* – a clear evocation of Lilith, though she is not named. These two passages, the "benign *kelipah*" passage and the "Lilith-*kelipah*" passage are presented in the text as continuous – indeed, I will proceed to read them as if they formed a single passage of which they form sub-passages. A detailed analysis of the puzzling relationship between these two continuous yet opposed sub-passages raises in acute form the problematic quality of Tishby's models.

The "benign *kelipah*" sub-passage, at I:19b-20a, describes the relationship between *kelipah* and *mo'aḥ* as complementary – as body to mind, as a protective covering to a protected essence, and as a garment to the body.

וכלא אצטריך קב"ה למברי בעלמא ולאתקנא עלמא בהו, וכלא מוחא לגו, וכמה קליפין חפיין למוחא, וכל עלמא כהאי גוונא עילא ותתא, 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 ואתלבש דא בדא, עד דאשתכח דא לבושא לדא, ודא לדא, דא מוחא ודא קליפה, ואע"ג דדא לבושא, אתעביד איהו מוחא לדרגא אחרא[19]

> *Kudsha Berikh Hu* had to create everything in the world, arraying the world. All consists of a kernel [*moḥa*] within, with several shells [*kelipin*] covering the kernel [*moḥa*]. The entire world is like this, above and below, from the head of the mystery of the primordial point to the end of all rungs: all is this within this

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[19] *Zohar* I, 19b-20a. I have adopted the textual emendations given by Matt in his *Aramaic Texts*, vol. 1, 41.

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 inner radiance – there is no way to gauge its translucency, tenuity, or purity – until an expanse expanded from it. The expansion of that point became a palace, in which the point was clothed ….   That palace expanded an expanse: primordial light. That expansion of primordial light is a garment for the palace, which is a gossamer, translucent radiance, deeper within. From here on, this expands into this, this is clothed in this, so that this is 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.[20]

Kelipot are thus generated as a result of each level "expanding." This "expansion" crystallizes so as to become that level's covering, its garment, and, at least from the fourth sefirah downwards, its *kelipah*: "this expands into this, this is clothed in this, so that this is a garment for this, and this for this. This, the kernel [*moḥa*]; this, the shell [*kelipah*]." This process marks the divine unfolding from its highest level to the 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*, that then enclothes it. The term "*kelipah*" is not used for this first enclothing. Nor is it used for the next "expansion," the "primordial light" (presumably the fourth sefirah, *Ḥesed*), that serves as the "garment" for the "palace." The term "*kelipah*" only appears at the next level, as a description of the entity that enclothes this "primordial light" (presumably the fifth sefirah, *Gevurah*, the sefirah of "Might"). And, "from here on," the sub-passage informs us, 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. This "benign *kelipah*" sub-passage strongly suggests the essentially non-threatening quality of the first *kelipah* named as such, and seemingly of all

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[20] Matt I, 151-152 (I have modified the translation to bring out the repetition of the demonstrative pronouns).

subsequent *kelipot,* both by explicitly proclaiming the relativity of the "*kelipah*"
designation and by describing the generation of the *kelipot* in terms identical to the
generation of *Binah* out of *Ḥokhmah*, i.e., an "expansion" and an "enclothing" of a
higher, clearly holy, level.

In this passage, the difference between the terms "*kelipah*" and "*moḥa*" is thus portrayed
as merely relative 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 conception is as far removed as possible
from that of absolute alterity between the divine and the demonic. If one takes this
passage seriously, one should reject the notion of an entity which is "essentially" a
kelipah, which is irremediably split from the holy. The merely relative difference
between the terms is accentuated by the incessant repetition of the same demonstrative
pronouns ("this," designated by both "*da*" and "*hai*") to designate both – a use of
repetition, as we shall see, that is the exact opposite of almost all uses of repetition in the
case of Zoharic juxtapositions of the divine and demonic. Thus far, this text confirms
Tishby's framework – it combines structural concentricity, geographical proximity, and,
on the question of essence, an anti-dualism so strong that one cannot even speak of two
"essences."[21]

However, in the immediately preceding sub-passage, and apparently continuous in the
printed text, the Zohar 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. Indeed, this entire sub-passage may be described as a kabbalistic
reworking of all the basic elements of the Lilith myth, restating the Ben-Sira narrative in
a Zoharic key. Even aside from textual contiguity, shared terminology and narrative
imagery at the beginning of each sub-passage make the "Lilith-*kelipah*" text seem
continuous with the "benign *kelipah*" text – and it is this very commonality that strikingly
highlights their differences.

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

<div dir="rtl">כל קליפה מסטרא אחרא הוי, ומוחא מן מוחא</div>

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

Indeed, this "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage portrays a process with a beginning very similar to that of the "benign *kelipah* sub-passage" but with a strikingly different sequel.

דבתר דאתגניז נהירו אור קדמאה, אתברי קליפה למוחא, וההיא קליפה אתפשט, ואפיק קליפה אחרא כיון דנפקת, סלקא ונחתא...[22]

> After the radiance of primordial light was treasured away, a shell [*kelipah*] *was* created for the kernel [*moḥa*]. That shell [*kelipah*] expanded, generating another shell [*kelipah*]. Emerging, she ascended and descended …[23]

The "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage thus begins with the key feature of the "benign *kelipah*" conception, the covering of the "primordial light" by a *kelipah*. Moreover, the further development of this first *kelipah* is portrayed using the same verb ("expanded," אתפשט) in both sub-passages. Thenceforward, however, the two sub-passages part ways. In the "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage, something happens at that point that disrupts the process: rather than the smoothly unfolding process that structures the "benign *kelipah*" sub-passage, in which each *moḥa* is surrounded by a *kelipah* that will serve in turn as a *moḥa* for the level beneath it, the first *kelipah* in the "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage "generates another *kelipah*" which is essentially, rather than merely relatively, a *kelipah* – indeed, it might be better to translate the phrase *kelipah aḥra* [קליפה אחרא], as "an Other *Kelipah*," on the model of the "Other Side," the *Sitra Aḥra.* This "Other *Kelipah*," disrupts the seamless story of the generation of kernels and shells, each of whose nature is merely relative. 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 generates the female devil. It is as though there were a malignant metastasis of a healthy process – with a "good" *kelipah* generating the "bad" *kelipah*, Lilith. This metastasis presents a striking contrast with the smoothly unfolding

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[22] *Zohar* I, 19b.
[23] Matt I, 148.

generation of benign garments/*kelipot* in the immediately subsequent "benign *kelipah*" sub-passage. The personification of this "Other *Kelipah*," the movement from the catachresis of a *kelipah*-generating-a-*kelipah* to the prosopopeia by which this malignant *kelipah* becomes the monstrous personage of Lilith, also seems important for the crystallization of an essentially evil realm.

An index of the metastatic nature of the generation of the Lilith-*kelipah* may be found in the sub-passage's portrayal of its/her geographical relationship to the holy dimension. The sub-passage tells us that, prior to Adam and Eve's sin, God had cast Lilith to the "nether regions of the sea" [בשפולי ימא].[24] This phrase is closely related to the "crevice of the great abyss" [נוקבא דתהומא רבא], in which Tishby tells us the geographically remote *Sitra Aḥra*, associated with the homology structure, normally resides.[25] From the perspective of Tishby's framework, although this remote location for the *Sitra Aḥra* accords with the dualist position on its essence, it clashes with the concentric structural model with which this sub-passage begins.

Reading the "Lilith-*kelipah*" and "benign *kelipah*" portrayals together as one passage, we find that the concentricity image is itself split, doubled into a healthy and malignant form, one in which Tishby's three axes line up (the "benign *kelipah*" sub-passage) and one in which they do not (the "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage). The force of the entire passage derives from the juxtaposition of these two very different portrayals whose basic rhetorical framework they nonetheless share. The text seems designed to function as a provocation that works on the reader by juxtaposing two radically different results of the "expansion" of the first *kelipah* – a provocation that depends on attributing as much similarity as possible to the two processes. Indeed, one could even say that this similarity between the two versions of the concentricity structure, the "benign *kelipah*" and the "Lilith-*kelipah*," is itself a kind of parallelism on the rhetorical level, and even a form of homology on the structural level. We thus rediscover the relationship between "resemblance" and "menace" in the relationship between the two forms of the concentricity structure itself.

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[24] *Zohar* I, 19b.
[25] Tishby, *MZ*, 300. This phrase appears numerous times in the Zohar, including II, 163b & 173b.

The two sub-passages, to put it slightly differently, thus represent a "splitting" into a benign and a malignant form of the very process of the generation of the concentric *kelipot*, leading, respectively, to good and bad *kelipot*. To recur to Tishby's models, the doubling of this process gives us 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 sub-passages, or, more proximately, to the Zohar's Geronese and Castillian precursors.   Yet, the striking similarity of the terminology in the two sub-passages and their apparent continuity in the text suggests a very different approach to reading. Whatever the two sub-passages' historical origins or influences, I contend that one should take seriously the recurring linguistic features of the text and the apparent continuity of its parts. The power of the passage as a whole emerges from its juxtaposition of the seemingly heterogeneous conceptions in the two contiguous sub-passages, those of the benign and malignant portrayals of the generation of the *kelipot*. As in the "fingernail *zohama*" passage, it is the contemplation of the baffling puzzle posed by the juxtaposition of these heterogeneous portrayals that would appear to be one of the main goals – or at least effects – of the passage.

Moreover, an examination of the dynamics of the geographical axis in the Lilith-*kelipah* sub-passage adds not only further layers of complexity to my thus far relatively static comparison of the two sub-passages, but also links the passage as a whole to issues of abjection and identity-formation – themes which I only fully explore in Chapter Two. In the "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage, as I have already noted, it is by an affirmative act of expulsion – or, to be more precise, two separate acts of expulsion – that Lilith is sent to her remote exile in retribution for her nefarious activities. These activities concern precisely her interference with identity formation on both the angelic and human levels. Lilith first sought out the "small faces" [אנפי זוטרי], presumably the cherubim, and desired to "cleave to them" and "be portrayed in them" [בעאת לאתדבקא בהו ולאצטיירא בגווייהו],[26] to

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[26] *Zohar* I, 19b; Matt I, 148 (translation modified). Cf. *bḤagigah*, 13b.

parasitically take on their form – rhetorically, a kind of rapacious auto-prosopopeia.   For this interference with "the small faces," *Kudsha Berikh Hu* "separated her from there, bringing her down below" [אפרש לה קב"ה מתמן ונחית לה לתתא].[27]

When human beings were created, the sight of the union of Adam and Eve, the "complete image" [דיוקנא שלים],[28] causes Lilith to fly away. Apparently, this 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 Zohar, is indispensable for the full formation of subjectivity. She then again returns to perform mischief with the "small faces" – an act for which *Kudsha Berikh Hu* "casts her into the nether regions of the sea" [ואטיל לה בשפולי ימא].[29] After Adam's sin, *Kudsha Berikh Hu* allows her to emerge from this exile and she acquires power over children, "the small faces of humanity" [אפי זוטרי דבני נשא].[30] Finally, after the birth of Cain, she succeeds in mating with Adam and brings forth improper subjects, "spirits and flying demons" [רוחין וטיסין] – or, rhetorically, achieving her goal of monstrous prosopopeia.[31]

In this sub-passage, 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 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 subjectivity at all levels of the cosmos. The geographical remoteness of this originally proximate figure comes about at a subsequent phase of the drama of creation and as an essential step in its unfolding.

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[27] *Ibid.*
[28] *Zohar* I, 19b; Matt I, 149.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*

Finally, while I only fully explore this theme in the next chapter, this dimension provides an insight into why the "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage precedes the "benign *kelipah*" sub-passage. 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*" section, that one can present a smoothly unfolding identity as in the "benign *kelipah*" section. The smooth, organic development of the "benign *kelipah*" section only becomes possible after the violent struggle with the abjected Lilith in the preceding section.

Nevertheless, the instability of this kind of abjection is expressed in the instability of Lilith's banishment to the depths of the sea – and here the theurgical effect of human action, for good or ill, comes into play. The first opportunity for escape from her abject refuge comes with the first sin, that of Adam and Eve. Lilith's banishment is thus inversely linked to that of Adam and Eve from the Garden. Just as the stability of human identity formation is linked to the abjection of Lilith, so the disruption of identity formation is linked to the partial suspension of her banishment. After the relaxation of her expulsion, not only does she acquire power over human children, she succeeds in mating with human beings.

In fact, the sub-passage declares that, 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 instability, that of 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 ההוא להט ההוא להט], בגין דהיא נפקת מסטרא]. [32] 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 the Zohar. If one interprets it here consistently with the rest of the passage, one might surmise that the "sword" refers to *Gevurah* and the "flame" to the "strong judgment" that represents a

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[32] *Ibid.*

hypertrophy of *Gevurah*, of whom Lilith and the *Sitra Aḥra* generally are a further metastasis.[33] However, a more common Zoharic reference of this image is to *Malkhut*, the Shekhinah, which "at times turns to mercy and at times to judgment."[34] That this connotation of the "fiery sword" may be intended here is supported by another passage, closely related to the "Lilith-*kelipah*" sub-passage just cited, in which the Zohar declares that Lilith "hangs from" or "depends on" [תליא] the Shekhinah to whom she "cleaves" [אתדבק].[35] The movement "downward" in Lilith's location in relationship to the divine – from *Gevurah* at the beginning of the passage to *Malkhut* further on – may itself be a result of her banishment.

In either case, this cleaving of Lilith to the Shekhinah recalls the cleaving of the ten sefirot of the *Sitra Aḥra* to the "*zohama* of the fingernail" of the Shekhinah in the passage I discussed above. Cleaving to fingernail filth 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 passages, though with very different configurations of the geographical and structural alternatives, express the central paradox of the relationship of the holy realm and the *Sitra Aḥra* – on the one hand, the constitution of both realms as a result of abjection and, on the other hand, the immense power possessed by the *Sitra Aḥra* despite its emergence as subsidiary to the holy side, as a crystallization of its refuse or its malignant metastasis.

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

[34] For the Shekhinah as the "ever-turning sword," see *Zohar* II, 27b (*Tosefta*). In interpreting the flame here as the Shekhinah, I depart from Matt who views it, perhaps more consistently with the rest of the passage, as applying to *Gevurah*. See Matt I, 149 n.328. My interpretation is based both on parallel passages using this image and on the "ever-turning" quality of the sword, which strongly suggests, as in other passages, the ambivalent Shekhinah.

[35] *Zohar* I, 33b. I adopt Matt's textual emendations given in his *Aramaic Texts,* vol. 1, 55 and the Matt translation, I, 208-209. The interpolations in square brackets are mine:

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

> Rabbi Yose said, "let there be מארת (*me'erat*), *curse,* below, for diphtheria in the world's children depends on her [i.e., Lilith], and she depends upon this מארת (*me'orot*), smallest of all lights, sometimes darkened, receiving no light. … that מארה (*me'erah*), curse clung to it. All those other species below [i.e., demonic forces] depend upon it because of the diminution of this light … everything depends on this, including Lilith in the world.

I would like to highlight two implications of the preceding discussion. The first concerns the manner of approaching heterogeneous images in the Zohar. Rather than seeking to uncover rival coherent models underlying these images, I affirm the need to first read each passage as a whole while refraining for as long as possible from determining its overall meaning. Such a reading can reveal whether the force and meaning of a passage might stem precisely from the way it juxtaposes heterogeneous images. In the face of a passage marked by heterogeneous or seemingly incompatible images, this approach can obviate the urgency of choosing among a number of unsatisfying alternatives – including harmonizing the text's seeming discrepancies, interpreting the text as a struggle between the models within the heart of a single author, or inferring that the text must be a patchwork stemming from multiple authorship. The privilege this approach accords to very close readings of the text follows the imperative proclaimed by Liebes to attend to the Zohar's literary dimensions. It carries Liebes' imperative further than he does, as I show in the remainder of this chapter, by focusing on the way the texts produce meaning by means of distinctive deployments of such detailed rhetorical aspects as constructional schemes and tropes. Above all, it embraces textual heterogeneities as meaning-producing provocations rather than as merely apparent problems to be dispelled in one way or the other. This approach to reading tends to highlight ambivalence, the instability of resolutions of conflicting forces (rhetorical or ontological), and textual indeterminacy.

A second implication concerns the affinity between this way of reading and latent Zoharic ontologies, particularly concerning subject-formation. In other words, though my emphasis on rhetorical analysis stresses the need for at least a provisional agnosticism about overall models, it also implies a certain affinity for conceptions to which the rhetorical forms seem suited, particularly that of "splitting," the main concern of this chapter, and "abjection," the primary focus of the next chapter. I caution, again, however, that the affinity of rhetorical forms and doctrinal conceptions is sometimes deployed in a counter-intuitive way, that is, in such a way as to create a textual effect precisely through running counter to the reader's expectations.

B. Signifying Ambivalence – Schemes and Tropes

Three of the principal ways in which the Zohar achieves "splitting" in its portrayal of the relationship of the divine and demonic are the following: sometimes an image is doubled, appearing in both holy and unholy forms; sometimes a single image is divided, thus belonging to both realms; and sometimes the ambivalence takes the form of textual indeterminacy, giving rise to conflict among later commentators about whether specific images are to be interpreted as associated with the holy or the unholy realms.

It might be tempting to use Tishby's framework to associate the first effect, that of doubling, with the notion of the relationship of the *Sitra Aḥra* to the divine as geographically remote, structurally homologous, and essentially dualistic; the second effect, that of division, with the notion of this relationship as 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. My discussion in the preceding section, however, has cast doubt on whether these associations between geography, structure, and essence capture the way the Zohar deploys its heterogeneous images. I have suggested, instead, a turn to close textual readings to discover the way the Zohar deploys heterogeneous images in its portrayals of the *Sitra Aḥra*.

In this section, I attend to two different kinds of rhetorical techniques Zoharic texts use to achieve the splitting effects described above. At times, these effects are 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, these effects are achieved primarily through the way phrases, sentences, or paragraphs are constructed, rather than the semantic content of the words. 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.[36] This detailed inquiry into the way the Zohar

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[36] The classic distinction between tropes and what I here call "schemes" was given by Quintillian (who refers to the latter as "rhetorical figures"):

"signifies" the *Sitra Aḥra* is imperative in the context of a work so attentive to language both stylistically and thematically.

1. Schemes: the Seductions of Rhetorical Parallelism

Attending to constructional schemes entails a focus not on the selection of images, but on the way phrases, sentences, and larger units are constructed. One literary theorist describes such schemes as the ways such compositional units are "balanced," as opposed to the choice of words within them.[37] My analysis of Tishby has demonstrated the need for an interpretive method that goes beyond developing coherent models, even competing models, as a way of grappling with Zoharic texts' paradoxical features. Starting with the way small textual units are assembled and produce meaning serves to highlight the distinctiveness of the Zohar's textual operations and ultimately heightens insight into its doctrinal content. Moreover, since the Zohar is a text (or collection of texts) that strikingly foregrounds its compositional and stylistic virtuosity, beginning with constructional schemes seems particularly apt.

It is important to note that any particular constructional scheme can function in the service of more than one meaning, a feature that Brian Vickers calls the "polysemous" or "poly-functional" nature of such schemes.[38] The Zohar is, of course, famous for using tropes to signify different metaphysical elements in different contexts, but it is just as

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….
7. Nothing of this sort is necessary in figures. …
2. [V]erbal figures are of two kinds. One, as they say, lies in the formation of phrases; the other is sought in the collocation of them… [W]e may call the one rather grammatical and the other rhetorical.. …
Quintilian, *Institutes,* 145, 183 (Book 9.2.4,5, & 7; Book 9.3.2) Because the phrase "rhetorical figures" evokes a broader meaning for most current readers, I have chosen to use Lewis Turco's term "constructional schemes" for these techniques. Turco, *The New Book of Forms,* 63. The specific technique I linger on most in the text, anaphora, is discussed by Quintilian at *ibid*., 193 (Book 9.3.30), though he does not use that term..
[37] Turco, *The New Book of Forms,* 63.
[38] Vickers, 'Repetition and Emphasis in Rhetoric: Theory and Practice', 91-92.

important to note that the way it constructs its phrases also has this "polysemous" quality. This quality is particularly important with regard to the theme under discussion, the doubled, divided, and destabilized portrayals of the relationship between the divine and the demonic.

I will particularly focus on one constructional scheme that Zoharic texts frequently employ to signify the relationship between the divine and demonic realms. I refer to the phrase, "there is … and there is …." [*it ... ve-it;* אית...ואית] – in which the same noun recurs after each "there is" – but in which the first use refers to the divine realm and the second to the demonic realm. 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;* אית שדה ואית שדה][39] – in which the first "field" refers to the Shekhinah and the second to her diabolical female counterpart, elsewhere called Lilith.   They may also take more elaborate forms, some of which I will analyze below. The effect of such schemes is to split the image between its divine and demonic forms – an effect that comes primarily, often exclusively, from the construction of the phrase, rather than from the content of the repeated word. It is thus the constructional scheme, rather than the referent of the trope, that is the main way such texts produce meaning.

The scheme "there is … there is…" is an instance of rhetorical "parallelism" – though I strongly 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.[40] It is generally deployed in conjunction with a number of other techniques, including what the rhetoricians call *isocolon* (in which successive clauses are of equal length) and *parison* (in which successive clauses are of equal or corresponding structure). The Zohar has other ways of constructing rhetorical parallelism, but, for reasons that should become

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[39] *Zohar* I, 122a.
[40] For the definitions in this paragraph, see Vickers, 'Repetition', 93 & 100.

clear, I will focus on those constructed through the use of anaphora and its auxiliary schemes.

The parallel scheme, "there is … and there is …," is very common in Talmudic and midrashic literature, both in Hebrew and Aramaic.   In this literature, it is deployed in a number of different ways – from asserting legal distinctions[41] to presenting opposing views[42] to moral contrasts.[43]   There are also a few occurrences of repetition of the "there is" phrase in the Bible itself, which, though few in number, give a further sense of its range.   These occurrences use this scheme to add emphasis,[44] to present a moral and factual contrast,[45] and to produce a cumulative effect of compatible, though different, notions.[46]   Of course, creating parallelism through various forms of repetitive structures – anaphora, isocolon and parison, or mere repetition of successive words (*epizeuxis*) – is a very common constructional scheme in the Bible generally.   As Lewis Turco points out, such constructions have a number of different 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).[47]   These kinds of techniques and meanings, as well as some of the specific biblical passages characterized by parallelism, play an important role in the Zohar generally but particularly in its

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[41] See, e.g., *bBava Kama*, 45b.

[42] See, e.g., *bBekhorot*, 42b.

[43] See, e.g., *bPesaḥim,* 50a.

[44] 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.

[45] Ecclesiastes 7:15:

> יש צדיק אבד בצדקו ויש רשע מאריך ברעתו
>
> …there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.

[46] Jeremiah 31:16-17:

> כי יש שכר לפעלתך נאם יהוה ושבו מארץ אויב ויש תקוה לאחריתך נאם יהוה ושבו בנים לגבולם...
>
> …for thy work [*ki yesh sakhar*] shall be rewarded [lit: 'for there is reward for thy work'], saith YHVH; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope [*ve-yesh tikvah*] in thine end [lit: 'and there is hope for thine end'], saith YHVH, that thy children shall come again to their own border.

Again, the anaphora disappears in the KJV translation.

[47] Turco, *The New Book*, 10-11.

discussions of the *Sitra Aḥra* – of which one example would be its use of the familiar verses from Ecclesiastes, "a time to … and a time to …."[48]

Although this constructional scheme may seem at first glance rather abstract, as well as rather commonplace in the Jewish tradition, the frequency and the manner of its use in the Zohar demand 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. Indeed, at times, the Zoharic texts produce their distinctive atmosphere primarily through playing on the polysemousness of its constructional schemes, their capability of signifying different ontological positions. Moreover, while this scheme is found particularly frequently in the context of portrayals of the relationship of the holy realm to the *Sitra Aḥra*, it is by no means limited to them.

I note that the anaphora "there is … and there is …" appears to contain, on its face, an ontological assertion. Perhaps the Zohar's insistence on this formulation in relation to the demonic serves to distinguish its vision of the real, all-too-real, existence of evil – an existence posited as rivaling that of the divine – from any Neoplatonic view of evil as a mere privation of being.[49] This feature means both that we cannot completely separate the rhetorical and ontological levels *and* that we require vigilance not to prejudge their relationship. Indeed, attention to the complexities of the Zohar's appropriation of this biblical and rabbinic scheme may contain clues to its portrayal of the cosmos generally.

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[48] Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. See *Zohar* II, 155b, Matt, V, 410 (translation modified):

אית עת ואית עת, (קהלת ג ח) עת לאהב ועת לשנוא, עת איהו לעילא, דההוא עת רזא דמהימנותא איהו, ודא אקרי עת רצון..., ועל דא עת לאהב, דא איהו עת דאתחייב בר נש לאהב. ואית עת אחרא דאיהי רזא דאלהי"ם אחרים, ואתחייב בר נש למשנא ליה ... ועל דא עת לשנוא

> There is a *time*, and there is a *time*. *A time to love, and a time to hat*e (Ecclesiastes 3:8). There is a *time* above, for that time is mystery of faith, and this is called a *time of favor*. ... So, a *time to love* – this is the time whom a person must love. And there is another *time*, who is mystery of *other Elohim*, whom a person must hate ... So, a *time to hate*.

[49] A related insistence may be found in Yitsḥak Sagi Nahor's commentary on the *Sefer Yetsirah*. He relates the difference between the *Sefer Yetsirah*'s "simple" and "double" letters to the divergent nature of the relationship between positive and negative forms they designate. In the case of the "simple" letters, the negative forms are mere privations [**אינם כי אם העדרות והסרה**]; in the case of the "doubled" letters, the negative forms have their own autonomous basis [**כל אחד יש לה סבה בפני עצמה**]. *Sefer Yetsirah Im Peirushe Kadmone Ha-Rishonim,* 19 & 16. The use of the term "double" to designate those counterparts that have an autonomous basis is itself a rather paradoxical notion. See also the discussion in Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 293.

The Zohar uses the anaphora "there is … and there is …." in three main ways. The first usage, my prime concern, creates rhetorical parallelism between the divine and the demonic realms (as in the "field" example given above - אית שדה ואית שדה). The second usage creates rhetorical parallelism between upper- and lower-level cosmic structures. This second usage can operate to compare and contrast either the upper and lower levels of the divine (or demonic) realm as a whole[50] or two specific higher and lower sefirot.[51] A third usage creates rhetorical parallelism between two entities at the same level of either the divine or demonic realms – mercy and judgment, left and right, or male and female.[52]

Passages characterized by this scheme often produce their effects in part through the sheer poetic sensuousness of the repeated anaphora. One receives the impression that the text 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. It is almost as though the text were trying to induce a vision of the cosmos in the reader through a rhythmic chant. The following passage provides a brief example of this technique:

בגין דאית מיין מתוקין ואית מיין מרירן, אית מיין צלילן ואית מיין עכירן, אית מיין שלם ואית מיין קטטו, ועל דא המה מי מריבה[53]

> For there are sweet waters and there are bitter waters, there are clear waters and there are filthy waters, there are waters of peace and there are waters of strife. And therefore they are "Waters of Strife" [Numbers 20:13]

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[50] *Zohar* II, 23a:

תא חזי אית גוונין דמתחזיין, ואית גוונין דלא מתחזיין

Come and see: there are colors that are seen and there are colors that are not seen.

[51] *Zohar* III, 137b:

אית רחמי ואית רחמי, רחמי דעתיק דעתיקין, אינון אקרון רחמים גדולים, רחמי דזעיר אנפין, אקרון רחמים סתם

There is compassion and there is compassion. The compassion of the Ancient of Ancients is called "the great compassion"; the compassion of *Ze'er Anpin* is just called "compassion."

[52] For an example in the demonic realm, see, e.g., *Zohar* III, 207a:

והיינו דאמר רבי יצחק אמר רבי יהודה, באלין כתרין תתאין אית ימינא ואית שמאלא, מסטרא דימינא חמרי, כמה דאוקימנא, ומסטרא דשמאלי אתני

And this is as Rabbi Yitsḥak said in the name of Rabbi Yehudah: in these lower crowns there is right and there is left: from the side of the right, male donkeys, as it has been established, and from the side of the left, female donkeys.

[53] *Zohar* I, 66a.

This passage also suggests the non-transparent relationship between the rhetorical and ontological levels – problematizing, for example, the susceptibility of individual images to being identified either with specific sefirot or even with more general levels of the divine and demonic realms. To be sure, some traditionalist commentators interpret the three parallel pairs of "waters" in this passage as referring to the left, right, and center of each of the two realms.[54] Yet such interpretations do not seem compelled or even motivated by the context of the passage; indeed, their forced quality serves primarily to highlight one of the many ways the Zohar's poetic imperatives often swamp such hermeneutic aspirations. The sheer rhythm of the repeated anaphora in this passage, which seems to lend itself to indefinite extension, makes efforts to identify specific references for its terms seem secondary or irrelevant.

Nevertheless, in other passages, such efforts to distinguish the references of the successive phrases may make more interpretive sense. Indeed, these kinds of passages work through a juxtaposition of several instances of distinct, though related, anaphorically established parallelism. An example of such a complex juxtaposition is the following passage containing both upper/lower and divine/demonic parallelism:

בגין דאית אתוון רברבן, ואית אתוון זעירין, אתוון רברבין אינון לעילא, אתוון זעירין לתתא,
וכלא לתתא כגוונא דלעילא. בגין דאית שמהן קדישין עלאין דקיימין ברעו דרוחא ולבא בלא מלולא
כלל, ואית שמהן קדישין תתאין דקיימין במלה, ובמשיכו דמחשבה ורעו עלייהו. ואית שמהן אחרנין
לתתא, דאינון מההוא סטרא אחרא, דאיהו מסטרא דמסאבא ואלין לא קיימין אלא ברעו דעובדא
לתתא, לסלקא רעו דההוא עובדא דלתתא לגביה, בגין דאיהו סטרא אחרא לאו איהו אלא בעובדין

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[54] 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. Another passage, *Zohar* I, 80a (*Sitre Torah*), is more explicit, though it may be a later interpolation:

ובדוגמא דא ברא גופא מארבע יסדות, אש ורוח ועפר ומים... מים דא דכר, ודא הוא מים מתיקן דקדושה, ואית מים
המאררים דאינון יצר הרע, אית אשא קדישא נוקבא, ואית אשא נוכראה אש זרה, ...רוח קדישא איהו דכר, ואית רוח
מסאבא דא יצר הרע, ... אית עפר קדישא, ואית עפר מסאבא,

> And on this model, he created a body from four elements, fire and wind and earth and water …water is male, and this is sweet holy water, and there are accursed waters which are the evil inclination. There is holy female fire, and there is alien fire, "the strange fire." … Holy wind is male and there is unholy wind which is the evil inclination … There is holy earth and there is unholy earth.

דהאי עלמא, לאסתאבא בהון, כגוונא דבלעם ואינון בני קדם, וכל אינון דמתעסקי בההוא סטרא אחרא.[55]

> For there are great letters and there are lesser letters. Great letters are those above; lesser letters below. And all below is as above. For there are holy upper names that exist in the will of the spirit and the heart without any verbalization; and there are holy lower names that exist in the word and in the drawing upon them of thought and will. And there are other names below, those that are from that Other Side [*Sitra Aḥra*], which is the contaminated side. And these only exist through the will to action below, to raise the will to action below to it [i.e., to the *Sitra Ahra*]. For the Other Side is not [לאו איהו] except through the actions of this world, in order to contaminate by means of them, like Balaam and those sons of the East and all those who occupy themselves with the Other Side.

In this passage, two kinds of primary parallelism are at work – that between the upper and lower divine ["there are letters … and there are letters"; אית אתוון ...ואית אתוון] and between these two divine levels and the demonic realm ["for there are names … and there are names … and there are names" דאית שמהן ...ואית שמהן ...ואית שמהן]. The two divine levels, the two kinds of "letters," can be read as the holy forces emanating from *Binah* and *Malkhut*, respectively.[56] The latter forces, the 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 great and lesser letters [בגין דאית אתוון רברבן, ואית אתוון זעירין], 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 holy upper names … and there are holy lower names" [דאית שמהן קדישין עלאין ... ואית שמהן קדישין תתאין]; second, a juxtaposition of the divine and demonic realms – "and there are holy lower names … and there are other lower names" [ואית שמהן קדישין תתאין ...ואית שמהן אחרנין לתתא].

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[55] *Zohar* II, 180b.
[56] Compare related passages such as *Zohar* II, 174a and II, 205b.

This complex set of rhetorical parallelisms is consistent with the content of the passage – which is focused on the relationship between the metaphysical level and the human. The divine "names," upper and lower, are portrayed from the perspective of their relationship to human will, thought, and word; the demonic "names" are portrayed from the perspective of human action – with the reference to Balaam clearly alluding to the practice of black magic.[57] The passage, then, establishes parallelism through rhetorical structure and also portrays the active establishment of ontological connection between the levels. Particularly since the content of the passage is itself linguistically focused, concentrating on "letters" and "names," the persuasiveness of its portrayal of the efficacy of such practices – and perhaps, as I suggest below, that efficacy itself – may itself be a product of the rhetorical technique of anaphorically established parallelism.

An even more complex instance, with a somewhat different configuration, is provided by the following passage:

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[58]

> 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 below
> on the Other Side [*Sitra Aḥra*]. There is Left above in supernal sanctity, arousing
> love, linking the moon with a sacred site to shine. And there is Left below,
> blocking love from above, preventing Her from shining through the sun and
> drawing near. This is the side of the evil serpent, for when this lower Left

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[57] References to Balaam as a master magician abound in the *Zohar*. See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 207b.
[58] *Zohar* I, 53a.

arouses, it draws away the moon, separating Her from above, so Her light darkens and She cleaves to the serpent.[59]

In this passage, the two kinds of primary parallelism at work are those between the divine and the demonic, here identified with upper and lower levels [*it le-ela… ve-it le-tata;* אית לעילא... ואית לתתא], as well as between the right and the left dimensions [*it yamina … it semola;* אית ימינא...אית שמאלא] that characterize both realms. The passage also creates rhetorical parallelism between two metaphysical theurgical actions – the action of the holy left side in arousing love between the male and female (the "sun" and the "moon") and the action of the demonic Left in separating them and in drawing the female to the demonic. Following Charles Mopsik, we could distinguish between these two kinds of actions either as "theurgy" in contrast with "theoclasty," i.e., construction *versus* destruction of the divine, or, perhaps more precisely, as "white theurgy"*versus* "black theurgy," i.e., construction of the divine *versus* construction of the demonic (along the model of "white magic" *versus* "black magic").[60]

Several observations can be made about the juxtapositions in these three passages. First, in all of them, as I noted above, the anaphoric rhythm is foregrounded and takes on a rhetorical force of its own. The power of such passages largely derives from the repetition of the anaphora as it takes us from left to right, from above to below, and from divine to demonic.   In the second and third of these passages, this rhetorical power seems to pass over into ontological efficacy. It appears as though it were the rhetorical force of the parallelisms that opens up the theurgical access among the various planes – or, at the very least, that makes that access persuasively plausible to the reader. In the second, "letters and names," passage, such parallelisms induce the reader to be carried along from plane to plane to the point of assenting to the efficacy of Balaam's magic. The overlapping rhetorical parallelisms create the sense of ontological accessibility from the upper divine levels to the lower divine levels to the human level – and then, staying with the image of a "lower" level, but shifting from the holy to unholy realms, creating the sense of accessibility from the metaphysical demonic level to the human level of Balaam.

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[59] Matt I, 295 (translation modified).
[60] Mopsik, *Les Grands Textes de la Cabale : Les Rites qui Font Dieu,* 85 & 98.

The rhetorical creation of a sense of the plausibility of ontological efficacy through such overlapping parallelisms may be even more pertinent in the third, "left/right, above/below" passage.

In this last passage, the seductive power of the constructional scheme may also be viewed as the very basis of the seductive power of the demonic. The hypnotic power of anaphoric repetition, the overlapping and even confusion of levels, dimensions, and realms it induces, may be the secret of the success of the demonic in taking the Shekhinah away from her proper consort. The complex juxtapositions of parallelisms, leading hypnotically from level to level, from dimension to dimension, and from realm to realm, marked by repeating terms linked by the "there is … there is …" anaphora, reversing their valences as the passage shifts from one plane to another, create the danger of confusion and the appeal of misprision, producing the plausibility, and perhaps even the ontological possibility, of the contamination of the divine by the demonic. And yet, as in the "names and letters" passage, it is also the juxtapositions of rhetorical parallelisms that make plausible, and perhaps even possible, the "good" access among levels, such as those between the human, the lower divine, and the upper divine.

Second, if one sought to express the ontological conception suggested by such rhythmic anaphoric passages, one would be tempted to articulate a vision of infinite correspondences, each facet of the universe reflected in all others – a vision expressed in the well-known formula, "as above, so below" [כגוונא דלעילא הכי אית לתתא].[61] This formula is restated in the Zohar in a variety of different forms, and appears in the second of these three passages in the form, "everything below is in the manner of above" [וכלֹא לתתא כגוונא דלעילֹא]. However, such a seamless move from rhetorical figure to ontological vision is rendered deeply troubling in the context of my discussion here: for the presence of the demonic as one of the cosmic realms brought into correspondence with all others renders this vision both problematic on the level of its possibility and disturbing on the level of its theological, moral, and cognitive implications.

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[61] *Zohar* II, 186b.

While these troubling qualities emerge from my discussions throughout this thesis, I will briefly sketch the relationship between anaphoric parallelism and the "as above, so below" formula.   The Zohar uses this formula in a number of ways, seemingly drawing a number of different implications that are not necessarily always consistent with each other. Such implications range from the ontological, in the form of a kind of Platonic idealism (the notion that everything below is based on a model above);[62] to the performative, in the form of a theurgical imperative (the notion that the repair or even construction of the divine above depends on human action below);[63] to the visionary, in the form of a portrayal of the prelapsarian human being as dwelling in a place in which all facets of the universe, above and below, are reflected and accessible to experience.[64] Keeping in mind the demonic facet, however, brings to the fore a disturbing side to each of these possible implications: 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 act to damage it and give ascendancy to the demonic ("white theurgy" *versus* "theoclasty" and "black theurgy");[65] if the prelapsarian Adam lived in a place from which

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[62] *Zohar* I, 186b:

דלית לך מלה בעלמא דלא אית לה דוגמא לעילא

For there is nothing in the world for which there is not a model above

[63] *Zohar* III, 113b:

ודאי כאלו עביד שמא קדישא בשלימו, כגוונא דאיהו עביד לתתא, הכי אתער לעילא

This is certainly as though he [a human being] had made the holy Name in its perfection; just as he does below, so it is aroused above

To be sure, in Neoplatonism, the possibility of theurgy, in the form of attracting divine energy to the world, is not only consistent with, but based on, the ontological vision of correspondences between dimensions ("cosmic sympathy").   Yet, 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. This may also be expressed on the ontological level, in which the human level may be asserted to be the "root" of the divine level. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives,*175-176 and Mopsik, *Les Grands Textes,* 377-378.

[64] *Zohar* I, 38a (*Hekhalot di-Bereshit*):

תא חזי בשעתא דאעיל ליה קב״ה לגנתא דעדן, הוה חמי ואסתכל מתמן כל רזין עלאין וכל חכמתא... בגין דכל הני היכלין אית בהו כגוונא דלעילא, ואית בהו כגוונא דלתתא, למהוי כליל בדיוקנא דרזא דלעילא, ובדיוקנא דרזא דלתתא, ובהו הוה דיוריה דאדם

Come and see: at the hour that the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* made him enter the Garden of Eden, he looked and saw from there all the supernal mysteries and all wisdom ... for in all these palaces, there is [all] as it is above, and there is [all] as it is below, so that it will be included in the image of the mystery above, and in the image of the mystery below, and in them was the dwelling-place of Adam.

[65] See *Zohar* III, 47a:

אמר רבי חייא אמר רבי יצחק, גריעותא דכלא לא אשתכח לתתא, אלא בגין דאשתכח לעילא, ולעילא לא אשתכח אלא כד אשתכח לתתא בחובי עלמא, דילפינן דכלא תלייא דכלא האי בהאי והאי בהאי

Rabbi Ḥiya said in the name of Rabbi Yitsḥak: the diminution of all is only found below because it is found above; and above, it is only found when it is found below due to the sins of the world – for we have learned, that, in all, this is dependent on this, and this on this.

all divine facets could be experienced, the postlapsarian human might live in a place from which the divine and the demonic are equally proximate – indeed, it was in this later dwelling place, the "first palace" in which Hosea was commanded to dwell, with which I began this thesis.

In any case, I argue that, in passages such as the three under discussion here, the plausibility of all three kinds of implications, the ontological, theurgical and visionary, derives much of its force from the constructional scheme of anaphora-based parallelism. It is as though the parallel rhetorical structures create channels of ontological accessibility along all three levels (the upper and lower metaphysical levels and the human level) and between their counterparts in the holy and unholy realms. Just as the rhetorical parallelism linking the human, the lower divine, and the upper divine constructs a beneficent accessibility, so the parallelism between the divine and the demonic constructs a perverse accessibility. When it comes to the latter parallelism, such passages rhetorically establish the paradoxical conjunction of "resemblance" and "menace."

In addition to the nefarious power and demonic seductiveness rendered plausible by anaphoric repetition, another kind of danger is that of the interpretive indeterminacy that such parallelism creates, an indeterminacy affecting the interpretation of particular terms as well as their relationship. Two passages in the Zohar explicitly broach the problem of such interpretive indeterminacy. The first, based on a midrashic homily, concerns the meaning of the word "end" [קֵץ; *kets*] as it appears in the last chapter of the book of Daniel. The chapter contains a complex and mysterious end-of-days vision, including a number of doublings and antitheses (12:2, 12:5 and 12:10), all of which baffles Daniel (12:8). In the midrash, Daniel is portrayed as beset by anxiety about whether he would meet a blessed or cursed fate. Even after receiving a favorable reply, he continues to worry about the meaning of the last verse of the chapter informing him that he would receive his ultimate reward at "the end of days."[66] The latter word is spelled in a seemingly quasi-Aramaic fashion, rather than in the more conventional Hebrew form [קֵץ

I note that in reading the first word of this saying as "גריעותא", rather than "ברעותא", I follow the Mantua and Cremona editions of the Zohar, as well as the version of Cordovero, rather than the Vilna edition.

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

הימין , *kets ha-yamin,* as opposed to קץ הימים, *kets hayamim*] – which, if re-read hyper-literally as Hebrew, could mean "the end of the Right." According to the midrash, Daniel was uncertain as to whether this phrase indicated 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 Zohar passage paraphrases this narrative but further exploits the reading of "*yamin*" as "right" by proclaiming a parallelism between "right" and "left" and presenting it through anaphora: "there is *kets* to the right and there is *kets* to the left" [אית קץ לימינא ואית קץ לשמאלא].[67] This reformulation has the effect of transforming the doubled term *kets* from its midrashic understanding as two different "end-times" into a kabbalistic understanding as two different kinds of personified entities, a holy entity and a demonic entity – the latter identified with the "snake … who comes from the side of the smelting of gold" [דא נחש ... מסטרא דהתוכא דדהבא קאתי]. Moreover, it transforms the midrashic alternative between two time-periods, in both of which righteous judgment will be achieved, into a contrast between holiness and the demonic – and even if the association between judgment and the demonic is not inconsistent with Zoharic imagery, this antithetical contrast is quite out of keeping with the intent of the midrash.   In the Zohar's interpretation, set up by the anaphora, Daniel's uncertainty, aroused by the indeterminacy in the meaning of the term *kets,* takes on a truly terrifying cast – for he now turns out to be in doubt as to whether he is being associated with a divine figure or a demonic serpent.

A second passage also based on the indeterminacy in the meaning of the term *kets* gives this uncertainty an even more ominous turn. In this passage, the Zohar combines the midrashic homily on Daniel with a midrash concerning Jacob's final words to his sons – viz., that he sought to reveal to them the "end of days," spelled by the midrash in accordance with the Daniel form [קץ הימין; *kets ha-yamin*], but was unable to do so

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[67] *Zohar* I, 63a. The Zohar conflates two questions posed by the midrashic 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**].

because the "Shekhinah departed from him."[68] Responding to Jacob's fear that this departure was due to a defect in his progeny, the sons recited the Shema, which signified that "just as there is in your heart only One, so there is in our hearts only One."[69] The Zohar closely follows this midrash but reinterprets the meaning of the word "One" in two ways. It first views "One" as referring to the holy 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[70]

> 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. We abide in single unity, not deriving from the Other Side at all, neither in desire nor in thought.[71]

Moreover, the Zohar interrupts its Jacob narrative with an anaphorically established parallelism between the two kinds of *kets*:

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[72]

> He wished to reveal to them that end [קץ, *kets*], as we have established – for there is *kets*, and there is *kets*! There is *kets ha-yamin* [קץ הימין], *end of the right* (Daniel 12:13), and there is *kets ha-yamim* [קץ הימים], end of days. *Kets ha-yamin, End of the right*, is mystery of the kingdom [*Malkhu*] of heaven. *Kets ha-yamim,* End of days, is the wicked kingdom [*Malkhu*], mystery of the Other Side [*Sitra Aḥra*].[73]

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[68] Ashkenazi, *Yalkut Shim'oni*, 72d: ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה.
[69] *Ibid.*: כשם שאין בלבבך אלא אחד כך אין בלבנו אלא אחד.
[70] *Zohar* II, 134a. In all my quotations from this passage, I have adopted Matt's textual emendations in his *Aramaic Texts,* vol. 5, 82.
[71] Matt V, 243.
[72] *Zohar* II, 134a-b.
[73] Matt V, 243-44 (translation modified).

In this Zoharic re-interpretation, the two kinds of *kets* are again transformed from their midrashic sense of alternative fates for an individual or nation into opposed metaphysical entities. In this passage, these entities are more clearly designated as the "kingdom of heaven," presumably the sefirah of *Malkhut*, on the one hand, and the "wicked kingdom, mystery of the *Sitra Aḥra*," on the other – presumably, the demonic counterpart to *Malkhut*, Lilith. The passage teaches us that these two kinds of *kets* must be radically separated.

Furthermore, like other passages I have discussed in this chapter, this passage combines the parallelism between the divine and demonic realms with that between the upper and lower levels of the divine. Specifically, as in the "letters and names" passage, these levels are presumably *Binah*, the "upper world," and *Malkhut*, the "lower world". Though not using 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":

אינון אמרו כמא דלית בלבך אלא אחד אחד דאנת ברזא דעלמא עלאה ואיהו אחד, אוף אנן דהוינן ברזא דעלמא תתאה איהו אחד ועל דא אדכרו תרי לבבות[74]

> They said, 'Just as there is only one in your heart – since you are within the
> mystery of the upper world, which is one – so too with us, for we are within the
> mystery of the lower world, which is one.' Therefore, two hearts are mentioned.[75]

The passage thus coordinates two parallelisms, that between the divine and demonic realms and that between upper and lower levels of the divine – with radically different stances in relation to each. The declaration by Jacob's sons in the midrash, affirming their shared faith in one God, becomes both a statement about the choice of the "One," the "kingdom of heaven" as opposed to the "wicked kingdom" of the "Other Side," as well as a statement about the unity between two holy "Ones," the "upper world" and the "lower world." Moreover, the passage also portrays the two holy unities, that of Jacob

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[74] *Zohar* II, 134b.
[75] Matt V, 244 (translation modified).

with *Binah* and of his sons with *Malkhut*, as preparing 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 (often identified with
Jacob, prepared for divine marriage by his relationship to his "mother," *Binah*).[76] By the
end of the passage, the multiplicity of 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 work of Moshe de Leon, the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*. In that work, De Leon cites
both the Daniel and Jacob midrashim and describes the relationship of the two kinds of
kets as that of *kelipah* and *mo'aḥ.* The *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, however, takes a rather
different approach to the question of the two kinds of *kets* than the Zohar passage's
unequivocal call for their radical separation. The *Sefer Ha-Mishkal* pronounces both an
imperative to separate the two realms *and* a prohibition on their separation. Thus, on the
one hand, the "end [*kets*] of all flesh will be distanced from the sweet milk, and the holy
people should make for themselves an extraordinary distance" from it.[77] 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."[78] At first
reading, these two imperatives seem contradictory, and, indeed, the tension between the
two subsists throughout the discussion. To be sure, 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*
would reject the Zohar's commendation of Jacob for having sought an absolute separation
between the divine and the demonic forms of *kets*.

The *Sefer Ha-Mishkal* and Zohar passages thus take two quite different stances on Jacob's
management of the ambivalence embodied in the anaphoric parallelism of the two kinds
of *kets*, on how to read their antithetical homonymy. For the Zohar passage, Jacob

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[76] *Zohar* II, 134a. On the preparation of the divine bridegroom by his mother, see also, e.g., *Zohar* II, 84a.
[77] Moshe de Leon, *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 147: וקץ כל בשר יתרחק מן החלב המתוק ויש לעם הקדוש לעשות [להם] הרחקה יתרה

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

properly separated the two kinds of *kets*, facilitating the union of higher and lower levels of the divine in and through the correspondence between Jacob's relationship to *Binah* and his sons' relationship to *Malkhut*. In the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, by contrast, it is Jacob's separation of the two kinds of *kets* that brings about the rupture of his union with the Shekhinah and detracts from the requirements of the cosmos.

A different kind of indeterminacy comes to the fore in a passage in the Zohar concerning the term, "thousand," *elef* [אלף]. This passage discusses the question of whether the term 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 somewhat different manner than in the "*kets*" passage, this discussion also echoes an uncertainty bequeathed from rabbinic literature – specifically, a Talmudic discussion concerning the Song of Songs verse. The Talmudic discussion, however, does not focus on the term *elef*, but rather on the sacred or profane identity of the "Solomon" in the verse, "thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand" [האלף לך שלמה] (Song of Songs 8:12).[79] Displacing the rabbinic uncertainty about the meaning of the term "Solomon" in the Song of Songs verse onto the term *elef*, the Zohar passage compares the valence of the latter term in the Exodus and Song of Songs verses.

The passage seems, at first, certain about the "profane" [חול] meaning of the term in the Song of Songs verse, but uncertain about its valence in the verse from Exodus, which concerns the construction of the *mishkan*, the desert sanctuary. The passage decides, however, that the word carries different valences in the two verses, proclaiming "there is *elef* and there is *elef*" [אית אלף ואית אלף].[80] Moreover, the "profane" [חול] nature of the non-holy *elef* is not simply that of earthliness, as in the Talmudic discussion, but of a demonic nature, "from the contaminated *Sitra Aḥra*" [מסטרא אחרא מסאבא].[81] The passage goes on to inform us that the divine and demonic realms must be separated, but with an important qualification:

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[79] See *bShavu'ot,* 35b.
[80] *Zohar* II, 227b.
[81] *Zohar* II, 227a.

בגין דבעינן לאפרשא בין קדש לחול, ורזא דקרא הכי הוא, (ויקרא י י) ולהבדיל בין הקדש ובין החול
ובין הטמא ובין הטהור. ועם כל דא אף על גב דפרישו אית לקדש מן החול, חולקא חדא אית ליה
בקדושה מסטרא דשמאלא, הדא הוא דכתיב האלף לך שלמה, דאינון אלף יומי החול, ואינון יומי
דגלותא.[82]

> For it is necessary to separate the holy from the profane. And this is the secret of
> the verse (Leviticus 10:10), "And that ye may put difference between holy and
> unholy, and between unclean and clean." And nonetheless, even though the holy
> has a separation from the profane, it has one portion in the holy from the left side.
> As it is written, "thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand" [Song 8:12], these are
> the thousand profane days, and these are the days of exile.

In relation to the two options that were broached concerning the relationship of the two
kinds of *kets*, integration *versus* separation, this passage maintains the tension between
them by juxtaposing them in a manner at once stark and unstable, and whose meaning is
far from clear. 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
latter "has one portion in the holy" [חולקא חדא אית ליה בקדושה]. Of course, the word I am
translating here as "has" is the same word, "אית" that appears in the common Zoharic
anaphora used to create parallelism between the divine and demonic (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.

Given that the unholy *elef* is said to be the "days of exile," the passage seems to suggest
that the demonic "having" of a holy "portion" 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 which discuss the capture of the Shekhinah ("*Kenesset*

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[82] *Zohar* II, 227a-b.

Yisra'el") by the demonic, usually described as an assault from the "left side."[83]
Alternatively, though this would fit less well with the "exile" theme, it could be interpreted along the lines of 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 *zohama*" passage). The uncertainty between these two interpretations may be related to the uncertain role of the proof-text from the Song of Songs.   The plain language of the verse seems to indicate that the *elef*, which the Zohar asserts is demonically "profane," *belongs to* Solomon, rather than vice versa, rendering the "exile" reference problematic. This uncertainty, in turn, brings us back to the indeterminacy of the repeated word, "has," "אית," in the two sides of the parallelism between the divine and the demonic "having" in the passage.

Again, the works of Moshe de Leon shed significant light on this passage – here by showing that the interpretive problem may lie not only with the reader but with Solomon himself. In several of his works, de Leon interprets this verse as alluding to the deeper meaning of Solomon's relationship to his thousand wives and concubines – the profane *elef*.[84] Thus, according to the *Shekel Ha-Kodesh,* Solomon took on these wives because of his desire to fully know and perfect (or "complete") the Shekhinah, the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," by coming into relationship with its "evil" side.[85] This side consisted of Solomon's thousand foreign wives, who are in the "domain of the Other

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[83] See, in particular, *Zohar* I, 210a-b. As in the "*kets*" passage discussed above, this passage affirms the existence of two "ends," "*kets* which is on the left, *kets* which is on the right" [**קץ איהו לימינא קץ איהו**
לשמאלא]. It then laments the rule of the "left *kets*" over the "right *kets*" as a result of sin:
דאתייהיב שלטנו להאי קץ דשמאלא... דמלכו קדישא מלכות שמים אתכפיא, ומלכות חייבא (אחרא) אתגבר
… because dominion was given to this *kets* of the Left… since the Holy Kingdom – Kingdom of Heaven – has been overturned and the [Other,] Wicked Kingdom has prevailed.
Zohar I, 210b, Matt III, 292 (translation modified).
[84] Moshe de Leon, *Sefer Shekel Ha-Kodesh*, 22-23; *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 149; *Sefer Ha-Rimon,* in Wolfson, *The Book of the Pomegranate*, 202.
[85] *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 להחזיק 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 that 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.

El"[86] – and who constitute, in Mopsik's gloss, the "exterior branches" of the "tree."[87] However, rather than restoring the proper relationships between the good and evil sides of the "tree," presumably by pressing the latter into the service of the former, Solomon was seduced into abandoning the good side and cleaving to the evil side. This was Solomon's "error" [טעותו], a term, Mopsik declares, that seems deliberately chosen by de Leon over a term like "sin."[88] Solomon "intended to perfect the interior of this level in the secret of good and evil" [ונתכוון להשלים תוכן המדרגה הזאת בסוד הטוב והרע][89] – again, presumably to integrate the two sides of the "tree" by subordinating the evil side to the good, fulfilling the proof-text offered by de Leon, "the queens and the concubines, and they praised her" [מלכות ופילגשים ויהללוה] (Song of Songs 6:9). Tragically, the dangerously intimate knowledge of the *Sitra Aḥra* required by Solomon's risky quest led him astray, so that he "abandoned all that was above and cleaved to the nether region" [עזב כל מה שלמעלה ונתדבק למטה].

The Zohar passage about the *elef* acquires its full meaning when read against the background of this discussion in the *Shekel Ha-Kodesh*. In light of the latter discussion, we find that the uncertainty expressed by the Zohar about the term "*elef*" and the obscurity of the Zohar passage itself – affecting both the term "*elef*" and the directionality of the "having" of this "*elef*" – correspond to a more dangerous uncertainty, that besetting Solomon's active quest for proper understanding and practice in relation to the *Sitra Aḥra*. 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 autonomous seductiveness, may be read into the otherwise obscure transition in the Zohar passage from the Song of Songs phrase "Solomon must have a thousand" [האלף לך שלמה] to the interpretation of that *elef* as the days of exile.

In light of my analysis in this section, I would argue that Solomon's "error" and the resulting "exile" must be seen, at least in part, as an effect of the complex set of

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[86] בסבח אל אחר. Cf. *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 149.
[87] Moshe de Leon, *Le Sicle du Sanctuaire,* 120 n. 179.
[88] *Ibid*., 121 n. 82.
[89] I am translating "תוכן" as interior. Mopsik, *Le Sicle*, 120, translates it as "content" ("*la teneur*").

indeterminacies surrounding the Song of Songs verse, some inherited from rabbinic times, others surfacing in 13th century texts.   The Zohar passage's uncertainties and dangers, both those of the reader of the passage and those of Solomon to which the passage implicitly alludes, should be related to the uncertainties and dangers set up by the complex juxtapositions of rhetorical parallelisms throughout the Zohar. From this perspective, Solomon's "wisdom" failed him, at least in part, due to his misreading of the significance of the anaphora, "there is *elef,* and there is *elef.*"   The rhetorical structure sets up an ontological expectation not only of a seamless set of correspondences among all dimensions of the cosmos, but also of relatively easy access, on the level of knowledge and practice, from one dimension to the other. In this interpretation, Solomon was seduced by the rhetorical impression of seamlessness and, confusing the rhetorical for the ontological, committed a fatal "mistake."

De Leon'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 "*kets*" I have analyzed above.[90] 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).[91] The discussions of Adam, Noah, and Abraham have their close parallels in the Zohar, as does the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*'s extensive discussion of the prophet Hosea who also sought to gain the same sort of knowledge and perform the same sort of *tikun* as Solomon.[92] It was, of course, with the possibilities and dangers embodied in Hosea that I opened this thesis.

After discussing some of the various ways the Zohar uses rhetorical parallelism, I return to the question of its relationship to the two models of the *Sitra Aḥra* described by Tishby. It should by now be evident that rhetorical parallelism does not determine the ontological status or relationship of the two juxtaposed realms.   On the contrary, the "polysemous" quality of such constructional schemes are crucial to the Zohar's evocation of the urgency and gravity of the fateful struggles inherent in its portrayal of cosmos, the

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[90] *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 149.
[91] *Ibid.*, 149-150.
[92] *Ibid.*, 149-151. Compare *Zohar* II, 245a.

difficulty of drawing the crucial distinctions necessary for correct interpretation and practice, and the sublime opportunities and terrifying dangers facing both the readers of the Zohar and the human and divine figures it portrays. As the passages discussed above have shown, rhetorical parallelism sets the stage for the complex dramas of divine, demonic, and human quests for ontological unity and separation, and for the tragic misapprehensions and catastrophes that have eternally beset such quests.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that rhetorical parallelism does not bear a simple relationship to the two models of the *Sitra Aḥra* discussed in the preceding section or to specific alternatives along any of their axes – geographical, structural or essential. Thus, although anaphorically established rhetorical parallelism might be read as suggesting structural homology, the Zohar uses it to portray the relationships between the divine and demonic characterized by concentricity, as well as those characterized by homology.

Perhaps the clearest example of the use of rhetorical parallelism to depict concentricity comes in the context of a discussion of the "curtains" of the *mishkan*. This image appears in the Zohar in the midst of a complex passage about the relationship of the soul to the various levels of the divine. The passage's principal imagery is that of "heavens" [שמים] and "firmaments" [רקיעין], terms it uses interchangeably.[93] The passage introduces its exposition of the various divine levels with the notion that "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.[94] Several folios later, the passage explores the relationship between these holy entities and their unholy 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, כקליפה על מוחא, רקיעין דלגו אינון ההוא קלישו דקיימא על מוחא, ואלין אקרון שמים ליהו"ה [95]

[93] The passage extends from *Zohar* II, 209a to II, 214b.
[94] *Zohar* II, 209a.
[95] *Zohar* II, 213a.

By this heaven are conveyed all heavens below on the side of Holiness, until

reaching those other heavens of the Other Side [*Sitra Aḥra*], called "goat

curtains." … For there are curtains and there are curtains! … Goat curtains are

other firmaments, of the Other Side … and those are exterior firmaments … and

these cover the interior firmaments, as *kelipah* on *moḥa*. The interior firmaments

are a thin membrane [*kelishu*] that stands on a *moḥa*, and these are called

"heavens for YHVH" [Psalms 115:16].[96]

Here the parallelism between upper holy heavens and lower holy heavens is

supplemented by the parallelism between holy lower firmaments and impure lower

firmaments. However, this tripartite structure (upper holy / lower holy / lower unholy)

which we have already seen a number of times, does not mark the image of the curtains.

Rather, "there are curtains and there are curtains" – i.e., two sets, corresponding to holy

and unholy lower "firmaments," the second set identified with the biblical phrase "goat

curtains" [יריעות עזים][97] to stress their demonic character. The limitation of the "curtains"

imagery to the two lower levels emphasizes the phenomenal image of covering it evokes.

The uppermost level is not referred to as a "curtain," for it is not a covering but that

which is covered – specifically, a *moḥa* which is covered by holy curtains, the "inner

firmaments." These firmaments, whose character as coverings has been established by

identifying them with "curtains," are called a *kelishu* [קלישו], a thin membrane, that

covers the *moḥa.* By contrast, the "outer firmaments," identified with "the goat

curtains," are called a *kelipah*.

Thus, in presenting its central images, the passage employs an anaphorically established

rhetorical parallelism, even while its elaboration of the "firmaments"/"curtains"

association emphasizes the concentric structural relationship of the *Sitra Aḥra* to the holy

realm, as well as of the lower level of the holy realm to the upper levels. This clear

combination of rhetorical parallelism and structural concentricity provides a further,

rather stark demonstration of the inadmissibility of a seamless movement from rhetorical

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[96] Matt VI, 213 (translation modified).
[97] Exodus 26:7.

impression to ontological status.[98] The anaphorically established parallelism, which

yields the antithetical homonyms "firmaments/firmaments," and which might seem suited

for structural homology, is here deployed in the service of a portrayal of structural

concentricity.[99]

I note that, in the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, Moshe de Leon offers an explanation for the

phenomenon of homonymy between 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 section). Addressing the question of how the word *kets* can be

used to name both a *kelipah* and a *mo'aḥ,* de Leon focuses on the physical image of a nut,

a primary source for the *kelipah*/*mo'aḥ* imagery.[100] De Leon 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

Leon makes it – after all, the *kelipah* in question is called "*kets"* when it is at its most

demonically destructive: "the *kets* of all flesh … for it has no aspiration other than

destruction and desolation" [קץ כל בשר ...כי אין חקירתו אלא תכלית ושממון].[101] Moreover,

this explanation is completely inadequate when it comes to the Zohar. Divine/demonic

homonymy is one of the main techniques that the Zohar uses to set the two realms in

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[98] 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 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 *Sitra Aḥra* and the notion of the relativity of the very status of *kelipah*
and *mo'aḥ* is absent.

[99] It is striking that a very similar portrayal of two sets of concentric entities that cover the Shekhinah is
found in a passage whose basic imagery – that of "days" – seems far less congenial to the "covering" trope.
At *Zohar* II, 204a, the Zohar tells us that "there are days and there are days" [אית ימים ואית ימים]. 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 *Sitra
Aḥra*. 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.

[100] *Sefer Ha-Mishkal*, 158.

[101] *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*, II, 122c (18:12).

antithetical contrast, particularly when it is declaring an imperative to make an absolute separation between them.   Indeed, the forced quality of de Leon'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.

Rhetorical parallelism is far from the only technique that the Zohar uses to set up relationships of resemblance-and-menace between the divine and the demonic. In particular, a full analysis of the way the Zohar signifies ambivalence requires a consideration of tropes, as well as schemes – as both rhetorical techniques may be used for related ends. I have argued, for example, that the seductiveness of the demonic, or at the very least, the power of the Zohar to convince us of the seductiveness of the demonic, partly lies in hypnotic, chant-like rhetorical parallelisms, established through the constructional scheme of repeated anaphoras. By contrast, in a passage I will explore in detail below, the Zohar portrays the seductive power of the demonic as based on phenomenal resemblance, specifically that of *nogah* to the 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 (although, 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 in which the often dangerously ambivalent relationship between the divine and demonic is expressed.

2. Tropes – Images of Hyperbolic Ambivalence

As I noted above, many of the Zohar's central images can be read as either divine or demonic, an effect achieved through the doubling, division, and indeterminacy of such

images. In this section, I focus on the way the Zohar's use of tropes achieve these three effects.   In addition, I emphasize the way certain individual images present a further paradoxical quality: a concentrated capacity to embody diametrically opposite superlatives, an extremely high level of holiness and an extremely base level of contamination. Such paradoxically concentrated images embody potent constructions and attempted managements of ambivalence, as well as manifesting their extreme fragility. At the rhetorical level, such simultaneously "highest" and "lowest" tropes, in which a single image can signify radically opposed meanings, may be called "antithetical hyperboles." The dangerously indeterminate meaning of any such image, its potential to embody either or both of two radically incompatible valences, is due not only, or even primarily, to difficulties originating with the interpreter of the text, but rather to the nature of the image itself.

a. *Dragons*

Some of the most elaborately developed ambivalent imagery of the demonic in the Zohar is found in relation to 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 descriptions of some of these creatures in the Zohar, which feature 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, the Zohar also often uses two or more of the reptilian designations interchangeably. In relation to these creatures, one finds all three key characteristics of ambivalent Zoharic imagery: doubling, division, and indeterminacy. This phenomenon is perhaps not surprising, for the ambivalent status of such creatures goes back to rabbinic literature, to the Bible, and undoubtedly much earlier.[102] More proximately in the history

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[102] 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 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* I, 146a (15:22). The images of these creatures in kabbalah as well as

of kabbalah, this ambivalence was elaborated by Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, one of the main precursors for Zoharic writing on the *Sitra Aḥra*.

I highlight these creatures both because of their importance in the history of kabbalistic writing about the *Sitra Aḥra* and because of their challenge to some of the key dichotomies used to analyze such writing. For example, on the one hand, images of structural homology, as well as schemes of rhetorical parallelism, are used to present the relationship between the holy and unholy reptilian counterparts – as in the Zohar's statement, "this serpent is death of the world … and he is on the left. And there is another serpent of life on the right side " [האי חויא הוא מותא דעלמא, ... והוא לסטר שמאלא, ואית חויא אחרא דחיי בסטר ימינא].[103] On the other hand, Joseph Gikatilla, an author closely related to the Zohar circle, portrayed the snake with the imagery of concentricity:

ובתחילה היה עומד מחוץ לכתלי מחנות הקדושה והיה מחובר לכותל חיצון שבמחנות, אחוריו היו דבוקות בכותל ופניו פונות כלפי חוץ [104]

> And in the beginning he stood outside the walls of the camps of holiness and was attached to the outermost wall of these camps. His hindquarters cleaved to the wall and his face was turned outward.

The true place of residence of Gikatilla's snake is thus contiguous, indeed attached, to the "walls" surrounding the "holy camps"; he is even almost part of the "wall," his back attached to the "inside," the holy realm, but his face turned to the "outside," the demonic realm. This portrayal of the snake as a liminal entity between the holy and unholy realms is closely related to portrayals of the *kelipah* of *nogah,* an indispensable element of the concentric image of the *kelipot.* Gikatilla declares that the snake serves a divine purpose as long as it keeps to its proper place, guarding the border between the holy and the unholy. The snake only becomes destructive when it leaves its appointed place just

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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.
[103] *Zohar* I, 52a.
[104] Gikatilla, *Sod Ha-Naḥash u-Mishpato,* 192. See also Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape,* 78-80.

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, the demonic reptiles are presented in a relationship of structural homology to their holy counterparts. Thus, Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen's *Ma'amar 'al Ha-Atsilut Ha-Semalit* systematically portrays the doubling of the reptile into "good" and "bad" forms.[105] The *Ma'amar* introduces the *livyatan* first as a term for the sefirah of *Yesod* which unites the divine bride and bridegroom. Using the terms *livyatan, tanin,* and *naḥash* nearly interchangeably, it goes on to describe a blind reptile [תנינעור] who serves as a demonic counterpart to the sefirah *Yesod,* uniting Lilith and Samael. It then declares that each of the three demonic entities, Lilith, Samael, and their phallic intermediary (their *shoshbin,* שושבין), may be called a *livyatan.* The passage's emphasis on homology between holy and unholy entities[106] implies that the term *livyatan* may also be applied to each of the three relevant divine entities, the *Kadosh Barukh Hu,* the Shekhinah, and their *shoshbin,* the sefirah *Yesod.*[107] In another text, Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen analogizes the messiah to a snake who takes his vengeance on an evil snake.[108] This text seems to be the source for the equivalence between the messiah and the snake, reinforced by their numerical equivalence (358 = נחש = משיח), influential in Sabbatean and post-Sabbatean texts, particularly in Moshe Ḥayim Luzzatto.[109]

Such reptilian doubling occurs in numerous places in the Zohar. The *naḥash,* is, of course, one of the Zohar's key appellations for diabolical figures – though it sometimes

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[105] See Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, 'Ma'amar 'al Ha-Atzilut 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 impure *tanin* in the sea, literally. And so it is above in the way of concealment.

[106] *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.

[107] These associations are made explicit by Cordovero, in *Pardes*, II, 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.

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

[109] *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

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refers to the male devil, Samael, and sometimes to his female consort.[110] Of the *ḥivya*, as I have noted, the Zohar 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 to be more like *shedim,* the demonic spirits that pervade everyday life.[111] A related set of splits apply to the consideration of the *taninim* – at times portrayed as embodiments of evil, at other times portrayed as representing the holy "fathers," presumably the sefirot of *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif'eret.*[112] One passage explicitly relates these two uses: after a lengthy portrayal of the demonic *taninim,* the passage announces that "superior *taninim* abide above – those that are blessed … These rule over all the fish of the sea" [תנינייא עלאין לעילא קיימין אינון דמתברכאן ...אלין שלטין על כל נוני ימין].[113]

In another passage, the homology between the *taninim* , or at least their human avatars, is portrayed as a product of the struggle between them. In this passage, the *taninim* are said to be Jacob and Esau,[114] figures often taken as embodiments or agents of the central divine and demonic personages. Jacob is described as 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*"[115] – the human fraternal battle thus participating in the cosmic war between the holy and unholy reptiles.

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

[111] *Zohar* I, 52a.

[112] For the latter interpretation, see *Zohar* III, 39b:

את התנינים הגדולים אלין אבהן דאינון משתקיין בקדמיתא ומשתרשן על כלא.

   "The great *taninim*": these are the fathers, for they are irrigated first [i.e., receive divine vitality from the higher levels] and spread their roots over all.

[113] *Zohar* II, 27b, Matt IV, 107 (translation modified). I have adopted Matt's textual emendation in his *Aramaic Texts*, vol. 4, 44.

[114] *Zohar* I, 138b.

[115] *Zohar* I, 138a-b, Matt II, 271 (translation modified):

ותא חזי, יעקב הוה ידע דעשו הוה ליה לאתדבקא בההוא חויא עקימא, ועל דא בכל עובדוי אתמשך עליה כחויא עקימא אחרא בחכמתא בעקימו והכי אצטריך, ואתייא דא, כי הא דאמר רבי שמעון, מאי דכתיב (בראשית א כא) ויברא אלהי"ם את התנינים הגדולים, דא יעקב ועשו, ואת כל נפש החיה הרומשת, אלין שאר דרגין דבינייהו, ודאי אתעביד יעקב חכים לקבליה דההוא חויא אחרא והכי אצטריך

   Come and see: Jacob knew that Esau had to cleave to that crooked serpent, so in all his dealings he conducted himself toward him like an other crooked serpent, with wisdom, with crookedness, and so it had to be. This accords with Rabbi Shim'on's comment on the verse: *And Elohim created the taninim* (Genesis 1, 21) – Jacob and Esau; *and every living creature that moveth –* other rungs between them. Indeed, Jacob became cunning toward that other serpent and so it had to be.

At least one Zohar passage opts for a divided, rather than doubled, image of the relationship between the good and bad dimensions of the snake. The snake 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 *Sitra Aḥra*.[116] This divided snake may be viewed as an icon of the deep ambivalence with which 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.[117]

The exact metaphysical status of "Jacob" in this passage is complex, as suggested in the immediately preceding lines, *Zohar* II, 138a, Matt II, 270 (translation modified):

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

> Similarly, here, He called him Jacob. He was never named by a human being. Elsewhere what is written? *The* Elohim *of Israel called him* El (Genesis 33:20) – *Kudsha Berikh Hu* called Jacob *El*, saying, "I am God in the realms above; you are God in the realms below."

The Zohar's interpretation here derives from *bMegilah,* 18a. The Talmudic teaching runs directly counter to the teaching in *Bereshit Rabah*, I, 94c (79:8), which attributes the divine naming of Jacob to Jacob himself and declares that he was punished for its 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 II, 270-271, n. 27.

[116] See *Zohar* III, 119b:

פתח ואמר, (ירמיה מו כב) קולה כנחש ילך וגו', השתא (כהאי גוונא) דישראל בגלותא, איהי ודאי אולא כנחש, חויא כד איהו (ד"א בדינא) כפיף רישא לעפרא, סליק זנבא שלים ומחי לכל אינון דאשתכחו קמיה, אוף הכי השתא בגלותא כהאי גוונא, רישא כפיף לעפרא, וזנבא שלים, מאן עביד לזנבא דיסתליק לעילא ושלים ומחי, רישא דאתכפיא לתתא, ועם כל דא, מאן מדבר ליה לזנבא, ומאן נטיל ליה למטלנוי, האי רישא, אף על גב דאיהו כפיף לעפרא, הוא מדבר ליה למטלנוי, בגין דא, קולה כנחש ילך: והשתא שאר עמין דאינון אחידן בזנבא, סלקין לעילא ושלטין ומחיין, ורישא כפיף לעפרא

> He opened and said: "The voice thereof shall go like a serpent" (Jeremiah 46:22). Now that Israel is 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. So even it is in like manner now in exile: the head is bowed to the dust, and the tail dominates. 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, "The voice thereof shall go like a serpent." And 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.

[117] 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, וקודשא 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 *Kudsha Berikh Hu* 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 "handmaiden," Lilith.

One final Zoharic instance of this image must be mentioned, the *ḥivya* portrayed at the beginning of the *Sifra de-Tseni'uta*[118] – or, at least, this instance as interpreted by Yehudah Liebes. According to Liebes, this *ḥivya* refers to a "divine force that seeks to return from the harmony in creation" – that balance between left and right, male and female, to which the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta*, indeed the entire Zohar, is dedicated – to the state of primordial "chaos."[119] This *ḥivya* is a force that "never rests from its destructive efforts," but that also "symbolizes a foundational and deep-rooted movement of existence," one that "is destined to prevail and triumph."[120] Ultimately, this *ḥivya* "reveals its nature as the solitary God,"[121] the God who is referred to in the verse, "And YHVH alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isaiah 2:11). This bold interpretation, which makes the ultimate force for cosmic destruction identical to the ultimate divine, is associated by Liebes with the doctrine of the cosmic cycles, or *shemitot*, a doctrine generally absent from the Zohar[122] and explicitly rejected by Moshe de Leon.[123] It may also be linked to the general notion, formulated especially in the kabbalah of 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 as a result of human sin.[124] Indeed, if Liebes is correct, this 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," and with the "anti-cosmic vector" in kabbalah.[125] While Liebes' interpretation is far from self-evident, it is made possible by the recurrence of hyperbolically ambivalent images, particularly of the reptilian variety, throughout the Zohar.[126]

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[118] *Zohar* II, 176b, Matt V, 551:

גלופי דגליפין, כחיזו דחויא, אריך, ומתפשט לכאן ולכאן, זנבא ברישא, רישא (אחורא) אחיד אכתפין, אעבר וזעים, נטיר וגניז

Gravings of engravings, like the appearance of a long serpent, extending here and there – tail in the head, head behind the shoulders, enraged and furious, guarded and hidden.

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

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

[121] *Ibid.* [מגלה את טבעו כאל היחיד].

[122] *Ibid.*

[123] See, e.g., *Sefer ha-Mishkal,* 92-93. See Liebes, 'Ketsad Niṭḥaber', 72.

[124] Idel, *New Perspectives*, 181-182. See also Mopsik, *Les Grands Textes,* 103-106. Mopsik sees these two divergent explanations as a contradiction within the writings of Ezra of Gerona.

[125] Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet La-Pri', 118-142.

[126] 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...

Turning to textual indeterminacy, the third effect I associate with this ambivalent imagery, the history of the reception of the Zohar suggests that one may fairly characterize at least some of the Zoharic *taninim* as indeterminate in relation to the distinction between divine and demonic identities. For example, the *taninim* who figure in the most extended Zoharic discussion of the subject, the so-called "*Ma'amar Ha-Taninim*" in Parashat Bo,[127] have been the subject of sharply conflicting interpretations. Some traditional commentators view these creatures as demonic and others as holy; still others interpret the *taninim* in this passage as referring both to their holy and unholy forms.[128] Nor is it surprising that such images were favored in Sabbatean writings, as in the *Derush Ha-Taninim* of Nathan of Gaza, a commentary on this Zohar passage. According to Scholem, for Nathan, the "great *tanin*" alludes both "to a holy entity and to a demonic entity which is to be repaired by the holy entity whose name is identical to it."[129] Nor should this indeterminacy be reduced to willful misreading by the interpreters; rather, it can be seen as an almost predictable effect of the Zohar's practice of doubling and dividing such images.

The story of the post-Zoharic career of these creatures 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 the central writings of kabbalah after the Zohar, the doubling of

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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'.
[127] *Zohar* II, 34a-35b.
[128] 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.
[129] Scholem, *Be-Ikvot Mashi'aḥ,* 11 [על דבר שבקדושה וגם על דבר שבקלפה המיתקן ע"י אותו דבר שבקדושה ששמו כשמו].

the dragon into holy and unholy forms became the theme of highly elaborate discourses – in Lurianic writings,[130] as well as in later writers such as Luzzatto,[131] the Vilna Gaon,[132] and Shlomo Elyashiv[133] (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. Thus, in the early 19th century, Yitsḥak Isaac Ḥaver wrote that messianic times will be "in the secret of the snake" [בסוד הנחש],[134] echoing a related statement made nearly six centuries earlier by Yosef Gikatilla.[135] In those times, the "two snakes of the *Sitra Aḥra*" will be annihilated by the "two snakes of holiness," identified with Moses and the messiah[136] – 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.[137] However, I do wish to draw attention to certain aspects of this reception history that shed light on the reptilian imagery in the Zohar as well as on other Zoharic images of hyperbolic ambivalence.

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[130] See, e.g., Vital, *Sefer Likutei 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* that unites them. On the shifting significance of the snake between holiness and unholiness in the Zohar and Lurianic kabbalah, see Liebes, 'Tren Orzilin de-Ayalta', *passim.*

[131] 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 לאענקרא ליה מכלא.

> And Esau will be strengthened in these [other] Elohim … He is the Satan and it is Esau. And confronting /corresponding to him is the messiah and he is *nahash* … and the messiah confronting/corresponding to him [Esau] must go after him and uproot him from all.

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

[133] 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 *nahash* himself, … And therefore he ruled over the *tanin* of *kelipah* to subjugate him under his hand.

[134] *Sefer Pitḥe She'arim,* 111b.

[135] Gikatilla, *Sod Ha-Naḥash*, 199: "The *naḥash* is in the secret of purity [הנחש הוא בסוד המהרה]." .

[136] *Sefer Pithei She'arim,* 112b.

[137] See, e.g., Liebes, *Sod Ha-Emunah Ha-Shabeta'it*, 328-329.

In the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, the ambivalent quality of the snake sometimes takes the form of portrayals of it as protean, capable of transformation back and forth from the divine to the demonic. This dynamic is described at the level of the relationship of human beings to intermediate spiritual forces, with frequent reference to the transformations between staffs and snakes in the biblical story of Moses and Pharaoh's magicians. Individuals come to be associated with the unholy "snake" 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 Metatron,[138] between a *shed* [שד, a demonic spirit] and an "angel,"[139] or between a *shed* and *Shadai* [שדי, a divine name].[140] 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.[141]

The second development in the *Ra'ya Mehemena* is the greater emphasis on the possibility of a positive, or even divine, meaning for the *livyatan*. In one passage, it is identified successively with Moses, with those who have merited identification with the sefirot of *Tif'eret* and *Yesod*, and finally with *Yesod* itself.[142] To be sure, an explicit identification of the *livyatan* with *Yesod* already occurs in the Zohar itself in at least one passage,[143] echoing the similar usage in Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen.

These two developments come together in the writings of Ḥayim Vital. The protean ambivalence of the snake – its ability to shift back and forth from snake to staff – becomes a feature of a specific stage in the development of the divine figure of *Ze'er Anpin*. According to Vital, the name "snake" is the "secret of the immature phase" of *Ze'er Anpin* [סוד קטנות נקרא נחש].[144] This is a stage in the evolution of this *partsuf* in

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[138] E.g., *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 93b.

[139] E.g., *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 277a.

[140] *Ibid.*

[141] 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 the theme of "enclothing" in Chapter Three.

[142] *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 279a.

[143] *Zohar* III, 60b.

[144] *Sefer Peri Ets Ḥayim*, 517-518.

which the demonic forces attach themselves to him, a stage in which he exists in the "secret of the staff who turns into a snake" [שהוא סוד המטה הנהפך לנחש]. This is, consequently, a dangerous stage of the divine with which to occupy oneself[145] – a danger again borne out by its Sabbatean use. This correlation between the "immature" *Ze'er Anpin* and the snake on the basis of their shared instability in relation to the divide between divine and demonic is implicitly related to the passage in the Zohar I call the "Bald God" passage, to which I shall shortly turn.[146]

Before doing so, however, I turn to three late texts, all from the first half of the 20th century, that show that this reception-history culminates in an ever-increasing concentrated ambivalence in the reptilian creatures themselves. The first text, in Shmuel Bornstein of Sochatchov's *Shem Mi-Shemu'el,* takes as its point of departure the Talmudic notion that snakes bite without any gain to themselves.[147] Bornstein emphasizes that this distinctive trait is shared by the holy and unholy snakes, and it is precisely this feature that makes each a pure representative of good and evil, respectively: just as the evil snake does evil for its own snake, so the good snake seeks to do good for its own sake.[148]   It is thus precisely the unique trait they share – that of pure disinterestedness – that makes the good and evil snakes opposites. This interpretation of the relationship of the two snakes is a particularly stark example of the key feature of ambivalence, the radical incompatibility between nearly identical doubles.

Moreover, Bornstein tells us that the holy snake, identified here with Jacob, is called a "snake" by virtue of its antithetical relationship to its demonic counterpart [והוא דומה לנחש

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[145] See Liebes, 'Tren Urzilin de-Oraita', *passim*.

[146] The "Bald God" passage is found at *Zohar* III, 47a-49b and my discussion below is at pp. 104-114. Although Vital does not refer to the "Bald God" passage in this context, he elsewhere associates the stage of the "immaturity" [קטנות] of *Ze'er Anpin* with the word "*Ish,*" in contrast with the name "*Adam"* associated with his "maturity" [גדלות]. See, e.g., *Ets Ḥayim*, 14b. The dangerous feature of the *Ish,* his connection with the demonic forces, and consequent need for purification is the central theme of the "Bald God" passage.

[147] See, e.g., *yPe'ah* 4a. Bornstein refers us to the Talmud Bavli, *Bava 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.

[148] *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.

בשלילה].[149] In other words, we learn the nature of the holy (a "snake" by virtue of its unmotivated goodness) as a back-formation from that of the unholy (a "snake" 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. [150] Yet, I would also extend this insight from the semantic and epistemological level to that of the ontological nature of the dynamic relationship between the divine and the demonic, in conformity with my general notion of splitting as simultaneously rhetorical and ontological. It also highlights the instability of the crucial boundary between the divine and the demonic and some of the dangers posed to cognitive and religious clarity that may result from the homonymy between such intimate, and yet radically opposed, rivals.

Two other late works takes this one step further – and perhaps closer to the rabbinic sources as well as to the kind of early kabbalistic tradition represented by the Gikatilla passage cited above. In such works, there is only one snake, 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 snake was destined to be king of the animals and was then cast down to the level of the most cursed among them.[151] In the *Sha'are Leshem*, Shlomo Elyashiv interprets this latter Talmudic dictum as implying that the snake belonged to the level of *Da'at,* Knowledge, one of the highest divine levels, closely connected with the sefirah of *Keter* (and evoking associations both with sexuality and with the Tree of Knowledge). This level is composed of both the left and the right cosmic dimensions, making it uniquely suited for choice between good and evil.[152] The *Esh Kodesh* of Kalonimus Kalmish of Piasetzna presents the snake in a manner even closer to the first Talmudic passage: the one and

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[149] *Ibid*. The same dynamic may be found in Ibn Tabul. Rubin, "*Derush ha-taninim"*, 39-40.

[150] 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 Zohar itself. See *Zohar* I, 194a; Tishby, *MZ* I, 289.

[151] *bSotah* 9b.

[152] *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.

only snake is a creature abstracted from natural needs and from natural causality.[153] 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 snake 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.[154] These three late texts bring the hyperbolic ambivalence embodied in the snake imagery to a supremely concentrated form, though they may be justly read as simply drawing forth the implications of the image present in kabbalah at least as far back as the Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen – or in the Jewish tradition as far back as the Talmud and beyond.

<center>

b. The Dragon's Fellows: the "Bald God,"

Koraḥ, and Job

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This excursus on the ever-intensifying concentration of hyperbolic ambivalence in reptilian imagery in kabbalistic history can illuminate other kinds of ambivalent Zoharic imagery. Specifically, I turn to three images: the image of the "Bald God," developed in the course of an elaborate narrative about the relationship between the divine and the demonic, the image of Koraḥ, closely related to the "Bald God" image, and the image of Job as presented in two quite different passages. Each of these images embodies hyperbolic ambivalence, though in distinct ways.

The "Bald God" passage[155] presents itself as an extended reflection on Leviticus 13:40: "And the man whose hair has fallen off his head, he is bald; yet is he clean [*tahor*]" [ואיש כי ימרט ראשו קרח הוא טהור הוא]. The importance of this passage is suggested by the strong reactions it has aroused in commentators. Tishby has called the central part of this passage "strange and obscure."[156] The troubling quality experienced by Tishby may be viewed as a latter-day scholarly version of the kind of trouble expressed in Lurianic texts about the close and dangerous connection between the "immature" *Ze'er Anpin* and

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[153] Kalonimus Kalmish Shapira of Piasetzna, *Sefer Esh Kodesh,* 60-62. I thank Shaul Magid for this reference.

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

[155] *Zohar* III, 47a-49b.

[156] *Zohar* III, 48b. See my discussion below. The quote from Tishby is from *MZ* I, 150 [מזור וסתום].

demonic forces – for, as I asserted above, the "Bald God" passage serves as an implicit sub-text for that Lurianic discussion. The Lurianic link between the "snake" and the "immature" *Ze'er Anpin* also provides support for the notion that the "Bald God," as well as other instances of hyperbolically ambivalent images such as Koraḥ and Job, can be viewed as the "dragon's fellows" – paradoxically concentrated images crucial for understanding the relationship between the divine and demonic in the Zohar and later kabbalah. The "bald God" passage is crucial for understanding the phenomenon of "splitting" in the Zohar; in the exposition that follows, however, I will necessarily touch on themes concerning abjection that I broached in the Introduction but will only fully explore in Chapter Two

The "Bald God" passage opens in a seemingly digressive fashion. After quoting the verse from Leviticus, the passage refrains from exploring it but turns instead to the nature of Solomon's wisdom, focusing on the cognitive relationship between contraries. Basing itself on a number of verses from Ecclesiastes, this discussion presents the relationship between contraries as indispensable and complementary. It arrives at a number of maxims expressing this view: "without the existence of folly in the world, there would be no wisdom … the benefit of light only comes from darkness … a person cannot know the taste of sweetness until he tastes bitterness" [אלמלא לא הוה שטותא שכיח בעלמא, לא הוי חכמתא שכיח בעלמא ...תועלתא דנהורא לא אתייא אלא מן חשוכא...דלא ידע אינש טעמא דמתיקא עד דטעים מרירא].[157] This complementarity seems relatively harmonious, with the one exception of a hint of the demonic origin of folly, which "is aroused from an other place" [דאתער מאתר אחרא]. Despite this relatively collaborative relationship between opposites, the passage cites as a proof-text the phrase from Ecclesiastes 7:14, "'this' confronted with 'this' hath made the Elohim," [גם את זה לעמת זה עשה זה האלהים] – a phrase that often evokes a homologous and menacing realm of the demonic, a vision rather more ominous than the cognitively complementary opposites of the "light/darkness" variety.

Then, without any explicit transition, the passage continues by puzzling about the existence of multiple Hebrew words to signify a human being, particularly *Ish* [איש] and

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[157] *Zohar* III, 47b. Cf. Wolfson, 'Light Through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar', 73-95.

Adam [אדם]. The passage makes it clear that these terms refer both to different kinds of people and also to different facets of the male divine, either (as in the Lurianic reception of this passage) two forms of the divine figure elsewhere called *Ze'er Anpin*, specifically its divergent harsh and benevolent forms, or the two divine figures *Arikh Anpin* and *Ze'er Anpin* – or perhaps a differentiation within the male divine distinctive to this passage. Before proceeding to an analysis of the dynamic unfolding of the passage, I note that it uses a number of different devices to juxtapose these different personae – among others, parallelism, antithesis, and hierarchical ordering. Thus, at one point in the exposition, it presents the relationship between the harsh and benevolent figures through the means of anaphora, juxtaposing two kinds of "faces" ["there are faces, and there are faces," אית פנים ואית פנים].[158] It also differentiates between various kinds of "*Ish*" [איש] by means of different scriptural adjectives.[159] In another place, the passage sets the terms "*Ish*" [איש] and "*Adam*" [אדם] in opposition; in still another place, it declares that the proper semantic relationship between the terms "*Ish*" and "*Adam*" is that of hierarchical ordering: "whoever is under the rule of *Adam* is called *Ish*" [כל מאן דאיהו תחות שולטני דאדם, אתקרי איש].[160] Understanding the relationship between these various devices requires attention to the dynamic unfolding of the passage, for it is in their disparate strategic deployment that the meaning and force of the passage reside.

The narrative section of the passage may be divided into three, somewhat overlapping, phases: a) the emergence of the *Ish*, initially a harsh divine figure, linked with the demonic, produced through the expulsion of refuse from the highest levels of the divine; b) the integration of the *Ish* into the service of the *Adam;* and c) the persistence of the alterity of the *Ish*. My discussion will necessarily involve a bit of simplification of this thick-textured discussion which occasionally shifts back and forth between stages.

After setting forth the difficulty of the problem through an elaborate narrative frame, the passage embarks on a portrayal of the emergence of the dangerous *Ish,* an emergence

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[158] *Zohar* III, 49a.
[159] *Zohar* III, 48a-b. See my discussion below at pp. 107-108.
[160] *Zohar* III, 48b.

associated with the "dark lamp," the *botsina de-kardinuta* [בוצינא דקרדינותא].[161] This paradoxically named entity, whose actions initiate the process of emanation in a number of passages in the Zohar, here appears as the source of inchoate, volatile particles, the "sparks" – the latter portrayed in a manner very similar to that in the *Idra Zuta*, where the sparks are identified with the "kings of Edom," unstable, evanescent entities whose refuse is the raw material for the realm of the *Sitra Aḥra*.[162] These sparks then crystallize into a unity and "enter … the Body," [עיילין ...בגופא], the latter term a common reference to *Tif'eret* or to *Ze'er Anpin* as a whole, and it is then that this figure is "called *Ish*." The *botsina de-kardinuta* (or perhaps the sparks of which it is the source)[163] then descends on the *Ish*'s head, marks him as belonging to the side of harshness, and links him to the demonic: his "skull" becomes "thoroughly red as a rose, and his hair is red within red, and the lower crowns of below hang from it" [גולגלתא דרישא דהאי סומקא כלא כוורדא, ושערי סומקי בגו סומקי, ותליין מניה כתרין תתאין דלתתא].[164]

This startling portrayal of a red-haired male divine figure from which demonic "lower crowns" hang, a kind of description for which one might be more prepared in relation to the Shekhinah, [165] is undoubtedly what made this text seem so "strange and obscure" to Tishby and so dangerous to Vital.[166] Indeed, perhaps to prepare us for this surprising

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[161] On the *botsina di-kardinuta,* see Liebes, *Perakim Be-Milon Sefer Ha-Zohar,* 145-151, 161-164.

[162] For the identification of the sparks with the kings of Edom, see the *Idra Zuta*, *Zohar* III, 292b. For the notion that some aspects of the kings are never rectified and thus serve as the basis for the *Sitra Aḥra*, see the *Idra Raba*, *Zohar* III, 135b and Tishby, *Netive Emunah u-Minut,* 25-26. "Edom" may be associatively linked with the "redness" of the hair of *Ze'er Anpin* caused by the *botsina di-kardinuta*. See also *Zohar* II, 254b for the association of the production of the sparks with the purging of divine refuse. See my discussion in Chapter Two, pp. 150-155.

[163] The passage shifts from portraying the sparks as descending to the *Ish* to portraying the *botsina* itself as descending. It seems to me that the *botsina* in the second portrayal is a synechdoche for the sparks.

[164] *Zohar* III, 48b. The only other place in the Zohar where phrases akin to "red within red" (in the forms: **סומקי דסומקי** and **סומקא בגו סומקא**) appear is in the *Idra Raba*, *Zohar* III, 136b and 137a. In that passage, it also evokes the harshest aspect of judgment of *Ze'er Anpin*, the aspect that unleashes all forces of destruction – i.e., the aspect in which judgment is most closely link to the demonic.

[165] I note that the more conventional association of long red hair would be with Lilith. See *bEruvin* 100b; *Zohar* I, 148a (*Sitre Torah*). I have noted the Lilith-like transformations of the Shekhinah in a number of places in this dissertation.

[166] See the discussion of this passage by Liebes, in *Ketsad Nitḥaber,* 53-67. Liebes shows how the themes of this passage received quite different elaborations in the Zohar and in Joseph of Hamadan, reflecting key contrasts between kabbalistic conceptions. Most strikingly for my purposes here, Joseph of Hamadan takes the name *Ze'er Anpin* as a name for the Shekhinah – the figure in relation to whom we would not be surprised to find a stage of "redness." For Joseph, moreover, the divine hair-shaving so central to this passage concerns, not the removal of impurities from the divine, but rather the withdrawal of the holy emanations at the end of a cosmic eon, a *shemitah.* The doctrine of the *shemitot* is largely absent from the

portrayal, the Zohar prefaces it by adding to the antithesis between *Ish* and *Adam* a phrase marked by rhythmic repetitions of the word *Ish*, interspersing its divergent senses:

וכד עיילין אלין בגופא אקרי איש, ולא איש דהא תנינן איש תם וישר איש צדיק, ואיש דהכא איש
מלחמה כתיב דכוליה דינא וכלא חד[167]

> When [the sparks] enter the Body, it is called *Ish* , and not *Ish* , for we have
> learned "*Ish,* blameless and upright" [Job 1:8], "a righteous *Ish"* [Genesis 6:9],
> and the *Ish* here, an "*Ish* of war" [Exodus 15:3] is written – entirely Judgment and
> all is one.[168]

As with the repeated anaphoras in some of the passages analyzed above, this kind of rhythmic repetition highlights the intimacy, contrast, and potential overlap between antithetical homonyms.

Perhaps even more striking is the next section, describing the process of the purification of the *Ish,* and the consequent mitigation of his dangerous alterity, his link to the *Sitra Aḥra.* Since his connection to harsh judgment and the demonic is through his hair, the remedy prescribed is the shaving of the head. Only through this process may the *Ish* be called "pure" [*tahor*].[169] That this purification of a divine figure is presented as the deep meaning of purification from the abhorrent disease of leprosy in Leviticus 13 heightens the arresting quality of this passage – particularly when we remember that the "leprosy" in question comes from the upper reaches of the divine through the *botsina de-kardinuta.* I note that, although the passage does not explicitly make the analogy, this purification process seems akin to circumcision, the removal of an impure covering to reveal the purity within, a theurgical operation the Zohar elsewhere prescribes for the *Yesod* of *Ze'er Anpin* and which I discuss in sub-section C.

Zohar and was rejected by Moshe de Leon, though Liebes argues that it survives in at least one passage in the *Sifra di-Tseni'uta*. *Ibid.,* 63-64.
[167] *Zohar* III, 48b. I have adopted Matt's textual emendations in his *Aramaic Texts,* vol. 7, 119.
[168] Matt, VII, 304 (translation modified).
[169] *Ibid.*:

> **וכד אתעבר מניה שערא ואתגליש, מחסד עלאה אתבסם כלא, ואתקרי טהור ...**
> And when the hair passes from him and he is shorn, all is sweetened from the supernal *Ḥesed*, and
> he is called "pure" [*tahor*]…

If we think about this passage in terms of Tishby's two models, we find a by now familiar juxtaposition of elements from seemingly incompatible structural conceptions. First, the covering of the *Ish* by harsh, red hair is produced by the sparks of the *botsina de-kardinuta*, explicitly identified elsewhere with the production of the refuse [פסולת] of the divine.[170] This covering is both a proto-demonic substance and is explicitly linked to the demonic "lower crowns." I note that the latter term suggests the homology model of the relationship between the divine and the demonic; nonetheless, the key physical image here, that of the covering of the divine by a proto-demonic layer, suggests the concentricity model – or, more precisely, we have here an instance of the homologous demonic realm, the "lower crowns," "hanging" from a concentric demonic (or at least proto-demonic) layer, the red hair, itself an amalgamation of the refuse from the highest divine level that now contingently covers a lower divine figure.

The text thus envisions a three-stage process. First, the action of the *botsina de-kardinuta* generates sparks from unnamed, upper reaches of the divine. They then appear in solidified and dangerous form, that of harsh, red hair, covering the head of the *Ish*. This movement from the concealed sparks within the highest level of the divine to the outer covering of a lower level marks progress towards the goal of purification – for the method of ultimate separation from impurity seems thereby clearly delineated, viz., a divine head-shaving. The concentricity image thus proves to be an intermediate stage between the harsh judgments contained within the divine and the severing of the link to the "lower crowns": concentricity as a way-station on the path to the achievement of dualistic homology – a theme I explore in detail in the next chapter. Here I would reiterate that the juxtaposition of elements from seemingly incompatible images of the relationship of the divine and the demonic does not make the text incoherent, but rather is indispensable to its narrative and literary force – as well as to its ontological vision.

The image of the *Ish* that results from the purification process is that of a shaven, bald figure, another startling image of a deity. It is here that the passage finally returns to the

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[170] *Zohar* II, 254b.

Leviticus verse cited at the outset of the passage ("And the man whose hair has fallen off his head; he is bald yet is he clean [*tahor*]"), indicating that this unexpected image of the deity as a baldheaded personage is the center of the entire passage. The passage tells us that the *Ish* is called "pure" [טהור] rather than "holy" [קדוש] because the former term indicates that the current state has been achieved only after a prior, impure state, citing as a proof text Job 14:4 "Who can bring a pure thing [*tahor*] from an impure [*tame*]" [מי יתן טהור מטמא]. The shaved head is thus a sign that the *Ish* was, indeed, impure in his prior state. Thus, like the first, "Solomon's wisdom" section of the passage, this section shows that the favored form only appears through emerging from its disfavored counterpart: wisdom from folly, light from darkness, sweetness from bitterness in the "Solomon's wisdom" section, purity from impurity in the "Bald God" section.   And yet, by distinguishing "purity" from "holiness," this second section gives this scheme a rather darker turn – for it tells us that the bald head is itself a sign of its erstwhile impurity, that very impurity which was linked to the demonic "lower crowns." By contrast, the "holy" divine, as opposed to the merely "pure," is embodied in a head full of hair. Indeed, "one is not called 'holy' except when the hair hangs down, for holiness depends on the hair" [דקדוש לא אתקרי אלא כד תלי שערא, דקדושה בשערא תלי].[171] Hair can thus denote either demonic-linked impurity or the highest holiness; conversely, a shaved head denotes both a being's purity but also its origin in impurity and inability to achieve "holiness."

It is, nonetheless, precisely in that state of ambivalent "purity," bearing the trace of its past impurity in its baldness, that the *Ish* can become an instrument of the *Adam.* The latter, the male divine figure in his "holy," rather than "pure" form, uses the *Ish* as an instrument of war[172] – a use presumably made possible precisely through the *Ish*'s continuing association with the side of judgment. From being a malevolently dangerous figure connected to the demonic, the erstwhile antagonist of the *Adam,* the *Ish*, once shorn of his menacing red hair, becomes the *Adam*'s military deputy. The danger posed to the divine by the *Ish* in his red state becomes "sweetened" and pressed into the service of the *Adam,* with his dangerousness presumably limited to those who deserve it.

[171] *Zohar* III, 48b.
[172] *Zohar* III, 49a.

It is at this point that the discussion takes another unexpected, but also clarifying, turn. In this third section, playing on the identity of the letters in the word "bald" and the name "Koraḥ" [קרח],[173] the passage tells us that the rebel leader was made "in the manner of the upper realm" [כגוונא דלעילא] – specifically, in the likeness of the *Ish* after his head is shorn of his harsh, red hair.[174]   It was his awareness of his divine resemblance that made Koraḥ resent Aaron's position. And it was also this very resemblance that led to God's condemnation of Koraḥ to the ultimate punishment: "I made you in the manner of the upper realm. You did not wish to ascend among the upper beings. Descend below, and be among the lower beings, as it is written, 'and they descended alive into Sheol'" (Numbers 16:30) [אנא עבדית לך כגוונא דלעילא, לא בעית לאעלאה בעלאין, חות לתתא והוי בתתאין, ודכתיב (במדבר טז לג) וירדו חיים שאולה].[175] Koraḥ stands on a knife's edge between extremes: between dwelling among (or as one of?) the divine beings [בעלאין], and descent into hell among (or as one of?) the demonic beings [בתתאין]. His fate, due to his misreading of the hyperbolically ambivalent trope of baldness, also shows the grave dangers inherent in an "as above so below" cosmos where the crucial divide between divine and demonic is highly precarious and even uncertain.

The most daring implication of this passage is that this hyperbolic ambivalence, this capacity for shifting between the highest and the lowest, also affects the divine *Ish*, an implication suggested by the very similar terms used to describe the two. The *Ish*, too, stands between his links to the demonic below ("and the lower crowns of below hang from him" ותליין מניה כתרין תתאין דלתתא) and his inclusion in the higher divine level, the *Adam* ("and this *Ish* is included in *Adam*," והאי איש בכללא דאדם). Wolfson, indeed, goes so far as to suggest that the red-haired figure evokes the figure of Esau,[176] a key personification of the demonic in the Zohar, often identified with Sama'el himself. We would thus have the startling result that the initial state of a central aspect of the divine is to be identified with the Devil and in need of purification to fully assume his identity as a good deity. I will return to this suggestion by Wolfson in the Conclusion.

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[173] This play is used, to different effect, in the Talmud, *bSanhedrin* 109b.
[174] *Zohar* III, 49a.
[175] *Ibid*.
[176] Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Light through Darkness', 81 n.29.

The line immediately following the conclusion of the Koraḥ section juxtaposes the two kinds of *Ish* through the use of anaphoric parallelism, suggesting that the ambivalence is of an enduring character: "there are faces and there are faces" [אית פנים ואית פנים]. On the one hand, "there are" those "faces of anger" [פנים של זעם] linked to demonic forces, portrayed in terms that recall the *Ish*'s red hair and its pendant "lower crowns": "and all those who hang from the side of these faces are impudent and fierce, for they are not of compassion" [וכל אלין דתליין מאינון פנים, חציפין כלהו תקיפין כלהו, דלא מרחמי].[177] On the other hand, "there are" those faces that have been shaven, and, consequently, from which the "impudent" and "fierce" forces have "all passed away and been broken" [מתעברן כלהו ואתברו].[178] These persistent, antithetical faces are here linked to the presence or absence of facial hair, with reference to the verse in Leviticus that follows the initial "bald man" verse.[179]

The very next Leviticus verse, moreover, discusses the possibility of a leprous sore, a *nega* [נגע] appearing on the bald part of the head or face. From the perspective of this Zohar passage, which portrays divine baldness as a result of purification, this new possibility indicates the merely provisional success of such purification. Indeed, with reference to this verse, and as if to reinforce the notion of the enduring potential for divine oscillation between purity and impurity, the passage discusses how such contamination of the divine can be caused by human sin and repaired by human action. Such contamination can affect both the male and female aspects of the divinity. It is the enduring office of the priest to diagnose which side of the divine has been infected and thereby to determine the proper sacrifice to repair the damage. This ongoing susceptibility of the *Ish* to both "black" and "white" theurgy confirms that the oscillation of this divine figure between extremes is an always latent possibility, posing an ever-present danger and promise.[180]

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[177] *Zohar* III, 49a.
[178] *Ibid*.
[179] Leviticus 13:41:

<div dir="rtl">ואם מפאת פניו ימרט ראשו גבח הוא טהור הוא</div>

And he that hath his hair fallen off from the part of his head toward his face, he is forehead bald: yet is he clean.

[180] The close association between the shaving of the divine head with human theurgical practice is emphasized in a brief story in *Zohar* I, 217a, whose enigmatic quality becomes illuminated only through reading it in conjunction with the "Bald God" passage.

The anaphora, "there are faces, and there are faces," thus strongly implies that the relationship between the two states of the *Ish* is not merely a question of a one-time transition between one stage and another, but rather embodies a permanent potential for fluctuation between the two. This distinction between "faces" and "faces" in the latter part of this section of the passage thus serves a rather different function than the distinction between "*Ish*" and "*Ish*" in the earlier part of the section. The earlier distinction between homonyms *precedes* the narrative about the integration of the *Ish* into the service of the *Adam* through the severing of his connection to the demonic effected by the divine shaving. The later distinction between antithetical homonyms comes *after* this narrative – and it can thus serve as a reminder of the ongoing danger to the divine posed by the establishment of an autonomous demonic realm, itself a byproduct of the process of purification.

The *Ish* and Koraḥ, like the snake, are thus images of hyperbolic ambivalence. The shaven, "pure" *Ish* is marked by the invisible trace of his impure counterpart. Moreover, although that impurity has become provisionally invisible, it is always ready to make its resurgence. The shaven *Ish* is thus an image of the potential for oscillation between purity and impurity. Although the beginning of this section of the passage declares that the *Ish* is the figure who is (or, alternatively, who *should be*) under the rule of the *Adam,* the text then devotes itself to showing not only the process by which the original duality between them comes about and the method for achieving the submission of the former to the latter, but also the instability of this achievement.

The passage further emphasizes this feature through its association of the *Ish* with Koraḥ. The latter descended into hell in his bald state – indeed, precisely as a result of his misunderstanding the meaning of this state, a misunderstanding that can be attributed to the dangerous indeterminacy of the hyperbolically ambivalent image of baldness. Like the unmotivated action of the snake in the interpretation of the *Shem mi-Shmuel*, it is the very trait that makes Koraḥ distinctive that makes him suited to the highest highs or lowest lows. The bald head, like the snake, becomes an image whose meaning is

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intrinsically indeterminate – capable of signifying absolute purity or absolute impurity.[181] Finally, like the snake in texts from Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen to Luzzatto and beyond, Koraḥ is also linked to messianic expectation – for, according to the Zohar, siding with one position in a Talmudic dispute,[182] Koraḥ is destined ultimately to rise from hell. Indeed, the radical ambivalence of Koraḥ in the Zohar may also presage his rehabilitation in a late text like the *Me Ha-Shiloaḥ* as the figure in the story of his conflict with Moses possessed of the higher, even divine, truth.[183] In any event, the "plausibility" of two opposite fates for this figure seems congruent with the hyperbolic ambivalence that he embodies.

In addition to the snake, Koraḥ, and the *Ish,* I now turn to one more image in the Zohar that shares in this kind of hyperbolic ambivalence, that of Job. Like these other images, Job is characterized by a distinctive trait which 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 אלא בדחילו [184]

> Job feared with fear. And in this fear was his essence. For concerning any matter above, either in the holy realm or in the *Sitra Aḥra*, a person cannot draw its spirit from above to below or to come near to it except through fear.

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 magicians.[185] And also by virtue of that fear, Job was able to repent and to turn to the service of the true God.

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[181] The specific kind of fellowship between Koraḥ and the reptilian creatures that I am advancing here is not explicit in the text. I note that one passage in the *Zohar*, III, 79a, links Koraḥ and the snake, though without the complex ambivalence contained in the "Bald God" passage.

[182] See *bSanhedrin* 108a.

[183] Leiner, *Me Ha-Shiloaḥ*, 154-157.

[184] *Zohar* II, 69a.

[185] 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, Matt II, 122 (translation modified):

It is instructive to compare the image in this "fearful Job" passage with another passage, which I call the "clean hands Job" passage.[186] This second passage attributes Job's punishment to his refusal to give the *Sitra Aḥra* a portion of the sacrifice he offered to God. If he had done so, the *Sitra Aḥra* would have "cleared the way and departed from the sanctuary," and the holy side would have "ascended to the highest level."[187] In this refusal to give the *Sitra Aḥra* a share of his offering, Job failed to act like God himself who, the Zohar declares, offered Job to Satan in order to distract him from his desire to persecute Israel.[188]

According to the "clean hands Job" passage, it was Job's desire to keep absolutely separate from the *Sitra Aḥra* that led to the latter acquiring the power to torture him. Job's hyperbolic desire for separation thus led to the hyperbolic oscillations in Job's fortunes – the ultimate happy life, succeeded by the ultimate unhappy life, succeeded by a return to the ultimate happy life.[189] The "clean hands Job" passage is a narrative of hyperbolic oscillation.

The passage concludes by pointing to Job's failure to "integrate good and evil" [ולא אכליל טוב ורע]. This phrase can be read as implying a general Zoharic teleology toward the integration of the divine and the demonic. It is, however, hardly free from ambiguity – for, after all, the goal of the gift to Satan by Job would have been to ensure the departure of the latter, the goal God himself sought to achieve by offering Job to Satan.[190] The ambiguity of the goal this passage prescribes for Job is one more indication of the

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אי רעותיה איכוין במלה עלאה קדישא, איהו אמשיך עליה ההיא מלה מלעילא לתתא לגביה, ואי רעותיה לאתדבקא בסטרא אחרא ואיכוין ביה, איהו אמשיך ההיא מלה מלעילא לתתא לגביה.

If his aspiration focuses on a supernal, holy entity, he draws that entity from above to himself below. If he aspires to cleave to the *Sitra Aḥra*, focusing there, then he draws that from above to himself below.

[186] *Zohar* II, 34a. Cf. Wolfson, 'Light through Darkness', 87-88.

[187] *Zohar* II, 34a: יפני ארחא ויסתלק מעל מקדשא, וסטרא דקדושה אסתליק לעילא לעילא

[188] *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.

[189] *Zohar* II, 34a.

[190] 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 *Sitra Aḥra* to depart as signifying the termination of the autonomous existence of the *Sitra Aḥra*, rather than its spatial departure. It seems to me, though, that the passage's divergent pronouncements point to a fundamental ambivalence.

unstable management of ambivalence at work here.   It is this passage's distinctive manner of allowing the two "plausible" and opposite goals to coexist within the same short text, other versions of which I have shown in my analysis of the passages concerning the *kets* in the Zohar and the *Sefer Ha-Mishkal.*

There are at least two ways one may productively read the "clean hands Job" text in relation to the "fearful Job" text, without taking a stance on the "single *versus* multiple authorship" question. 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 led to his failure at the later stage with regard to the *Sitra Aḥra* – whether we interpret that failure in terms of seeking the *Sitra Aḥra*'s departure or its integration.   However, this reading cannot account for the tone of the "fearful Job" passage. In this passage, Job's "fearfulness," his ability to concentrate purely on the object of his worship, is portrayed 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, to shift from being 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.

Rather than forming two parts of one narrative, I propose that the two Job passages represent two very different ways of portraying ambivalence between the incompatible goals of the integration and banishment of the *Sitra Aḥra*. In the "clean hands Job" text, phrases favoring integration of the divine and the demonic coexist with those favoring their separation, the latter goal even portrayed as shared by God himself.[191] In this passage, Job's desire for separation from the *Sitra Aḥra* is unequivocal; it is the Zohar's

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[191] Cf. Wolfson, 'Light through Darkness', 88.

evaluation of this desire that is ambivalent. By contrast, in the "fearful Job" passage, the Zohar presents Job as a figure of hyperbolic ambivalence, concentrated in his fearful "essence." This "essence" 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.

The *Ish,* Koraḥ, the "fearful Job": three icons of hyperbolic ambivalence, three true fellows of the dragon. Each, in his own way, embodies both intimacy and incompatibility between the divine and demonic by means of a distinctive trait that lends itself to radically opposite valences. The selflessness of the snake, the shaved head of the *Ish,* the baldness of the *Ish* and Koraḥ, the fearfulness of Job – each of these traits makes it radically impossible for these icons either to integrate the divine and demonic or to fully expel one of them. For each of these figures, to express his "essence" means to live one side of the dichotomy exclusively, and yet such exclusivity also means betraying that same "essence" that marks him as belonging to both. As a hermeneutic matter, these images are absolutely indeterminate: for it is the distinctive trait that makes them legible as belonging to one extreme that simultaneously makes them legible as belonging to the other extreme.

Rather than a choice between dualism and dialectical integration, an analysis of such images culminates in radical undecidability – in relation to which both dualism and dialectical integration would be equally plausible and equally impossible resolutions.   At every moment, the images contain an active, even if invisible, trace of a contrary past or future: the snake can operate for good or ill, Koraḥ can ascend or descend, the "Bald God"'s hair can grow back or a blemish can develop on his very baldness, Job's fear can lead him to oscillate from one side to the other.

As the Zohar tells us, the very word "pure," *tahor*, suggests an emergence from impurity, a failure to achieve "holiness," and a possible relapse into impurity. In the face of the

active trace such images contain of their opposites, any interpretation of them which insists on their univocity, even as a result of a dialectical reconciliation, would work to repress the enduring quality of such traces on which the texts insist.[192] As Derrida has commented in the context of related images in philosophical texts, such images "mark the spots of what can never be mediated, mastered, sublated, or dialecticized through any *Erinnerung* or *Aufhebung*."[193] A reading of these images that seeks to refrain from effacing the heterogeneousness of the various pronouncements about them should take as its guide not the stark alternative between integration and separation, or even a dialectical relationship between them, but rather, the undecidability inherent in hyperbolic ambivalence.

Such images in the Zohar resemble dream images in a specific sense described by Freud, for whom dreams

> show a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing. Dreams feel themselves at liberty, moreover, to represent any element by its wishful contrary; so that there is no way of deciding at a first glance whether any element that admits of a contrary is present in the dream-thoughts as a positive or as a negative.[194]

C. Ambivalence Thematized: Variations on Seduction

Images of hyperbolic ambivalence raise in acute form the danger of the gravest cognitive and religious errors. The indeterminacy of the mark or trait that both joins and separates two entities (or two phases or aspects of one entity) when one belongs to the holiest and

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[192] Cf. Kofman, *Lectures de Derrida,* 81: "The passage from double determination to univocity is not the consequence of a progress in reason but of repression."

[193] Derrida, *Dissemination*, 221.

[194] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* 353. Others, of course, have made an association between kabbalistic and dream images. In the specific sense that I intend here, that of the antithetical quality of kabbalistic images, see Luzzatto in *Klaḥ Pitḥe Ḥokhmah*, 26:

<div dir="rtl">

יכולות הספירות ליראות בדמיונות אפילו הפכיים זה לזה, כמו ממש הרואה בחלום

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> The sefirot can even appear in images that are opposites of each other, exactly as [it is for] one who sees in a dream.

the other to the unholiest dimension, makes interpretation the most hazardous of enterprises. Moreover, since the Zohar is primarily concerned not with neutral cognition but with will and desire, the danger is really that of seduction, deception, and self-deception. The Zohar passage on Koraḥ, for example, portrays him as deluding himself through misreading the ambivalent sign of his baldness, a misreading into which he was led by his jealousy of Aaron and his desire for priestly power. This fatal combination of semiotic ambivalence and intense desire seduced Koraḥ into misreading his phenomenal resemblance to the divine and brought about the catastrophic reversal of his destiny from dwelling with the divine to banishment to the demonic. The prevalence in the Zohar of doubling, division, indeterminacy, and hyperbolic ambivalence at the level of images, in addition to that of hypnotic parallelism at the level of schemes, means that the danger of seduction and deception is irreducible.

In the last section of this chapter, therefore, I turn to a text which takes seduction as an explicit, central theme, and brings together a number of the different ways this danger arises.[195] This text is a section of a lengthy passage based primarily on a structurally concentric portrayal of the *Sitra Aḥra*. The passage contains a wide range of the key rhetorical techniques used in the Zohar to portray the relationship between the divine and the demonic. Analysis of this text will also give me the opportunity to explore *nogah,* the "brightness," that liminal entity whose ambivalence has both ontological and rhetorical dimensions. As I noted above, one Zoharic passage declares that *nogah* is the "innermost" of the *kelipot* and "clings to" or even "unites with" the holy *mo'aḥ.*[196] It is this liminality of *nogah* that prepared it for its eventual role in Lurianic kabbalah as the crucial battleground between holiness and unholiness – a role it already played in at least one 13th century text.[197]

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[195] *Zohar* II, 203a-b.

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

[197] 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

The Zohar passage under discussion here presents *nogah* in the midst of a broad discussion of the demonic generally, explores the ambivalence of this entity in a manner which leaves significant issues unresolved, and extends this ambivalence to the realm of the *kelipot* generally – a text thus not only *about* ambivalence but also itself marked *by* ambivalence. 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:

> 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* elsewhere in the Zohar and in other 13th century writings, notably in Moshe de Leon's commentary on Ezekiel's vision.[198]

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*, though not without ambivalence and seemingly in an ascending order of their association with evil. It traces the source of the "wind" to the "north," presumably the sefirah of *Gevurah*. Although it assigns a holy task to this *kelipah*, that of protecting the *moḥa*, it also explains that, in accordance with the verse, "for evil appeareth out of the north" [מצפון תפתח הרעה] (Jeremiah 6:1), evil "Other Sides cling" [סטרין אחרנין אתאחדן] to it. It refers to the second of the phenomena, the "great cloud," as "dregs of gold" [סוספיתא דדהבא], an important Zoharic image in passages tracing the *Sitra Aḥra* to the metastasis of the sefirah of *Gevurah*. This "cloud" is, however, doubled by a holy cloud, as I shall shortly

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of "deconsecration through blood" – evoking a mortal struggle to purify the *nogah*. See Gikatilla, *Sha'are Orah,* 212-214.

[198] See Moshe de Leon, *Perush ha-Merkavah le-R. Moshe de Leon,* 59-61.

discuss. The "fire" is most clearly ominous, associated with "hard judgment" [דינא קשיא]. As to the fourth of these phenomena, *nogah,* the Zohar expresses a far more complex ambivalence, as I shall shortly show 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].[199]

To turn to my main theme in this section: the passage explicitly declares two of the phenomena, the "cloud" [ענן] and *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 the Zohar for portraying the relationship between the divine and the demonic.

As to the cloud, the passage declares it must be distinguished from its holy equivalent and that the two are opposites on the phenomenal level – the holy cloud absolutely illuminated and illuminating, the Ezekiel cloud absolutely dark and darkening. Despite this stark difference, the dark cloud "knows how to seduce" [דידע למפתי][200] – or, perhaps we should say, very skillful "knowledge" is required for the seduction to succeed precisely because of its phenomenal difference from its divine counterpart. Given the phenomenal antithesis between the holy and unholy clouds, such cunning must rely on something other than inducing the target of seduction to make a simple cognitive misjudgment. One might, of course, speculate that the unholy 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," the musical Aramaic "*anana,*" in an almost chant-like manner, sliding between the holy and unholy meanings:

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[199] 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 the holy and the unholy and portrayed in complex ways as mediating their relationship. *Ra'ya Mehemena,* in *Zohar* III, 282b.
[200] *Zohar* II, 203a.

תא חזי בין עננא לעננא, ההוא עננא דכתיב (במדבר י לד) וענן יהו"ה עליהם יומם, (שם יד יד) ועננך עומד עליהם, האי איהו עננא דנהיר וזהיר, וכל נהורין אתחזון גו ההוא עננא, אבל עננא דא, עננא חשוך דלא נהיר כלל, אבל מנע כל נהורין דלא יכלין לאתחזאה קמיה[201]

> Come and see, between cloud and cloud [*ben anana le anana*], that *anana* of
> which it is written (Numbers 10:34), "And the cloud [*anan*] the Lord was upon
> them by day," (ibid. 14:14), "and that thy cloud [*anan*] standeth over them" – this
> is that *anana* that illuminates and shines, and all lights are seen in that *anana*. But
> this *anana*, dark *anana* that does not illuminate at all, but blocks [*mana*] all lights
> so that they cannot be seen before it.[202]

The seductiveness the passage attributes to *nogah,* however, is quite different. 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. *Nogah* is thus portrayed as that which seduces by virtue of its ability to be
visually mistaken for the true light, especially when presented in a seductive context.
Perhaps befitting the theme of seduction, the passage describes this seduction in a
deceptively simple text that is far more obscure than would appear on first reading. Note
that, in my translation, I have graphically indicated certain lacunae and obscurities:

בהאי נגה מפתי לאתתא לנטלא נהורא, ועל דא כתיב (משלי ה ג) וחלק משמן חכה, שוי ההוא נהורא לקבליה דברית, ובגיני כך מפתי ליה ונטלא נהוריה, ודא איהו פתויא דמפתי לאתתא, דכתיב (שם) נפת תטפנה שפתי זרה וגו'.[203]

> With this *nogah,* [X?] seduces the woman to take light. And therefore 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 and took his/its light. And this is the
> seduction that seduces the woman, as it is written (ibid.), "for the lips of a strange
> woman drip as an honeycomb," etc....

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[201] *Zohar* II, 203a-b.
[202] I have tried with my transliterations to give some sense of the rhythmic quality of this text.
[203] *Zohar* II, 203b.

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 *Sitra Aḥra* and that this feature makes them less dangerous. Here the

quintessential concentric *kelipah*, *nogah*, resembles the holy dimension to such an extent

as to pose a mortal danger of seduction through 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 "snake," or, more precisely, the

"upper snake" [הנחש למעלה] who confronts the "upper Adam" and the "upper Eve," i.e.,

Tif'eret and *Malkhut*.[204] This interpretation has much to commend it, dramatically

increasing the legibility of the text by aligning it with other Zoharic passages about the

seduction of Adam and Eve.[205] It also helps explain the use of the proof-text from

Proverbs ("and her mouth is smoother than oil"), provided that we understand the "snake"

here as feminine, as Lilith, as do other Zoharic passages about the seduction in the

Garden.[206]

Nevertheless, this interpretation suffers from the fact that such a "snake" or, indeed, any

personified demonic figure at all, is not mentioned in this passage. 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. Still another alternative would be to say

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[204] Thus, e.g., Cordovero, *Or Yakar*, XI, 39.

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

[206] E.g., *ibid.; Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* on Ekhah, *Zohar Ḥadash,* 91d. This interpretation does face a small
difficulty in that Moshe de Leon emphatically identifies *nogah* with a masculine entity. See Moshe de
Leon, *Perush ha-Merkavah le-R. Moshe de Leon,* 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.

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 true subject at all but only an alluring appearance. A final alternative, as I shall discuss shortly, is that this obscurity, like some others in this text, may be a product of textual emendations due to 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 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.[207] Uncertainty also attaches to the referents of the masculine pronoun and possessive in the next sentence: "[X?] placed this light opposite the covenant and thereby seduced *him/it* and took *his/its* light" [שוי ההוא נהורא לקבליה דברית, ובגיני כך מפתי ליה ונטלא נהוריה]. 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").[208] Moreover, they interpret the "covenant" as a reference to *Malkhut*, thus completing the reading of the object of the seduction as feminine.[209] This reading is supported by the textual variants listed by the *Sulam* (and adopted by Matt) in which the pronoun and possessive in this phrase are given feminine forms – perhaps suggesting that at least some copyists or editors were also striving to resolve the puzzle of the referents in the passage.[210] I note that the *Sulam* itself, 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].[211]

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[207] 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.

[208] 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."

[209] 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.

[210] *Sulam* X, 57. The *Sulam* does not give the source of these variants. Both the Mantua and Cremona editions have the masculine forms.

[211] *Ibid*. (emphasis added).

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 Adam was seduced after Eve. This reading which would take the "covenant" as the *Yesod*, the male phallus, its more common referent in the Zohar. 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 to the divine "upper Adam." The second sentence of this text would thus refer to the 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.[212] 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 disagreement among 13th century kabbalists – specifically, about whether it is appropriate to speak about seduction and even sin in relation to divine figures like *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut*.[213] This notion of divine seduction and sin seems to be explicitly endorsed by Moshe of Burgos who insists on the parallels between the earthly and divine sins – and even refers to illicit "desire and undermining" [תאוה וערעור] on the part of *Malkhut*, corresponding to that of Eve.[214] One passage in the Zohar[215] appears to explicitly engage with this Moshe of Burgos formulation and to seek to mitigate its scandalousness by declaring 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[216] –

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[212] *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.
[213] Tishby presents this debate in *MZ* I, 299-300.
[214] 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.
[215] *Zohar* II, 144a-b.
[216] 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 the Zohar, in a number of places, clearly refers to mating between the males and females of the holy and unholy couples seems to strongly suggest the latter. See my discussion in Chapter Two, pp. 191-220.

perhaps evoking an angelic figure, in accordance with the midrashic view adopted elsewhere by the Zohar that the angels were created on that day.[217] I suggest that the text under discussion here, with its unclear referents, might implicitly record 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 personage using *nogah* as an instrument. The unclarity of its referents might very well indicate the deletion or distortion of certain elements of an earlier and clearer version 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 holy *Yesod* that enables the former to place itself next to the latter, and thus in a position from which to lead the "woman" astray. Thus, as in the "Bald God" passage, it is the concentricity of the *kelipah* that is an essential component of its dangerous quality, in both cases linking the divine to the demonic, though with different techniques. Moreover, given the demonic female evoked by the Proverbs proof-text, the seduction by *nogah* through its placement next to the covenant also suggests a gender-substitution in the seduction process – in which the demonic female seduces the holy female by passing herself off as male, a theme that emerges in various forms in seduction scenes in the Zohar.[218] 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

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[217] See *Zohar* I, 18b-19a; *Bereshit Rabah* I, 1b (1:3).

[218] 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 אתפתח 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*).

nogah itself, with the latter option thereby affirming that "brightness" may itself be called "light."

The danger portrayed here is not only that of deception or self-deception but rather of an ontological ambivalence. Here, as elsewhere, both in the Zohar 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 the interpretation that I favor), *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; yet, in another part of the passage, 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 Zohar describes this operation as divine circumcision, the removal of the "foreskin" of impurity.

אבל מבוצינא קדישא שמענא עלה 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 מלאתגלאה מגו ערלה. [219]

> But from the Holy Lamp I have heard mystery of mysteries. When foreskin settles on holy Covenant, defiling the sanctuary, then that sanctuary is prevented from revealing the mystery of the sign of Covenant within the foreskin. When this *radiance* [*nogah*] enters within, separating foreskin from the sanctuary, it is called חש מל (*ḥash mal*) -- *ḥash*, quickly, revealed; *mal*. What is *mal*? As is said: *Joshua* מל (mal), *circumcised* (Joshua 5:4) – mystery of the sign of Covenant, not prevented from being revealed from within the foreskin. [220]

The foreskin disrupts the proper union between the holy phallus and the Shekhinah (the "sanctuary") by blocking revelation from the former to the latter, as well as by polluting the Shekhinah – presumably through her union with the impure entity, the "foreskin."

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[219] *Zohar* II, 203b.
[220] Matt VI, 159-60.

When it is performing this crucial surgery separating impurity from purity, *nogah* thus becomes a holy entity, or the holy variant of itself, the "*ḥashmal*." Unlike the two "clouds," the two variants of the *nogah/ḥashmal* entity are related not through homonymy, but rather through phenomenal resemblance, as well as by effecting a transition from one state to the other through passing from the service of the unholy to that of the holy realm (and presumably vice versa). Indeed, in contrast with the "clouds," there seems to be only one entity, shifting between holy and unholy forms. *Nogah/ḥashmal* thus proves to be one of those hyperbolically ambivalent entities I have called "the dragon's fellows."

Nogah/ḥashmal is particularly well-placed for the delicate operation of divine circumcision due to its location at the threshold between the holy and unholy dimensions, and well-equipped to achieve it, due to its affinity with both the impure and pure sides. In other words, the same traits that make *nogah* dangerously seductive also empower it for holy service as 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 its light, so *ḥashmal* cunningly deceives the demonic foreskin in order to separate it from the holy *Yesod* 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.* Like the *Ish* in the "Bald God" passage, *nogah* is able to switch sides, as it were, with the aggression it formerly used for unholy purposes now pressed into the service of the holy. Moreover, such a cunning procedure to induce the departure of the foreskin by *nogah/ḥashmal*, an entity with marked similarities to the snake as I noted above, further reinforces the notion that it is one more "fellow of the dragon." Indeed, this stratagem to accomplish the circumcision would make it akin to the Zohar's Jacob who adopted the methods of the snake to mislead and then cause the departure of Esau.[221]

The circumcision of the divine phallus, the removal of its demonic covering, strongly resembles the shaving of the head of the *Ish* – and may even serve as the implicit model

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[221] *Zohar* I, 138a.

for it. This link may also help in the interpretation of this divine circumcision, one of those theologically scandalous notions that abound in the Zohar. The presence of the foreskin on *Yesod* might be understood in a number of ways. If understood on the model of 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][222] – or, in Kristevan terms, that the primordial condition of the divine requires abjection of refuse in order to establish a bounded identity. Alternatively, we could interpret this demonic presence, like the red hair of the "Bald God," as a derivative condition, a consequence of the fall-out from an initial abjection at a higher level. The removal of the foreskin, the quintessential concentric *kelipah*, would thus be a stage in the production of dualism through successive acts of abjection, a key theme in Chapter Two. Moreover, just as the face of the *Ish* seems capable of switching "sides" as a result of human sin, so the foreskin – contrary to its human model – may be able to return to cover the holy phallus as a result of the "black theurgy" of human sin – as suggested in at least one Zoharic passage.[223]

A third possible explanation for the presence of the foreskin, suggested in a short text from Moshe of Burgos, would heighten still further the ambivalence and potential for oscillation of *nogah/ḥashmal*. [224] In the Moshe of Burgos text, the *Yesod* is blocked from bestowing its *shefa* due its covering by a "turban" – a covering undoubtedly modelled on the foreskin. Moshe of Burgos attributes the presence of this covering to the seduction of the divine phallus by Lilith. The Zohar passage under discussion here, replete with images of seduction and blockages of light, suggests a kinship with the Moshe of Burgos text. In this reading, the foreskin might have taken its place on the *Yesod* as a result of a seduction of the divine – in accordance with the reading I have favored of the *nogah/*seduction excerpt. The theme of seduction in this excerpt makes a link to the

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[222] *Zohar* I, 263a (*Hashmatot*).
[223] *Zohar* II, 258a.
[224] 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.

seduction scene in Moshe of Burgos very persuasive. From this perspective, moreover, the Zohar passage might be interpreted as identifying *nogah* with the foreskin, since both are described as adjacent to the divine light emanating from *Yesod* and covering it over – an identification that, indeed, is explicitly made in Lurianic texts.[225] *Nogah/ḥashmal* would thus be responsible both for the presence of the foreskin on the *Yesod* and for its removal – indeed, it might even *be* the very entity that, in its two opposite guises, both requires removing and does the removing.

The implications of the deep-rooted ambivalence about *nogah* for the relationship between the divine and demonic generally is thematized in this passage in the form of an unresolved disagreement between two of the Zohar's sages. This disagreement, between the overall narrator of the homily, R. Yitsḥak, and R. Hamnuna Saba, splits between them the two poles of the ambivalence underlying much of the Zohar's discussions of this relationship.

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 דקדושה דמהימנותא אית ליה, ולא
אצטריך לאנהגא ביה קלנא, ועל דא אצטריך למיהב ליה חולקא בסטרא דקדושה דמהימנותא. רב
המנונא סבא הכי אמר, וכי נגה לו סביב, ואצטריך לאנהגא ביה קלנא[226]

> "And brightness was about it" [Ezekiel 1:1]: … even though this side is nothing other than the side of contamination, there is brightness about it. Therefore a person should not cast it outside. Why? Because "a brightness was about it," it has a side of the holiness of faith, and one should not treat it with contempt. Therefore it should be given a portion in the holy side of faith. Rav Hamnuna Saba said as follows: "could there be a brightness about it?!" And it should be treated with contempt.

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 passage, the aspect of the

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[225] E.g., *Ets Ḥayim,* 87a.
[226] *Zohar* II, 203b.

holy light that reaches the *kelipot*.[227] The disagreement between the two sages seems limited to the question about whether or not the first three *kelipot*, wind, cloud, and fire, are indeed surrounded by this "brightness." R. Yitshak's affirmative view leads him to pronounce that the "side of contamination" in general should neither be "treated with contempt" nor "cast outside." R. Hamnuna Saba's negative view, rejecting the notion that *nogah* surrounds the *kelipot*, brings him to the opposite conclusion about the treatment of the realm of the *kelipot* generally.

R. Hamnuna Saba's position is the more common view of *nogah*. It is consistent with the physical image of the concentric *kelipot* as surrounding the holy dimension, with *nogah* closest to the *mo'ah*, rather than surrounding it. The outermost *kelipot* can therefore be safely "cast outside" without disturbing the holy dimension. R. Yitshak's position is a very exceptional understanding of the geography of *nogah,* even though it conforms far more to the language of the Ezekiel verse. It stands directly contrary to the standard image of the concentric *kelipot*, in which the *kelipot* closest to the *mo'ah* bear the most kinship to it. His affirmation that the *kelipot* are surrounded by *nogah,* therefore, should be seen as a consciously emphatic assertion of a less adversarial relationship between the divine and the demonic. The disagreement between the two sages also bears a strong resemblance to the conflicting general attitudes toward the *kelipot* analyzed above, for example, in relation to the *kets*.

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 either a declarative or ironic tone. This signifier, like some of the hyperbolically ambivalent images discussed above, thus becomes radically indeterminate, poised between opposite meanings. A single letter, the single line of the "ו", here stands as the knife's edge which divides the two sides of the ambivalence. Indeed, the possibility that the difference between holiness and unholiness could depend on reading a single letter ironically or declaratively introduces a radical indeterminacy into this gravest of distinctions – if anything, even more efficiently and insidiously than that affecting words

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[227] See *Zohar Ḥadash*, 38a-b, which seems both to describes *nogah* as one of the four *kelipot* and to declare that it only surrounds them and is not "in" them.

like "*kets.*" There are no clear criteria, of course, for distinguishing irony from earnestness. In this connection, it is useful to recall Liebes' claim that one of the key roles of the *Sitra Aḥra* in the Zohar is precisely to introduce the destabilizing role of irony into kabbalistic teaching, rendering derisory any attempt to definitively fix any "doctrine of the Zohar."[228] The oscillations in this passage between positive and negative portrayals of *nogah*, at the levels of both image and syntax, seem particularly apt for this liminal element between the holy and unholy dimensions.

Moreover, the dispute between R. Yitsḥak and R. Hamnuna Saba also suggests an explicit Zoharic ambivalence about the relationship of the concentricity structure to the homology structure. The bottom line of the dispute about *nogah* is whether one should "cast it outside" [לדחייא ליה לבר]. If, as Tishby maintains, the geographical proximity to the holy side is one of the key features that distinguishes rival portrayals of the demonic, then the dispute is very fundamental indeed. R. Hamnuna Saba's call for the "casting outside" of the concentric *kelipot* could lead to their transformation into a separate realm, homologous to the holy dimension. Indeed, as I have already broached in the context of the *Ish* and will discuss more fully in the next chapter, a number of Zoharic passages portray the concentricity of the *kelipot* as an intermediate step between the expulsion of refuse from the highest level of the divine and the achievement of the more thorough banishment of the *kelipot* to a separate realm. By contrast, R. Yitsḥak's position that the concentric *kelipot* should "not be cast outside," recognizes the irreducible intimacy in the relationship between the divine and the demonic. The difference between the remote and proximate *Sitra Aḥra* would thus in this passage come to form the terrain of a dispute between two Zoharic sages – perhaps reflecting actual disagreements among 13th century kabbalists, perhaps a textual manifestation of the fundamental ambivalence involved in the establishment of bounded identities through abjection, perhaps both. Again, the two images are not simply two "models," but literary devices dynamically deployed in relation to each other, here in the form of a complex dispute between two views about

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[228] Liebes, 'Zohar ve-Eros', 8. Liebes points to the Zohar's discussion of Isaac's name. Isaac, the sefirah of *Gevurah*, often the root of the *Sitra Aḥra* in the Zohar, 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 – jesting, joy, for he transforms water into fire, fire into water.
Zohar I, 103b, Matt II, 136 (translation modified).

"contempt" for the *kelipot* – and the normative imperative, or even ontological possibility, of "casting them outside."

Whether or not the dispute between R. Yitsḥak and R. Hamnuna Saba represents an actual dispute within Zoharic circles, their coexistence within the Zohar is a symptom of an irreducible quandary in the construction of identity. Abjection can always only be a partial or provisional expulsion of the undesirable elements, since they and the subject originate in the same undifferentiated primordial state. Full expulsion can never be achieved, and the remote *Sitra Aḥra* will always maintain a connection with the holy dimension, even if by the flimsiest of links, such as the "*zohama* of the fingernail" of the Shekhinah. Any attempt to sever the link, as in the shaving of the head of the *Ish* or the circumcision of the divine phallus, can never be more than a provisional measure – the hair can grow back, even the foreskin 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 succcessful. *Nogah* can perform the divine circumcision, 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 Sama'el. Both the project of casting the *Sitra Aḥra* "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. Indeed, one might say that, at the deepest level, R. Yitsḥak and R. Hamnuna Saba, and the historical differences their dispute may or may not record, are part of the same dream – and that the construction of Zoharic texts from divergent juxtapositions of their competing impossibilities is the source of their literary and spiritual power.

D. Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to the question of how to "read the *Sitra Aḥra*," in particular, how to read the divergences in its Zoharic portrayals. In the first section, I presented and systematized Tishby's approach of identifying divergent models, each with a structural, geographic, and essential dimension. This approach is consistent with that of

reading the Zohar 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 the Zohar's 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 the Zohar both establishes and destabilizes the difference between the divine and the demonic. First, I looked at the way the Zohar produces a split between the two realms through constructional schemes, particularly anaphoras, rather than through the content of images.   These schemes produce a difference between the two realms in the construction of phrases and paragraphs, a construction in which a single term becomes transformed into a pair of antithetical homonyms. 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 these schemes, splitting through rhetorical parallelism thus both establishes the difference between the two realms and produces a distinctive danger of seduction and confusion. Second, I looked at the ways the Zohar produces splitting between the divine and demonic dimensions through its distinctive use of the content of certain tropes.   Such images may be doubled into divine and demonic forms, internally divided between the two dimensions, or remain indeterminate in relation to the distinction.   I particularly focused, however, on the production of certain images that are hyperbolically ambivalent, belonging simultaneously to the highest and lowest realms. Such tropes yield their own distinctive danger of misprision and seduction. Finally, I examined in some detail a passage in which the two kinds of seduction formed the very theme of the Zoharic exposition.

Though I concentrated in this chapter on splitting as the construction and destabilization of difference between two realms, I continually came upon the question of the genealogy of such splitting – the ways two distinctive dimensions are produced through the dynamics of abjection. This was particularly the case in my explorations of the "Bald God" passage, as well as in the *nogah* passage. With the discussion of "casting out" in

the latter passage, I have reached the point of a natural transition to my direct discussion in Chapter Two of the construction of identity, both divine and demonic, through abjection.

Chapter Two:

 Origin, Intimacy, and Sustenance

... this abyss that must be constituted into an autonomous site … and into a
distinct, that is signifiable, object …

> \- Julia Kristeva[1]

דכד תננא נפקא מגו רוגזא תקיף, אתפשט ההוא תננא... בחיזו דדכר ונוקבא, ... רישא
דנפקא לאתפשטא... סליק ונחית, אזיל ושאט, ונח בדוכתיה, ... ואיהו צל, צלא על אתר
אחרא דאקרי מות [2]

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."[3]

> **-** Zohar

A. *Introduction*

In this chapter, I shift my focus from splitting, which portrays – even if in unstable and
ambivalent form – an existing difference between the divine and demonic, to abjection,
which portrays the generation, seeking out, and nurturing of that difference. This change
of focus brings with it a shift in the locus and nature of agency in the relationship
between the two realms. In passages marked by splitting, active relationships between
the divine and demonic primarily take place through the episodic transgression by
demonic entities of rhetorical and phenomenal boundaries. In this chapter, by contrast,
my 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, usually through the medium of an
inchoate, often repulsive, emission. Specifically, I will be concerned with: a) *constitution*

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[1] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 119.
[2] *Zohar* II, 242b.
[3] Matt VI, 405 (translation modified).

of the demonic: the *emission* by the divine (or proto-divine) of inchoate secretions which then *crystallize* into an autonomous "Other Side" inhabited by defined figures and entities; b) *intimacy with the demonic:* the *drive* for intimate relationships between constituted divine and demonic figures, relationships for which the refuse of the divine usually serves as the medium; and c) *sustenance of the demonic*: the *nurturance* of the demonic by the divine, providing it with indispensable vitality, through relationships whose abject nature at times manifests in the refuse of the divine which serves as their medium and at other times simply inheres in the improper mixtures such relationships entail.

In all these relationships, the *Sitra Aḥra* appears as an inevitable ontological byproduct of the construction and reconstruction of divine subjectivity, sustained through replenishment from divine vitality, and posing a danger, a temptation, and a potential resource for the divine. To appropriate Kristeva's terms, the *Sitra Aḥra* thus 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" – and that which is ultimately "unrejectable, parallel, inseparable from the proper" divine and yet its absolute other.[4]

At a rhetorical level, such texts involve a variety of techniques that may be systematized in terms of a two-step operation.[5] First, a "trope of limitation": a movement from an image of plenitude to that of deficiency, usually associated with the emission of some inchoate refuse or unstable ephemera, but also with the mere fact of the majestic divine consorting with the most debased partners (in Hamlet's apt words, "sating itself in a celestial bed and preying on garbage"). This incongruous transition can be generally characterized as a form of irony, portraying a presence that proves to be an absence, an omnipotence that utterly fails to achieve its goal, a holiness that issues in unholiness, a majesty that stoops to debasement, a meaning that proves to be meaningless. The

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4 Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 126.
5 As noted in the Introduction, I have adapted the terms for the tropes in this sentence from Harold Bloom. See Introduction, p. 11, n. 46.

emission of inchoate, ephemeral, or unpleasant byproducts occurs as a 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.[6] Such a trope of limitation is then followed by a "trope of representation," in which the stage of inchoate byproducts is succeeded by the crystallization of distinct holy and unholy structures and personages.

As I noted in the Introduction, both aspects of this process may be viewed as catachreses in the classical sense – "abuses" of language which purport to name that for which no "proper term" exists. Catachresis is apt here both in relation to the implausible reversal from divine plenitude to abject refuse and to the monstrous products that emerge when the refuse crystallizes to form the demonic realm. Both processes are "unspeakable" in the idiomatic sense of that word and no "proper" description fits them.[7] Insofar as the texts depicts such crystallizations as those of demonic personages, such as Sama'el and Lilith, the catachresis employed is that of a monstrous prosopopeia. The emergence of these new structures and personages, however, is not the end of the process. Rather, the rival crystallizations, the proper divine self and the (im)proper demonic Other, then enter into complex relations with each other, those of intimacy and nurturance, in which the dynamics of abjection and consolidation – and re-abjection and re-consolidation – are replayed on a variety of cosmic levels, and in which tropes of limitation and representation succeed each other in a dynamic whose end is only forecast in a messianic future.

Before turning to those dynamics in detail, however, I turn to a brief discussion of the place in kabbalistic discourse of narratives of the origin of the *Sitra Aḥra*. As in Chapter One, I find it useful to present my own understanding through critical engagement with

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[6] *Zohar* III, 292b:

כהאי אומנא מרצפא (ס"א מרזפתא), כד אכתש במנא דפרזלא, אפיק זיקין לכל עיבר
    Like this craftsman who strikes on an iron tool with a hammer, and brings forth sparks in every
    direction

(I note that I favor the textual variant "מרזפתא" to read this passage.)

[7] 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.

that of Isaiah Tishby and the Scholem tradition's grand schema of conflict between "Platonic" and "Gnostic" strands in kabbalah.

B. *The Origin of Evil: Theogonic Narrative versus Theological Explanation*

1. Introduction

Many kabbalistic texts discuss the emergence of the *Sitra Aḥra*, though at widely varying length and emphasis. Such discussions vary in genre from mythic narrative to conceptual explanation to a range of intermediary forms. Some texts seem concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, with reconciling their portrayal of evil with potential objections from philosophical theology, while others seem indifferent to such concerns. Some texts devote themselves to portrayals of ongoing encounters between personified divine and demonic forces, in which the ultimate origin of the latter seems of lesser moment, while others take pains to describe in detail the source of the demonic. While the Scholem/Tishby tradition might line up this range of genres and concerns with the variable allegiances of particular texts to Neoplatonic as opposed to "Gnostic" tendencies, such differences need not stem from any identifiable historical filiations.

Moreover, kabbalistic texts, particularly the Zohar, at times pose putatively theological challenges, either in implicit or explicit form, not with the goal of initiating theological discourses, but rather, as literary foils, as occasions to initiate mythological elaborations. Rather than answering the theological question, such passages proceed to elaborate narratives in which the seeming incontrovertibility of the axiom underlying the putative challenge evaporates. A particularly clear example, which I discuss below, is provided by a Zoharic discussion of the verse, "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (Exodus 23:19).[8] One Zoharic sage advances a seemingly unanswerable theological objection to interpreting the imagery of this verse in accordance with classic Zoharic decoding – which would view a "kid" as an embodiment of the demonic and "mother" as a name for the Shekhinah. Such an interpretation would make a divine entity the

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[8] *Zohar* II, 125a. See my discussion below at page 144-147.

"mother" of a demonic entity, a theologically inadmissible position. Far from engaging in some sort of theological apologetics, Rabbi Shim'on treats the question as simply an occasion to describe the processes by which this precise state of affairs could come to be, implicitly treating the theological axiom of the absolute separation of the divine from any demonic taint as irrelevant – or more precisely, the ontological condition it demands becomes transformed into one among a range of possible conditions. This technique of using a theological objection as a literary element bears a kinship to the technique I described in Chapter One of the deployment of images from seemingly incompatible models in the service of a single passage's literary effects.

Perhaps the boldest texts, in the sense of most indifferent to theological objection, are those that recount the origins of the *Sitra Aḥra* in the most primordial "temporal" or structural levels of the divine (or proto-divine) realm. Despite their seeming radicalism, such notions may be found in a range of key 13th century texts, long predating their elaboration by Lurianic and Sabbatean writers.[9] Tishby argues that this position was broached in the Zohar as one of its highest secrets,[10] elaborated in some Lurianic writings, though concealed in others,[11] and fully emphasized only in Sabbateanism.[12] For Asi Farber-Ginat, by contrast, the origin of evil 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.[13] To be sure, she notes that texts that shift this emergence to lower levels of the divine realm reflect a desire to "moderate" the radicalism of the original thesis.[14]

The emergence of the demonic out of refuse at the most primordial levels, preceding the full elaboration of the divine structure, is highly significant for my argument, since it indicates that the formation of divine and demonic subjectivity is always subsequent to the process I am calling abjection. However, I will be just as concerned with the *narrative structure* of the process of subject-formation-through-abjection as with its

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[9] Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet La-pri', 118-119.
[10] *Zohar* III, 135a-b; Tishby, *MZ* I, 296.
[11] See Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra,* 56-57.
[12] Wirzubski, 'Ha-Te'ologiah ha-Shabeta'it shel R. Natan Ha-Azati', 210-64.
[13] Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet', 118-119.
[14] *Ibid*., 118, n. 2.

relative *locus* in theogonic and cosmogonic processes. The fact that one can find subject-formation-through-abjection processes at all levels, a continual construction and re-construction of the divine and demonic, is, for me, the most significant phenomenon. Not only does it show the deep-rootedness of these processes in the tradition, but it also shows the impossibility of their definitive achievement, an impossibility that confirms the theory of abjection. From my perspective, the primary issue is not the degree of radicalness as measured by the locus of these processes, but rather, their proliferation and persistence at all cosmic levels, notwithstanding significant variations among them.

2. Tishby, "Dualism," and Abjection

Tishby's discussion of "dualism" deserves close examination, for I believe that critical reflection on his analysis of Lurianic, as well as Zoharic, doctrine, can contribute to understanding the latter. I refer in particular to a feature that characterizes his discussion of both the Zohar and Lurianic kabbalah: his apparent conflation of two possible interpretations of the presence of evil (or proto-evil) at the most primordial level: 1) an irreducible and primordial "dualism" of antagonistic forces – a position, sometimes called "absolute" or "radical" dualism;[15] and, 2) the pervasive diffusion of the roots of evil within the primordial divine (or proto-divine), a position I propose to call that of "duality," or more precisely, depending on the text, "proto-duality" or "crypto-duality."[16] A primordial dualism between independent good and evil forces does not appear as such in any normative kabbalistic text. To be sure, the contrast drawn by Nathan of Gaza between the "light that contains thought" and the "light that does not contain thought," reformulated by Farber-Ginat as the "cosmic" and "anti-cosmic" "vectors," may have its roots in 13th century texts, including the Zohar.[17] However, it is not wholly clear that the "anti-cosmic" forces in the 13th century texts are either independent or in themselves evil; indeed, although this is not the place to elaborate this point, I would argue that, at least in

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[15] See Stoyanov, *The Other God,* 4.

[16] 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.

[17] See generally, Farber-Ginat, 'Kelipah Kodemet', especially 126-30. Liebes, *Sod Ha-Emunah Ha-Shabeta'it*, 57 and fns. 74 & 77.

some of the pertinent texts, these "anti-cosmic" forces can be better understood through the framework of abjection. In any case, it is not "dualism" that informs the Zohar, but rather "duality," as I have defined those terms.   Tishby's theoretical conflation of "dualism" and "duality" (in my definition of those terms) stands at odds with his analysis of the primary materials at a detailed textual level. It is this conflation which renders deeply flawed his analytical framework – based on a dichotomy between the "dualistic tendency" and "restrictions on dualism"[18] – for reading many Zoharic texts.

I begin with Tishby's analysis of Lurianic doctrine. Tishby argues that Lurianic kabbalah rests on a myth of divine "catharsis," aimed at purging the hidden roots of evil in the *En-Sof* itself. For Tishby, the entire Lurianic system – from the initial *tzimtzum,* to the breaking of the vessels, to the series of *tikunim* culminating in the final cosmic redemption – is motivated by the desire to expel the root of evil outside the divine, bringing it from its concealed hiding place in the divine into a separate and revealed form. By bringing evil into the open as a distinct realm, this process also aims at making possible its utter destruction.[19]

The difference between *duality* and *dualism*, as I have defined them, can serve as a vehicle for describing this myth. The primordial reaches of the divine are characterized by a latent duality, not yet articulated into an opposition, between forces of kindness [חסדים] and judgment [גבורות] – the latter either a source or, at times, even a euphemism for the 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.[20] 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 perhaps more of a proto-duality – though the text goes on to say that this "dirt" is "revealed" when the "water is filtered," perhaps also suggesting a crypto-duality.[21] In any case, by contrast with these images of a latent,

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[18] Tishby, *MZ* I, 288.

[19] Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra,* 54-57.

[20] Vital, 'Derush al Olam Ha-Atsilut', 17 [עכירות ועוביות הדין שבאור האין סוף...כטיפה בים הגדול].

[21] Ibn Tabul, *Derush Ḥeftsi-Bah*, 1d. [גרגיר עפר בתוך ים הגדול אינו עושה עכירות ואינו נרגש וכשיסתננו המים יתגלה וימצא העפר].

primordial duality in the *En-Sof*, the ongoing drama of purification and *tikun* is designed to *produce* a cosmic *dualism*: good on one side, evil on the other – in order to make it possible for the former to separate itself from the latter and, indeed, vice versa, and thereby make it possible for a properly constituted divine to directly combat a "properly" (or perhaps "improperly") constituted demonic. In this narrative, 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.

Tishby, however, in his theoretical discussions, does not describe the myth's relation to dualism in this way. Rather, he begins his work on 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.[22] Though he maintains that the dualistic, Gnostic strand tends to predominate in kabbalistic views about the origins of evil,[23] he portrays Lurianic kabbalah as marked by the tension between the two, whose coexistence he posits "in the heart of its creator."[24] Much of Tishby's interpretive work in presenting the Lurianic doctrine is devoted to distinguishing the more theologically acceptable monistic strands from what he considers the "authentic," more "mythological," dualistic strands.[25] I note that this interpretive structure would not be substantially modified even if we rejected the notion of a historically identifiable "Gnostic" influence in favor of one conceptually or phenomenologically defined.

However, in view of the distinction I have outlined between *duality* and *dualism*, which I believe provides a better framework for Tishby's own explication of Lurianic doctrine, the grand narrative of a struggle between monism and dualism is simply a distraction. Dualism, as it emerges in Tishby's own descriptions, is not a primordial condition in Lurianic kabbalah, but rather, is produced as an interim stage during the multi-phased process of the divine struggle with evil. It is not a radical mythological position in

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[22] Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra*, 13-14.
[23] *Ibid*., 15-16.
[24] *Ibid*. 60.
[25] See, e.g., *ibid*., 39-52, 64-65.

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.

Indeed, every additional act of such purification produces a further "revelation of matter and refuse."[26] Again, dualism is here a 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."[27] Or, to put it in 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."[28]

When it comes to the Zohar, 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 in several Zoharic passages.[29] This process begins with the production of sparks by the "lamp of darkness" or "hard spark" [בוצינא דקרדינותא*; botsina de-kardinuta*][30] as it strikes within primordial "Thought" [מחשבה]. The following text from the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* portrays this process most concisely:

רישא שירותא דמהימנותא, גו מחשבה, בטש בוצינא דקרדינותא, וסליק גו מחשבה, ואפיק ניצוצין,
נציצין זריק לתלת מאה ועשרין עיבר, ובריר פסולת מגו מחשבה, ואתבריר. [31]

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[26] Ḥayim Vital, *Mevo She'arim*, 6c [ובכל עולם מתחדש בירור נוסף על חבירו וגלוי החומר והפסולת .]
[27] *Ibid.*, 1c [די שיתרחק מא"ס הרחקה נוספת ...ויכול הדין להתגלות ולהתהוות ממדרגה אחר מדרגה .]
[28] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 126.
[29] Tishby, *Netive Emunah u-Minut,* 25-26.
[30] On the *botsina de-kardinuta,* see Liebes, *Perakim be-Milon Sefer Ha-Zohar*, 167-173.
[31] *Zohar* II, 254b.

The head of the beginning of faith: within Thought, the dark lamp knocked, and

ascended within Thought, and brought forth sparks. It cast sparks upon three-

hundred twenty sides, and sifted/clarified/purified refuse from within Thought.

And it was sifted/clarified/purified.[32]

For Tishby, this "clearly mythical" conception is a Zoharic reworking of the midrashic

notion of the "worlds that were destroyed"[33] into an image of the "purification of divine

Thought from the roots of evil that were mixed in it and blocked the process of the holy

emanation."[34]   Tishby tells us that the "author" of the Zohar scattered the various parts of

this myth of the "Gnostic dualism of good and evil" within divine Thought in three

different passages, presumably seeking to protect the esoteric status of this daring

doctrine.[35] Nonetheless, we find the same dilemma in Tishby's work on the Zohar's

conception of the origin of evil as in his work on the Lurianic conception. As I have

noted, his essay on the *Sitra Aḥra* in *Mishnat ha-Zohar*[36] is thoroughly structured by the

notion of a tension between "the dualistic tendency" and "restrictions on dualism."

A key, and symptomatic, example he gives of such a "restriction" is the notion that evil is

generated out of the holy dimension.[37] This notion was elaborated in a variety of forms

in early kabbalah, from the *Bahir* to Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, and plays a key role in both the

Zohar and Lurianic kabbalah. 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 as a servant of divine justice, what some have

called a "monarchian dualism."[38] Such a conception, though proclaimed in kabbalistic

texts such as some passages in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, stands at great odds with the

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[32] אתבריר and its cognates pose translation difficulties. The Zohar 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."

[33] *Bereshit Rabah*, I, 4b-c (3:7).

[34] Tishby, *Netive Emunah*, 25-26:   זיכוך המחשבה האלהית משרשי הרע שהיו מעורים בה ועכבו את תהליך האצילות
הקדושה .

[35] *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.

[36] Tishby, *MZ* I, 285-307.

[37] *Ibid*., 295.

[38] Stoyanov, *The Other God,* 4.

perennial rebellions of the demonic, with the "slave who becomes king and the bondwoman who supplants her mistress" – rebellions that constitute central concerns not only of the Zohar, but also of the very works that contain passages that seem to embrace "monarchian dualism," including the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*.

More importantly, as I have shown in relation to Tishby's discussion of Lurianic kabbalah, notions of the emergence of the demonic out of the divine, even its most primordial reaches, are far from incompatible with the cathartic myth that Tishby sees as the most authentic manifestation of the "dualistic" and "Gnostic" strand in kabbalah. On the contrary, at the very heart of the myth lies a portrayal of the generation of evil from good – or rather, the distillation of a pure evil from a heterogeneous, though predominantly good, primordial mélange, or, perhaps even more precisely but also more provocatively, the distillation of a pure demonic evil and a pure divine good from a not yet coherently characterizable primordial reality. This primordial reality has no proper name, but is rather the impersonal "*En-Sof*": a primordial reality that one 14th century text declares to be completely unmentioned in the Bible, a position that is also implicit in some Zoharic texts.[39] From the perspective I affirm here, the reason for this textual absence should be attributed as much to its ontological indeterminacy as to its transcendence of human language – or rather, the latter derives from the former. This indeterminacy is primarily the lack of a "face" – whether one thinks of the Lurianic term *partsuf*, or to the Zoharic process of *tikunin*, which, both in the *Sifra de-Tseni'uta* and the *Idra Raba*, take as their central focus the unfolding of the "head" of *Atika Kadisha*.[40] The *En-Sof*, from this perspective, is thus only a "proto-divine," insofar as it cannot be considered a personal deity and cannot create a stable cosmos, until it has received its *tikun,* its face, or, in rhetorical terms, its prosopopaeia.[41]

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[39] *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, 131a.   The Zohar implicitly endorses this position in passages such as I, 15a, which asserts the primordial subject of the verb "created" in Genesis I, 1 is absent from the verse.
[40] See, e.g., *Zohar* II, 176b; III, 128b.
[41] Compare Moshe De Leon'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 ואמשיך המשכת ההויה להמצא]. Moshe De Leon, *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, pp. 150-155.

I suggest that, beyond the desire for fidelity to Scholem's historical narrative, the apparent internal contradiction in Tishby is due to the inadequacy of his conception of catharsis to describe the workings of the myth in both the Zohar and Lurianic kabbalah. Tishby's model of catharsis assumes a coherent being that is troubled by undesirable elements within itself and seeks to purify itself by expelling them. This model, however, does not describe why this being would be troubled by these elements: if the *En-Sof* is a coherent being before the catharsis begins, why should it be troubled by elements of its own being? And, if it is indeed troubled by those elements, then should we not reject the notion that it was a coherent being before their expulsion? Tishby implicitly posits a tension between the monism of a coherent being and the dualism of its elements – a tension he attributes ultimately to the historical tension between Neoplatonic and Gnostic tendencies. This perspective, however, leads him into such impasses as portraying the genealogical posteriority of evil as a retreat from dualism despite the fact that the constitution of distinct realms of good and evil out of a primordial proto- or crypto-duality is the very essence of the supposedly "dualist" myth of catharsis (that Tishby so vividly explicates) and the goal of all kabbalistic practice.

By contrast, the account of the formation of subjectivity through abjection enables us to avoid the aporias into which Tishby was led – or, rather, to explicitly thematize the paradoxes underlying them. For this account, there is no coherent subject prior to the attempt to expel the "refuse." Rather, the expulsion of "refuse" is what allows a coherent subject to come into existence. To use 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.[42] The existence of a coherent subject (or, more precisely, a subject striving for coherence) would be an after-effect of the process of purification, not its agent – as would the existence of a coherent "Other" of the subject, the fully constituted *Sitra Aḥra*. Dualism, between a subject and its others, would be a *product* of the process of the constitution of a coherent subject. This process

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[42] 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."

can help explain what Liebes calls the "paradoxical link" in the Zohar between the "forces that precede the emanation" of the sefirot and the "forces of evil."[43]

The advantages of this perspective include, above all, obviating the need to see kabbalistic texts, including the Zohar, as 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 "creators." On the contrary, it explains the necessary link between the striving for the expulsion of refuse, essential for the construction of a coherent divine subjectivity, and the coming into being of a structured realm of the *Sitra Aḥra* – between, one might say, the constitution of a monistic subject and a dualistic cosmos. It also explains why the structured realm of the *Sitra Aḥra* is a belated structure, which comes into being from the inchoate formlessness of "smoke," "dregs," "refuse," and so on – as well as why the nameable divine is also a belated structure, a product of "*tikunin*," however variously that word might be translated and however various its meanings might be in different kabbalistic texts. Finally, by stressing the precariousness and ultimate impossibility of the project of the definitive construction of a purified and bounded subject, it explains why kabbalistic texts describe an endless series of expulsions of refuse and purifications in divine and human history, necessitated by an endless series of returns of the deadly impurities (at least in pre-messianic times).[44] It shows how the two seemingly opposite goals in relation to the *Sitra Aḥra* – annihilation and incorporation[45] – are both responses to the same dilemma, that of the subject confronting that with which it was inextricably associated before it came into full existence. And it explains why these two responses are equally pyrrhic projects. Coherence and boundedness do not characterize the primordial state but, by their very nature, characterize a condition that opposes itself to something else, an other, an "Other Side" – and when it comes to subjectivity, that "Other" emerges

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[43] Liebes, *Perakim*, 350.

[44] 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 safety precautions allows them to unleash their demonic imagination.

[45] Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, 77.

from the same amalgam as the subject. 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 "same" 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 impossible dream, a struggle not so much initiated by a subject as that through which the subject seeks to constitute itself – and can only ever partially and provisionally succeed.

Before proceeding, I note that, although my critiques of Tishby's discussions of the *Sitra Aḥra* in the Zohar and in Lurianic kabbalah are similar, I do not intend to minimize the differences between these two literatures. Such differences are, of course, many and highly significant, including a vast range of Lurianic images and ideas not present, or only adumbrated, in the Zohar, as well as the genre differences, the predominantly expository style of Lurianic texts by contrast with the literary virtuosity of the Zohar. 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 Zohar. It is, of course, far beyond the scope of this thesis 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.

3. Levels of Abjection

In this section, I present a number of key Zoharic texts which portray the ontological processes of abjection and crystallization, conveyed through tropes of limitation and tropes of representation, at a variety of different levels. In doing so, I foreground the structure of the process rather than the question of the level at which evil originates. If, as both Kristeva's portrayal of abjection and the bulk of kabbalistic texts suggest, the struggle to achieve proper subjectivity is interminable, and its anxious and dangerous relationship to inchoate refuse and crystallized antagonists 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 both the indispensability and precariousness of abjection in the construction of bounded subjects – requiring continual constitution and reconstitution (or reconsolidation) of the divine and demonic at all levels.[46]

In what follows, I will discuss four of these levels. In the first two levels I discuss, constitution-through-abjection is portrayed all the way from its initiation in inchoate emissions to its culmination in demonic crystallizations; interestingly, these two levels are the highest and lowest cosmic levels, "primordial Thought" (presumably the level of *Keter* or perhaps the upper reaches of *Ḥokhmah*) and "earth" (*Malkhut*). The second two levels I discuss are two intermediate levels, associated with the "left" side of the divine, *Gevurah* and *Binah*, 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*. However, a discussion of this level requires the introduction of a variety of themes which will be more suitable in Section C of this chapter.

a.   *"Thought"*

The first level I discuss is that of primordial "Thought." I will use the three texts suggested by Tishby, beginning with the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* excerpt I have already quoted. This text portrays the production of sparks at the highest level of Thought:

רישא שירותא דמהימנותא, גו מחשבה, בטש בוצינא דקרדינותא, וסליק גו מחשבה, ואפיק ניצוצין, נציצין זריק לתלת מאה ועשרין עיבר, ובריר פסולת מגו מחשבה, ואתבריר.[47]

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[46] 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.
[47] *Zohar* II, 254b.

The head of the beginning of faith: within Thought, the dark lamp knocked, and ascended within Thought, and brought forth sparks. It cast sparks upon three-hundred twenty sides, and sifted/clarified refuse from within Thought. And it was sifted/clarified/purified.

The *botsina de-kardinuta* is associated throughout the Zohar with the first stages of the emanative process, most famously in the very first lines of Zohar *Bereshit* – where it "goes forth within the concealed of the concealed, from the head (or mystery) of *En-Sof*"[48] and produces, or becomes, the inchoate and colorless *kutra be-golma* [קוטרא בגולמא, "a cluster of vapour forming in formlessness"[49]); it then proceeds to produce the colors which will shape all divine and cosmic forms. In the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* excerpt, the *botsina* "knocks" and "ascends within Thought." This action is neither attributed to an identifiable subject nor linked to the pursuit of a clear goal.[50] Despite the vigor and boldness of its "knocking" and "ascending" within primordial Thought, however, the *botsina* 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].[51]

In Kristevan terms, this initial movement of the subject-less *botsina* is that of an inchoate desire to establish a distinct and bounded subject – a desire which thus necessarily, albeit paradoxically, precedes its subject. This initial movement, however, cannot achieve the separation of the subject from the primordial state of undifferentiation without first expelling that which cannot be assimilated, the abject. Without the travails of abjection, the nascent desire for separation cannot be realized – or, in kabbalistic terms, the

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[48] The text, *Zohar* I, 15a, with its variants, is as follows:
בוצינא דקרדינותא ונפיק [נ"א נפיק] גו סתים דסתימו מרישא (נ"א, מרזא) דאין סוף קוטרא בגולמא
Like Matt, I, 107, I favor the first variant in brackets, though I translate the passage somewhat differently.
[49] Matt I, 108.
[50] This is perhaps in contrast with the Zohar *Bereshit* passage which is, somewhat unclearly, 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 I, 107.
[51] *Zohar* II, 255a.

primordial "Thought" cannot give rise to distinct sefirot and *partsufim* without the sifting out of its "refuse" and, ultimately, the crystallization of the realm of evil.

A text from the *Idra Zuta,* a more elaborate, if somewhat un-linear, version of this process, supports this interpretation:

עד לא אברי עלמא לא הוו משגיחין אנפין באנפין, ובגין כך עלמין קדמאי אתחרבו, ועלמין קדמאי
בלא תקונא אתעבידו, וההוא דלא הוה בתקונא, אקרי זיקין נצוצין, כהאי אומנא מרצפא (ס"א
מרזפתא), כד אכתש במנא דפרזלא, אפיק זיקין לכל עיבר, ואינון זיקין דנפקין, נפקין להיטין ונהירין,
ודעכין לאלתר, ואלין אקרון עלמין קדמאי, ובגין כך אתחרבו ולא אתקיימו, עד דאתתקן עתיקא
קדישא, ונפיק אומנא (ד"א מאנא) לאומנותיה:
ועל האי תנינא במתניתא דילן, דניצוצא אפיק זיקין בזיקין, (נ"א דבוצינא אפיק זיקין ניצוצין), לתלת
מאה ועשרין עיבר, ואינון זיקין, עלמין קדמאי אקרון ומיתו לאלתר, לבתר נפיק אומנא (ס"א מאנא)
לאומנותיה, ואתתקן בדכר ונוקבא, והני זיקין דאתדעכו ומיתו, השתא אתקיים כלא:
מבוצינא דקרדינותא נפיק ניצוצא, פטישא תקיפא, דבטש ואפיק זיקין עלמין קדמאי, ומתערבי (ד"א
ומתדכי) באוירא דכיא, ואתבסמו דא בדא[52]

> Before the world was created, they were not gazing face-to-face. And, consequently, the primordial words were destroyed. And the primordial words were made without *tikun*. And that which is without *tikun* is called 'scattering sparks.' It is like a craftsman: when the hammer strikes an iron tool, it brings forth sparks in every direction. And these sparks that come forth, come forth glowing and shining, and are extinguished at once. And these are called the primordial worlds. And, consequently, they were destroyed and did not endure – until *Atika Kadisha* received his *tikun* and the craftsman went forth to do his craft.
>
> In regard to this, we learned in our Mishnah, that the lamp brought forth scattering sparks upon three-hundred twenty sides, and these sparks are called 'primordial worlds,' and they died immediately. Afterwards, the craftsman went to do his craft. And it received its *tikun* as male and

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[52] *Zohar* III, 292b.

female. And these sparks, that were extinguished and died, now all
endured.

A spark came forth from the dark lamp, a strong hammer, which knocked
and brought forth sparks, primordial worlds, and they mingled in the pure
air, and were sweetened each with the other.[53]

Given the Zohar's recurrent emphasis on relationship, particularly male-female
relationship, for the establishment of a proper subject, the stage before "face to face"
contemplation at the beginning of this excerpt should be understood as a stage prior to the
constitution of *any* proper "face," any proper subject.[54] If the stage prior to the "face to
face" is equivalent to the stage prior to a proper creative subject, the action of the *botsina*
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 "blacksmith" image, in which a subject wields a hammer that stands in for the
botsina, would, in this reading, be an imperfect analogy, as suggested by the fact that the
Zohar, in a relatively rare gesture, explicitly flags it as an allegory [כהאי , "like this"].
Perhaps the allegory is offered to make the action of the subject-less knocking of the
botsina a bit more palatable. In any case, this blacksmith is, at best, a very incomplete
subject, one who has not received his "*tikunin*" and thus incapable of truly creating. The
only outcome of this incomplete subject's action is the momentary appearance of the
"primordial worlds," here identified with the sparks that emerge, burn, illuminate, and are
immediately extinguished. The "blacksmith" intends to create, but his pre-*tikun*
subjectivity misfires, yielding only ephemeral, useless, dangerous byproducts. It is only
when the creative subject is completed, here by means of the *tikun* of the face of *Atika* –
or, in rhetorical terms, by means of prosopopeia – that a full creative subject can emerge,

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[53] I have made a selection from the textual variants in my translation.
[54] See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 7b:

<div dir="rtl">דדכר בלא נוקבא פלג גופא אקרי, ופלג לאו הוא חד</div>

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.

an "artisan" who can "proceed with his craft." And it is only then that a stable cosmos can emerge.

An interesting feature of this passage, as compared with the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* passage, is that it concludes with the revival and sweetening of the extinguished sparks, rather than their "sifting" out as "refuse" and crystallization as "Hell." Still a third option concerning the fate of the sparks is provided by a closely related text in the *Idra Raba*: "some of them were sweetened, and some of them were not sweetened at all" [מנהון אתבסמו, ומנהון לא אתבסמו כלל].[55] In any case, all of these outcomes, in which holy or unholy entities, or both, eventually emerge from sparks, are seemingly impossible destinies for these inchoate ephemera that had "died immediately." Indeed, this catachrestic use of the word "death" in the context of the "death of the Kings" is addressed explicitly in the *Idra Raba*.[56]

The third text cited by Tishby completes this portrayal, highlighting the way in which the emitted "sparks" consolidate to form an adversary to the divine. This text forms the prologue to the "bald God" passage I have analyzed at length in Chapter One. Here I focus exclusively on this prologue, which explicitly shows the crystallization of the byproducts of the *botsina* into a demonic force:

תאנא מבוצינא דקרדינותא נפקו 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 תרין כתרין תתאין דלתתא [57]

> It has been taught: From the Lamp of Adamantine Darkness issue 325 sparks – engraved in and joined to the side of *Gevuran*, called *Gevurot* – and they converge as one, becoming one body. And when these enter the Body, it is called *Ish* … And because lower judgments cling and join to the hair of this one, he is

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[55] *Zohar* III, 135b.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *Zohar* III, 48b.

called Harsh Judgment …The skull of the head of this one is completely red as a rose, and his hair red within red. From it hang lower crowns of below…[58]

This passage makes explicit the end of the story begun in the other two: the movement from the emission of refuse to its consolidation as a mighty force able to subjugate and re-create the divine. The sparks, which the *Idra Zuta* passage asserts had "died immediately," here "converge as one"; these ephemera are now transformed into "mights" or "judgments" [גבורות, *Gevurot*], becoming the "red hair" to which the demonic "lower judgments" and "lower crowns" "cling and join." The covering of the "Ish" by this red hair comes to determine his very nature: he is now called "Harsh Judgment" upon which the demonic sefirot "hang" or "depend," and can only separate himself from them through a metaphysical shaving. For the purposes of this chapter, the important point here is the clarity with which the passage describes the consolidation of the sparks, whose ephemeral and dispersed nature is highlighted in other passages, into a mighty force that takes possession of the divine *Ish*, transforming him into a new, fearsome, red-haired figure from whom the demonic sefirot hang – a demonic deity, a veritable Lord of the Underworld. Taking the three passages together, the tale of the "sparks" proceeds from their appearance as inchoate emissions to their crystallization into a mighty and at least temporarily victorious colonizer of the divine.

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 *botsina* or the mighty "craftsman" – which succeeds only in producing ephemeral sparks. It then proceeds to catachresis and prosopopeia: the impossible consolidation of those ephemera into a mighty force that conquers and re-creates the divine *Ish*, transforming it into the personified chief of the demonic realm.

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[58] Matt VII, 304-6. I have adopted most of Matt's textual choices, but slightly modified his translation. Note his new translation of בוצינא דקרדינותא.

I now turn from the highest level of the divine to the lowest. In relation to this level, a
crucial passage appears near the beginning of Zohar *Bereshit*, which may be called the
"snow in the water" passage. This text links the formation of "the earth," that symbol of
feminine divine entities, usually *Malkhut*, with the emission of refuse and the generation
of the demonic realm. The passage is a complex intertextual artifact, weaving together
biblical passages portraying creation with those portraying the visions of Elijah and
Ezekiel, as well as a number of midrashic sources. The passage is mysterious in mood,
marked by deeply evocative, yet obscure, imagery – and its enigmatic quality is
underlined 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 תהו ובהו וגו', היתה דייקא מקדמת דנא, תלגא גו מייא, נפקא מינה זוהמא, בההוא
חילא דתלגא במייא, ואקיש בה אשא תקיפא, והוה בה פסולת ואתעדיאת,[59] ואתעבידת תה"ו, מאתר
(נ"א, מדורא) דזוהמא קינא דפסולת.[60]

> "And the earth was Tohu and Bohu." "Was," precisely – prior to this moment.
> Snow in the midst of water: *zohama* emerged from it, from the force of snow in
> water. And a strong fire struck it and there was refuse in it. And it was
> removed[61] and became Tohu: from the place [or, the dwelling place][62] of
> *zohama*, the nest of refuse.
> .

The air of mystery is created both by the way the passage explicitly begins *in medias res*
("was") and by its evocative and unexplained opening image ("snow in the water").

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[59] Matt's edition omits this word.
[60] *Zohar* I, 16a.
[61] The *Sulam* translates this as "became pregnant." *Sulam* II, 29. Matt's edition omits this word.
[62] The version "from the place" [מאתר] is that of the *Zohar Mantua Edition*; the *Cremona Edition* has "the
dwelling place" [מדורא]. Cordovero and Matt favor the latter. See my comment below at note 69.

Analyzing this text in relation to its precursor materials allows one to track the manner by which Zoharic writing achieves its effects. 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, in *Bereshit Rabah*).[63] However, the text pushes the anteriority of the earth further back than does the *Bahir*. The *Bahir* preserves the link between the verb ("was") and the first subsequent noun ("Tohu"), proclaiming the initial state to have been one of baffling Tohu; it then breaks the link between the two nouns ("Tohu" and "Bohu"), declaring that that initial state is followed by the more substantial Bohu.[64] By contrast, this text 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 – indeed, a state of primordial discontinuity.

Without transition, the text then simply announces its central image: "snow in the water." It is crucial to the rhetoric of the passage that it does not even explicitly make a link between this image to that of the "earth was," as though any link to anything would spoil the primordiality of the state the text wishes to evoke. The primordial image thus abruptly placed on the darkened textual stage evokes a timeless and placid hibernal scene, a plenitude of natural beauty – that is, until one reads further and discovers that it immediately gives way to an arduous, violent drama, beginning with the emission of the *zohama* that immediately, and in defiance of phenomenal experience, succeeds the opening image.

The source of the image of the "snow-in-the-water" is undoubtedly the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*: "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."[65] This

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[63] *Bereshit Rabah,* I, 3a (1:15); *Sefer Ha-Bahir*, 3.
[64] *Sefer Ha-Bahir,* 3.
[65] *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, 11 (ch. 3):

vignette is a majestic fable of divine power, a tale of a king who insouciantly reaches under his throne and playfully casts a snowball which instantly becomes the earth. The Zoharic text, by contrast, takes this tale and thoroughly interrupts its meaning, in a manner similar to its operation on the biblical text: detaching the snow in the water both from the prior the act of the divine king and from the subsequent generation of a perfected earth.

Rhetorically, the work performed by the Zoharic text on its midrashic precursor is, on a first appreciation, an act of irony, in which the seemingly majestic act of a putatively omnipotent deity succeeds in producing only slime, rather than a beautifully structured cosmos. The term *zohama* evokes something not merely inchoate, but repugnant, implicitly evoking a repulsive sexual emission.[66]   However, it is an even stronger operation than irony – for, as we saw, the initial, off-stage, act of the text in relation to its precursor had been to elide the divine subject of the tale, an *hors-texte* prerequisite to the presentation of the snow-in-the-water as a primordial scene. This elision transforms the initial turn of the text itself, that from pristine form to inchoate repulsiveness, into a subject-less event, defying phenomenal experience and even syntax. I note that the Zoharic writer must have assumed that its precursor text would be familiar to his readers, who would thus sense this elision.[67] Shorn of its agent, initiating act, and majesty, the tale becomes the site of a distinctively Zoharic portrayal of the dramatic emergence of a fully formed cosmos through struggle with nascent demonic forces. The latter first appear as inchoate *zohama*, but are then crystallized, as a result of the very struggle to purify the divine, into mighty adversaries.

I turn to consider the latter process in detail. After the emission of the *zohama*, the next event is the striking of "harsh fire" – an event very similar to the striking of the *botsina*

הארץ מאיזה מקום נבראת משלג שתחת כסא הכבוד לקח וזרק על המים ונקפאו המים ונעשו עפר הארץ
This account appears to be a reimagining of *bYoma* 54b and an imaginative reading of Job 37:6. At least two other Zoharic passages also use the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* account: *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* Ruth, at *Zohar Ḥadash,* 76a-b and, in a manner much closer to the passage here, *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* Shir Hashirim, at *Zohar Ḥadash,* 60a. There are interesting differences between the second of these passages and the one I am discussing in the text but their analysis await another day.
[66] See my discussion of the term *zohama* below, at p. 192-193.
[67] Maimonides, for example, refers to the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* "snow under the throne" account as "famous words" ["דברים מפורסמים"]. Maimonides, *Moreh Ha-Nevukhim*, 221.

de-kardinuta in the "primordial Thought," *Idra Zuta*, and "Bald God" passages.   Like the striking of the *botsina de-kardinuta*, that of the "harsh fire" yields another inchoate byproduct, that of refuse [פסולת]. Unlike the "sparks" in the *Idra Zuta* passage, this byproduct does not "die immediately," but rather gives way to protean stuff, Tohu – portrayed as something both "within form" and, "as one contemplates it, no form at all" [השתא איהו בדיוקנא, כד מסתכלן ביה לית ליה דיוקנא כלל]. This portrayal of Tohu thus posits it as a transitional stage between inchoate *zohama* and a fully crystallized entity.[68]

The emergence of Tohu coincides with the formation of a stable space for the incubation of form: "from a place of *zohama*," it becomes a "nest of refuse"[69] The subsequent steps ratchet up the defiance of phenomenal experience: a further "sifting and purification" of Tohu results in a firm crystallization of the first formidably destructive entity, the "great mighty wind, splitting mountains and shattering rocks" of Elijah's Horeb vision [כד האי תהו אבריר ואצריף, נפיק מניה (מלכים א יט יא) רוח גדולה וחזק מפרק הרים ומשבר סלעים ההוא דחמא אליהו]. Still further purifications, of the "Bohu" and "Darkness" of Genesis 1:2, produce two additional destructive forces evoked in Elijah's vision, "earthquake" [רעש] and "fire." And it is only thus that the "earth" fully emerges – accompanied by the emission of *zohama* and the drama of its eventual crystallization into mighty destructive forces.

At the ontological level, the "snow in the water" passage is a concise portrayal of the inextricability of divine creativity, the abject, and the crystallization of the demonic. The move towards creation, which throughout the Zohar is identical with the unfolding of divine subjectivity, is immediately attended by the abjection of *zohama*. The series of acts that seek to purify this *zohama* ultimately leads to 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 emergence of the divine structure comes only at the cost of the constitution of its demonic adversaries.

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[68] Some commentators associate the Zohar's interpretation of Tohu here with the philosophers' "hylic matter," citing, for example, Naḥmanides' commentary on Genesis 1:2. Matt I, 118n.75; Buzaglo, *Sefer Mikdash Melekh*, 80. While this concept may very well be in the background of the Zohar passage, an overemphasis on it, I believe, detracts from a full understanding of the passage.

[69] I am here following the Mantua version [...מאתר דזוהמא]. In the Cremona version [...מדורא דזוהמא], favored by Matt, the two appositional phrases are synonymous, rather than denoting a transition from a more inchoate to a more stable place.

At a rhetorical level, the process by which inchoate slime and refuse consolidate to produce the formidable adversarial forms, "mighty wind," "thunder," and "fire," consists of a series of catachreses – for it hardly needs to be said that the emergences of these formidable forces from a "sifting" of the insubstantial Tohu, Bohu, and Darkness have no phenomenal correlates. The rhetorical power of this passage lies precisely in these catachreses, these "abuses of language," these grafts of impossibly mixed images onto each other, as in the "sifting" of "*zohama*" to produce a "mighty wind." These catachreses may be called acts of morpho-poeisis, the poetic making of form (like prosopopeia, but where the forms in question are not "faces").[70] The persuasiveness of these acts of morpho-poeisis stems from the unexpected audacity of the trope, the boldly discontinuous turn to representation. The morpho-poeitic movement from "*zohama*" to "mighty wind" is just as startling as the prior, ironic movement from divine omnipotent majesty to the emission of the "*zohama*."

The insistence on place here – "from the place of *zohama*, the nest of refuse" – is also rhetorically significant. If metaphor always involves the transport of a term to a "borrowed place," catachresis is an "abusive" form of such transport – a transport of a term to an improper place, a place it has not politely borrowed but violently usurped.[71] Indeed, this passage consists of a series of improper movements – from *zohama*, to refuse, to Tohu, to "place of *zohama*," to "nest of refuse." This movement produces the site for the morpho-poeitic consolidation of the demonic forces – wind, earthquake, and fire, an entire demonic structure whose emergence is coeval with the emergence of the holy "earth."

It is thus only through two sets of bold tropes – limitation and representation – that a fully formed cosmos emerges. 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. Just

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[70] Using the term "morpho-poiesis" in this way is of recent vintage. 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 thus provides a useful rhetorical term for instances when "prosopopeia" is not strictly applicable.

[71] Parker, 'Metaphor and catachresis', 60-73.

as the emission of *zohama* from the snow-in-the-water is an unexpected, unanticipatable, irony, so the emergence of formidable form from Tohu and Bohu are unexpected, audacious acts of morpho-poiesis that just as thoroughly defy phenomenal experience and rhetorical convention. In these ways, the Zoharic text overturns the midrashic vignette from a triumphant tale of an already constituted subject enacting verbs of power to one in which an ironic preface of a subject-less mishap is followed by impossible representations of the emergence of form from the inchoate. "Catharsis," at least as commonly understood, cannot begin to capture the operations of this text.

The technique of creating a gap in the story of creation, in which to insert the previously untold drama of the emergence of the demonic, can be seen quite explicitly in the Zohar's treatment of the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* imagery, but it also may now be viewed simply as a reading of the first three verses of Genesis. The first verse 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 incompatible theories about its hidden mysteries or relationship to other Near Eastern creation myths. The Zohar treats the second verse as performing the same function in relation to the creation story as the Zohar's reading itself performs in relation to the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* story – as creating a gap in the smooth unfolding of creation, a gap in which the initial move towards creation, which I suggest the Zohar renders subject-less, is diverted by the emergence of forces adversarial to that move. The Zohar 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 dark 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. I suggest that it was the second verse's 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."[72]

It is only after an arduous process, concealed within the otherwise enigmatic second verse, that divine subjectivity can truly act freely, indeed that this subjectivity truly comes on the scene. It is notable that it is only in relation to the creation of light in the third verse that God first speaks. The creation of light proves to be not simply a detailing 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 of the second verse. And yet, this creation will forever be shadowed by the dark forces that emerged simultaneously with the initial subject-less move toward creation. [73]

A brief review of the disagreements among later commentators about the identity (divine vs. demonic) of the various entities mentioned in the passage is very instructive. The significance of these interpretive variations goes beyond the frequent phenomenon of difficult Zoharic passages giving rise to dramatically divergent understandings. Rather, in this case, such differences are deeply symptomatic of the obscurities inherent in the dynamics of abjection. If neither the (divine) subject nor its (demonic) others are primordially given, but rather come to be through an arduous struggle of mutual differentiation, then it is not at all surprising that the location of a particular entity in relation to the dividing line between the two dimensions might be difficult to determine in a poetic portrayal of the process.

I focus here on the transition from "*zohama*," to "Tohu," to "mighty wind" in three commentaries: Shalom Buzaglo's *Mikdash Melekh* (18th century), Cordovero's *Or Yakar* (16th Century) and Shim'on Ibn Lavi's *Ketem Paz* (16th century).[74] If one is willing to delve behind Buzaglo's Lurianic terminology, his interpretation seems closest to the spirit

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[72] *Bereshit Rabah*, I, 1d (1:5):   אילולי שהדבר כתוב אי אפשר לאמרו
[73] A precursor to this Zoharic view may be found in *Bereshit Rabah* I, 3b (2:1):
א"ר ברכיה עד דהיא פגה אפיקת כובייא
     Rabbi Berakhia said: "while it [i.e., the earth in Gen. 1:2] was yet unripe, it brought forth thorns."
[74] 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* I, 145a) associates the first with the coarsening of divine *shefa* associated with "water." Buzaglo (*Mikdash Melekh*, I, 80) associates the "snow" with the male quality of compassion and the "water" with the female quality of judgment.

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of the passage. For this commentator, the *zohama* is a by-product of the union of the snow and the water (respectively, the Lurianic "drop of *Aba*" and "drop of *Ima*") with the former the purer of the two. He offers alternative explanations of the source of the *zohama*: either it comes solely from the "drop" of *Ima* or from both "drops." In any event, in accordance with the analysis I have been developing, the *zohama* ironically comes from the emissions of "drops" that are quite literally the "seminal" (or "ovular") acts of the generation of life.[75]

This abjection is then followed by crystallization. First, Tohu is produced from the separation and concentration of the initial *zohama*; Buzaglo proclaims Tohu to be both a "*kelipah*," and, perhaps more precisely, the "root of the *kelipot*."[76] 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]."[77] This process of the crystallization of the *zohama* into Tohu and then into the four Ezekiel phenomena ultimately yields a personified demonic realm – specifically, the demonic male and female, the Lurianic "*Ze'er* and *Nukva* of *Kelipah*" – morpho-poiesis yielding prosopopeia.

Cordovero's interpretation differs from that of Buzaglo, at times dramatically so. His description of the origin of the *zohama* involves the somewhat ambiguous mixture of images he uses elsewhere in his portrayal of the origin of the *kelipot*.[78] On the one hand, he sees the *zohama* as one stage in the gradual coarsening of entities as they descend the chain of being [העבות הדברים למטה והעתקן ממציאות למציאות][79]– from the purity of water to the coarser stage of snow (the reverse of Buzaglo's water/snow hierarchy) and then to *zohama*. On the other hand, this imagery portraying the generation of the *zohama* is combined with others that suggest a rather more discontinuous relationship between purity and impurity, a discontinuity marked by abjection, specifically digestive refuse and the refuse of afterbirth. Whether or not these two sets of images can be reconciled, it is in

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[75] 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.
[76] *Mikdash Melekh*, I, 80.
[77] *Ibid.*, 81: והיא קליפה ראשונה מד' קליפות שראה אליהו והנה רוח סערה וכו'
[78] Cf. *Pardes*, II, 53b-d.
[79] *Or Yakar* I, 145a.

the subsequent stages that Cordovero's view diverges most sharply from that of Buzaglo. First, Cordovero offers a far more foreshortened process than Buzaglo. The Tohu that emerges from the *zohama* is already purely, exclusively evil [רע לבדו], rather than a way-station to the crystallized *kelipot*.[80] Finally, in even more striking contrast to Buzaglo, the three mighty forces of Elijah's vision are holy forces, whose role is to subdue the *kelipot*.[81] This foreshortening suggests a Cordoveran discomfort with the abject, a desire to move past it towards a crystallized dichotomy between good and evil as quickly as possible.[82] To be sure, reading the Zoharic text to foreshorten the movement from the inchoate "*zohama*" to the purely evil "Tohu" also comes at the price of heightening the transition's phenomenal impossibility and rhetorical impropriety, emphasizing the monstrously catachretic quality of the text.

Finally, a brief mention 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, this commentator declares that Tohu is a holy entity, indeed, perhaps even one of the highest holy entities, *Keter* or *Binah*.[83] 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];[84] the second and third of the phenomena, the "earthquake" and "fire," are crystallizations of refuse that descends from two other entities that Ibn Lavi portrays as holy, Bohu and Darkness. To be sure, 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."[85] He

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[80] *Ibid.*

[81] *Or Yakar*, I, 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*, II, 55d-56a, he quotes a passage 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*.

[82] 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 be intended 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).

[83] Ibn Lavi, *Ketem Paz,* I, 48c.

[84] *Ibid.,* 50c.

[85] *Ibid.*, 48d.

supports this homology between the holy and unholy Tohu with reference to the Ecclesiastes verse, "also 'this' confronted with 'this' hath made the Elohim."

These interpretive variations reflect divergent ways of responding to the paradoxes in the process of abjection, different ways of constructing and managing the ambivalence that is inevitable given the emergence of the divine and the demonic from primordial undifferentiation. Specifically, the interpretive differences here concern 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 side, while Buzaglo portrays those phenomena as fearsome destructive forces. They also concern 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. To be sure, some of these interpretive positions are rather closer to the plain meaning and spirit of the text than others; their divergences remain, nonetheless, highly symptomatic of the paradoxes of abjection. If neither the (divine) subject nor its (demonic) others are primordially given, but rather emerge through an arduous struggle of differentiation, then it is not at all surprising that the location of a particular entity in relation to the dividing line between the dimensions might be difficult to determine. Nor is it surprising to find a lack of clarity about the agent of the process of the emergence of the holy cosmos and its unholy counterpart – for the identity of the agents are only established as a result of the process.

One striking expression of this inherent indeterminacy is the notion found in Ibn Lavi, as well as other kabbalistic texts, that the word "Tohu" may refer to the highest level of either the divine or the demonic.[86] In doubling Tohu between holy and unholy forms, and portraying it as an intermediate stage between *zohama* and a crystallized demonic realm, such texts bring together the splitting and abjection perspectives. I note that the

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[86] The influential commentary on the *Sefer Yetsirah* by Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi, a 14th century author outside the Zohar circles, (commonly misattributed to the Ra'avad), also presents Tohu as a superior divine level, the sefirah of Ḥokhmah. *Sefer Yetsirah Ha-Shalem*, 77.

notion of a holy form of Tohu does not appear as such in the Zohar, though it seems to me to be compatible with its spirit.[87]

c. *"Fierce Rage"*

I turn from the emergence of evil through processes at the highest and lowest divine levels to those that take place at two intermediate levels, those of *Gevurah* and *Binah*. The processes described at these levels do not concern the initial constitution of structures or personages; rather, they involve disruptions of the identity of already-constituted structures or personages, the rectification of which brings about the reconstitution of those structures and personages. Nonetheless, the processes are quite homologous to those that place at the highest and lowest levels – beginning with the emission of inchoate refuse, requiring reconsolidation of the divine structure, and accompanied by the ever-present danger of the crystallization of an autonomous demonic realm as a result of this process.

I first turn to the Zohar's most prevalent portrayal of the advent of the demonic, its emergence as a byproduct of the dissociation of divine subjectivity associated with the hypertrophy of *Gevurah*, the sefirah of divine judgment. In this context, the ironic trope of limitation portraying the emergence of refuse out of a plenitude is not that of an intentional act of divine majesty going pathetically astray, but rather the tragicomic spectacle of a fierce divine passion, the fire of God's wrath, yielding an inchoate miasma, mere smoke. This volatilization of divine ferocity, its transformation from exorbitance into intangibility, is then followed by a trope of representation, a prosopopeia, in which the smoke becomes personified, crystallizing as the mighty adversaries of the divine, the

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[87] The description of the first stages of emanation at the beginning of Zohar *Bereshit* (*Zohar* I, 15a, a passage that may be called the "*tehiru*" passage) and the portrayal of the emergence of refuse and the demonic several folios later in the "snow in the water" passage contain very similar language. Both portray the emergence of color and form from inchoate stuff – the "*zohama*" and Tohu in the "snow in the water" passage and the *tehiru* and the *kutra be-golma* ["a cluster of vapour forming in formlessness"] 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.

diabolical male and female, Sama'el and Lilith, with their own autonomous place in the cosmos.

Two Zoharic passages elaborately portray the two steps of this process, one in Zohar *Va-Yetze*, 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 דדכר 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, והא אוקימנא, תרין דרגין אינון דמתחבראן כחדא …[88]

For when smoke goes forth from fierce wrath, that smoke spreads, wrath after wrath, this upon this, this riding and ruling this, appearing as male and female, becoming all a furious wrath. As smoke begins to spread, it pushes from within the wrath through the pressure of one point, spreading. Then the smoke of wrath spreads twistingly, like a certain *ḥivya* skilled in doing evil.

The head that goes forth to spread is a dark rung. It ascends and descends, roams about, and rests in its place. The rung endures, settling, out of that smoke that goes forth from wrath. And it is "Shadow," a shadow on another place called "Death." And when the two of them join as one, it is called "Shadow of Death." As we have established, they are two rungs joining as one.[89]

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[88] *Zohar* II, 242b-243a.
[89] Matt VI, 405 (translation modified).

This passage portrays a process structured in a fashion 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 strong initiative produces an inchoate, miasmic emission – here, smoke; this inchoate element is then described, in mysterious imagery and poetic cadences, as spreading out and beginning to take on visible, personified form, the "appearance of male and female" [בחיזו דדכר ונוקבא]; these adumbrated "appearances" then take on a more substantial existence – significantly, in the form of "settling" and acquiring "places" in the cosmos, indeed, becoming 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. Having acquired distinct form, place, and vitality, they can then descend into the world to do their mischief. This passage thus portrays the complete process of the emergence of evil: from the dissociation of subjectivity as a result of 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 insubstantial smoke out of fierce divine anger to the prosopopeia involved in the crystallization from that smoke of the faces of the diabolical enemy.

The second passage is found in the *Sitre Torah* section printed in Zohar *Va-Yetze*:

סתרא דסתרין סתרא, מגו דתוקפא דטיהרא דיצחק, (נפק) מגו דורדיא דחמרא, נפק חד נעיצו קטירא,
כליל חד 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 רוחין בישין מתדבקן כחדא[90]

> The secret of secrets:
> Out of the scorching noon of Isaac,
> out of the dregs of wine,
> a fungus [or "complex"] emerged, a cluster [or "form"],

[90] *Zohar* I, 148a.

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 [*Sitra Aḥra*]:

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[91]

As should be evident, these two passages contain very closely related narratives. Both portray the emergence of a structured form of evil 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 the first passage's image of the hypertrophy of *Gevurah*, "fierce rage"). Indeed, the irony of the sequence "scorching noon → dregs of wine" is even greater than "fierce rage → smoke." They 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 more explicit, as the inchoate fungus gives rise to two named personages, 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, "the movement of pain, disease, function, etc., from one site to another within the body … as in many malignancies."[92]

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[91] This somewhat free verse translation is from Daniel C. Matt (trans.), *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, 77. The first two words I added in brackets are adapted from the *Sulam*'s Hebrew translations [הרכבה & צורה]. *Sulam*, V, 13.

[92] *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 the demonic out of the abject, they do not explicitly tell us of the effect on divine subjectivity of the hypertrophy of *Gevurah* and its attendant abject byproducts. Another passage dealing with smoke, which may be called the "pleasing aroma" passage, implicitly completes the picture. The passage discusses the effect on God's wrath of Noah's postdiluvian sacrifice. It portrays the theurgical modulation of *Gevurah*, thanks to which divine anger can wax and wane 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 can thus indirectly teach us, by a sort of *a contrario* inference, about the disruptions of divine identity wrought by processes which *do* generate stabilized demonic entities, as in the two passages discussed above.

The passage first seeks to explain how destructiveness emerges from the divine, specifically the divine wrath associated with the "nose," an image of *Gevurah*.

אש נפיק מלגיו ואיהו דק, ואחיד במלה אחרא לבר דלאו איהו דק הכי, ואתאחדן דא בדא, וכדין תננא סלקא, מאי טעמא, בגין דאתאחיד אשא במלה דרגיש, וסימניך חוטמא דנפיק ביה תננא מגו אשא. [93]

> Fire issues from within, and is tenuous, grasped by another substance, without, less tenuous; they are grasped by one another. Then smoke ascends. Why? Because fire is grasped by sensate substance. Your symbol for this is the nose, through which smoke issues out of fire.[94]

It is, significantly, this abjected by-product, the "smoke," rather than its source, the divine "fire," that "destroys everything."[95]

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[93] *Zohar* I, 70a.
[94] Matt I, 412.
[95] *Zohar* I, 70b [ושצי כלא].

After portraying the emergence of the destructive smoke, the passage describes
the theurgic effect of the divine inhaling of the "sweet savour" of the sacrifice:

... בגין דאהדר אשא לאתריה, וחוטמא (אתרגיש) אתכניש בההוא ריחא לגו לגו, עד דאתאחיד כלא
ותב לאתריה ואתקרב כלא לגו מחשבה ..., עד דנח רוגזא[96]

> ... for fire returns to its site, and through that aroma the nose contracts inward,
> inward – till all is embraced, returning to its site, all drawn in toward Thought
> ...until wrath subsides.[97]

Theurgically thwarting the metastasis of divine wrath, the "pleasing aroma" pacifies the
destructiveness embodied in the smoke, as well as the wrath embodied in the fire, by
reunifying them with the upper levels of the divine – and "all is embraced and returns to
its site."

The passage thus portrays the relation between constituted subjectivity and experiences
of abjection. Specifically, it portrays the disturbance of subjectivity brought about by the
emission of miasmic byproducts as a result of the flaring of divine anger. This
hypertrophy of *Gevurah* 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, of *Gevurah* from *Ḥokhmah* or *Keter*)
The "pleasing aroma" of the sacrifice 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 control of himself after an attack of rage, this deep breath allows the divine to re-
align its "Might" to its "Thought." The deep breath thus 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 byproduct, 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 of

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[96] *Zohar* I, 70a.
[97] Matt I, 412.

sacrifice yields a divine subject in which "all is embraced, returning to its site." The coherence of the divine subject is thus subject to these recurrent processes of abjection and reconsolidation.

We need now only read this passage in relation to the passages 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 subjectivity is precarious, vulnerable to periodic experiences of dissociation, and requiring periodic efforts of reconsolidation. The abject byproducts associated with these periodic crises lead to the crystallization, or reinforcement, of an autonomous demonic realm. Only extraordinary human action can disrupt this otherwise inevitable construction of the demonic as a result of the periodic crises of the coherence of the divine subject.

d. *"The River"*

Finally, I turn to perhaps the most obscure example of the constitution of evil from abjection, the processes associated with the sefirah of *Binah*. When it comes to portraying the relationship of *Binah* to harsh judgment and thence to the demonic, the Zohar is at its most overtly paradoxical and seemingly most concerned to avoid contaminating the holy with the unholy. The following declaration portrays this relationship at its most inexplicable:

דתנינן אף על גב דבהאי נחל דינא לא אשתכח ביה, דינין מתערין מניה[98]

> As we have learned: even though judgment is not found in this stream, judgments
> are aroused from it.

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 irony here, of the perfectly compassionate *Binah* arousing

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[98] *Zohar* I, 220b.

judgment, is not even attributed to an action, as with the *botsina*, or with a swelling

emotion, as with the fire of the divine wrath, but simply posited as a mystery. The irony

here seems to verge on an inexplicably tragic reversal.

Other passages, however, provide rather more elaboration, while maintaining a greater or

lesser sense of mystery. The three passages I will discuss here portray both linguistic and

ontological relationships between *Binah* and judgment, though the stress in each is on the

disjunctive or diversionary nature of such relationships. The first passage contains both

linguistic and ontological dimensions, with emphasis on the former – specifically, on the

mystery of those places in the Bible when the divine name which is written as the

Tetragrammaton, YHVH, signifying compassion, is read as Elohim, signifying

judgment.[99] This disjunction epitomizes the mystery of *Binah*:

אמאי אקרי אלהי"ם, והא אתוון רחמי אינון בכל אתר... יהו"ה בכל אתר רחמי, ובשעתא דמהפכי

חייביא רחמי לדינא, כדין כתיב יהו"ה, וקרינן ליה אלהי"ם ...

והאי נהרא אתקרי אם לגנתא... אקרי רחמי בלחודהא, הא מסטרהא דינין מתערין, ובגין כך כתיב

ברחמי, ונקוד בדינא, אתוון ברחמי, ואתנגיד דינא מסטרהא[100]

> Why is it called Elohim [i.e., though written as YHVH] since these 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 call it Elohim ... And this river is called the mother of the garden
>
> … She is called compassion when she is alone, yet from her sides judgments are
>
> aroused. And 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 from her sides.

At the linguistic level, the link between *Binah* and judgment is thus a relationship

between a semantic essence, the unvowelized letters, and semantic expression, the

vowelized letters. The movement from one to the other is a reversal from compassion to

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[99] See, e.g., Genesis 15:2.
[100] *Zohar* III, 65a.

judgment, the two great Zoharic opposites. This reversal is introduced by a question, an astonishment that that which is "compassion in every place" can be read as judgment. In relation to this passage, which treats explicitly of the problematics of verbal expression, rhetorical analysis seems very apt: the trope here is a classical instance of irony, a disjunction, or misfire, between the articulated word and the semantic essence it purports to express. This rhetorical reversal is also evoked ontologically in terms hinting at something like the organic emission of refuse: the essence of *Binah*, the "mother of the garden," is compassion, yet when she expresses herself, she emits judgment from "her sides," an emission in contradiction to her proper essence. At the phenomenal level, then, the passage portrays a relationship between the judgments that emerge from the "sides" of *Binah* and, albeit implicitly, the compassion which emerges from her "front." I note that the passage attributes this disjunction between essence and expression to "black theurgy," the effect of human sin on the divine, capable of turning an *essentially* compassionate entity into an *expressively* judgmental one.

A second passage focuses on the ontological dimension. This passage is concerned with the ontological preconditions of the dominance on Rosh Hashanah of judgment, here evoked by the name of Isaac, and with the theurgical effect of the blowing of the shofar, the latter term evoking both the earthly horn and the divine Shofar, a name of *Binah*. The dominance of judgment turns on a paradox: on the one hand, *Binah* is the mother of the three "fathers," Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sefirot of *Ḥesed*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif'eret*. Since she is compassion, the only way for judgment, *Gevurah*, Isaac, to dominate is by the cessation of the flow of her beneficence. And yet, Isaac's force can only come from this maternal source. The Zohar portrays this paradox, that Isaac can only dominate when his Mother is both separated and not separated from him, in a series of statements of which the two key phrases are the following:

האי נהר אף על גב דלאו איהו דינא, דינין נפקי מסטריה ואתתקפו ביה ...

כד אסתלק ההוא שופר גדול דלא ינקא לבנין, כדין יצחק אתתקף, ואתתקן לדינא בעלמא:[101]

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[101] *Zohar* III, 99a-b.

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 its children, 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 familiar assertion of *Binah*'s ontological purity, that "it is not judgment." It continues, however, by declaring that "judgments issue from its side" and, moreover, "are strengthened through it." The significance of this is further illuminated through the second phrase: Isaac, one of *Binah*'s "sons," is strengthened precisely, and paradoxically, when his mother no longer "suckles" those "sons." Taken together, the two phrases yield the following: when *Binah* "suckles," 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 *Sitra Aḥra*.[102]   (I explore the "suckling" trope at length below in section C).

A third passage provides even more of a window into the dynamics of abjection – as well as of reconsolidation – lurking in the background of the Zoharic 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., 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 the Zohar (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, suggests the implicit ontological disruption for which the state of *Teshuvah* ("return") is a subsequent repair and reconsolidation. The use of the appellation of *Teshuvah* in this passage, a relatively uncommon usage in the

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[102] See, e.g., *Zohar* II, 184a.

Zohar, links this text to other 13th century texts 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[103]

> 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 assuaged and disappear – and
> Compassion is aroused, overpowering that evil aroused by harsh Judgment.[104]

This rare explicit proclamation of the emergence of evil forces from *Binah* is linked to the emergence of the "incomplete worlds that are not whole" – a reference to the midrash of the "destroyed worlds" and its Zoharic adaptation. It thereby associates the emissions from *Binah* with the primordial refuse emitted as a byproduct of the action of the *botsina de-kardinuta* (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 would-be creator of these worlds who has not yet received his *tikun*, i.e., the complete construction of his subjectivity. And, indeed, this is precisely what follows in this passage, the repair of *Binah* and her achievement of the name and status of *Teshuvah* through human action. This repair is portrayed as the return of all the elements of the divine to their proper places, essential for the achievement of this name:

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[103] *Zohar* III, 15b, following Matt's textual emendations.
[104] Matt VII, 94 (translation modified).

כל כתרא וכתרא תב בקיומיה, ומתברכאן כלהו כחדא, וכד תייבין כל חד וחד לאתריה, ומתברכאן כלהו כחדא, ומתבסמא אימא בקלדיטי גליפין, ותייבין לסטרהא, כדין אקרי תשובה שלימא[105]

> Every single crown returns to its status, all blessed as one. And when each and every one returns to its place and they are blessed as one, Mother is sweetened by engraved keys, and they return to her sides. Then she is called Complete *Teshuvah*.[106]

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 divine subjectivity through Noah's sacrifice which I described in the previous section. We see a very similar reconsolidation of subjectivity here, subsequent to its disruption by improper emissions, yielding 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 the Zohar's reflections on evil, Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen's *Ma'amar al Atsilut Ha-Semalit.* The *Ma'amar* describes an "emanation, emanated from the power of *Teshuvah*" [אצילות אחד נאצל מכח התשובה].[107] This emanation serves as a "curtain that separates the emanation of the upper levels, among whom there are no alien emanations" [מסך מבדיל בין אצילות כל מעלות הקדושות ולא אצילות זרות עמהן]. This *Teshuvah*-emanation, in principle, should thus emanate only holy beings. Immediately, however, things go awry, as essence clashes with realization:

> 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.

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[105] *Zohar* III, 15b.
[106] Matt VII, 95 (translation modified).
[107] Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, 'Ma'amar al Atsilut Ha-Semalit', 87.

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 *in potentia* 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. [108]

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.[109]

In this text, we have a combination of themes closely related to the Zohar's "*Binah*-as-*Teshuvah*" passage. As in the latter passage, deficient, destructive, and evil forces, associated with deficient "worlds," emerge from *Binah*. The Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen passage links this evil emanation to a tragic mishap in the act of emanation: *Binah* was preparing to emanate good forces, when it inexplicably emanated evil forces in their stead. By contrast, the Zohar is silent on the occasion for the emanation: though the subsequent unfolding of the passage suggests that it was a result of human sin, the "incomplete worlds" theme suggests its link both to the Ha-Kohen *Ma'amar* and to the frequent use of the "destroyed worlds" myth in the Zohar to refer to a primordial mishap in the divine unfolding, unconnected to human action. Another key difference between the two passages lies in the fate of the destructive forces. In the *Ma'amar*, they are *destroyed* through their "return" to *Teshuvah*; in the Zohar passage, they are *sweetened* through their "return" to their proper places. In both texts, however, the appellation *Teshuvah* stems from this entity's role as a place of "return"; moreover, both fates can be seen as forms of reintegration into the divine, bringing to an end the disruption of its proper unfolding caused by improper emissions.

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[108] *Ibid.*
[109] *Ibid.*, 88.

A missing link of sorts between the Zohar and the *Ma'amar* is provided in a manuscript passage quoted by Moshe Idel, who describes it as both very close to the Ha-Kohen brothers and under apparent Zoharic influence.[110] In the midst of a narrative about emanation clearly derived from Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen, this 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].[111] 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].[112] This text thus contains themes linking the themes of the Ha-Kohen *Ma'amar*, the Zohar "*Binah*-as-*Teshuvah*" passage, and other Zoharic passages discussed above. Although apparently written after the Zohar (or at least some of it), this text makes explicit the processes of abjection in relation to *Binah* that I have argued are implicit in the *Binah*/*Teshuvah* passage as well as other passages discussed here.

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-the-water, 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 personages and structures (the demonic that crystallizes from the "unsweetened" sparks, the Tohu that comes from the *zohama*, Sama'el and Lilith that emerge from the smoke, the destructive "guardians" that emerge from *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 evoke the crystallization of divine and demonic structures and personages.

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[110] Idel, 'Ha-Maḥshavah Ha-Ra'ah shel Ha-El', 358 & n.8.
[111] *Ibid.*, 358.
[112] *Ibid.*, 359, n. 8.

4. The Divine and the 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 primordiality of subject-formation through abjection is portrayed in a particularly striking way in the *Hekhalot di-Pekude* text dealing with "Primordial Thought" – in which the very subject of the action of the *botsina de-kardinuta* is absent, since it will only be formed through the process of abjection provoked by the *botsina* 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 "*botsina de-kardinuta*" striking within "Thought," on the one hand, and more sensuous images such as "snow-in-the-water" and "fire and smoke," on the other. Such differences become further accentuated when we move to the Zoharic passages that portray the emergence of the *Sitra Aḥra* through the most concrete images of "generation," that is, through images of human procreation and family dramas. In such passages, the portrayal of the relationship of abjection to subject-formation is the explicit theme. Using such human images to portray metaphysical processes, these texts are more concrete, more routinized, and, perhaps, even more provocative than those discussed above. Such passages have two inter-related emphases – the relationship of holy progenitors to good and evil offspring and the sibling relationship between such offspring.

a. *Procreational Purification: the "Afterbirth" passage*

A paradigmatic passage with the first of these emphases is contained in a passage in Zohar *Terumah* that may be called the "afterbirth" passage.[113] This passage is an

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[113] *Zohar* II, 167a-b.

elaborate variant of several Zoharic passages describing the divine unfolding through an exegesis of the first and second days of creation. In keeping with this scriptural context, the passage focuses on the vicissitudes of "light," usually associated with the male dimension of the divine, often with the sefirah of *Ḥesed* and the patriarch Abraham. The passage identifies, in the repetitive structure of signifiers in the third verse of Genesis, an interruption of the smooth unfolding of the divine. This repetition appears only in the Hebrew – *yehi or va yehi or* - יהי אור ויהי אור. The first "*yehi or*" is associated with the right side, the second with the left – indeed, not just any left, but the left (implicitly associated with Isaac) from which the *Sitra Aḥra* emerges. The repetition of the word "light" thus shifts the meaning of its second iteration to its opposite, the "darkness" ultimately manifested in the evil deeds of the corrupter Esau, Isaac's son, and here implicitly identified with Sama'el.[114] This kind of repetitive structure – in which repetition becomes a way to signify radical difference – is a favorite Zoharic constructional scheme, that of anaphora, as I showed in Chapter One. That the English translation, "'Let there be light,' and there was light," does not have the same effect highlights the fact that this meaning is produced purely by the scheme, rather than the semantic content.

The emergence of the right is thus immediately followed by the emergence of a potentially malevolent left; indeed, the very divine attempt to lead the right from potentiality to actuality – from the command "*yehi or*" to its realization "*va-yehi or*" – begins the process leading to the emergence of the *Sitra Aḥra*. This is a sequence that we have now seen a number of times, in Yitsḥak Ha-Kohen's *Ma'amar* as well as in a

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[114] *Zohar* II, 167a, Matt V, 467-468 (translation modified):

כיון דאמר יהי אור, אמאי כתיב ויהי אור, דהא בויהי כן סגיא, אלא יהי אור, דא אור קדמאה דאיהו ימינא... ויהי אור, דמימינא נפק שמאלא, ומרזא דימינא נפק שמאלא, ועל דא ויהי אור דא שמאלא. מכאן דויהי קדמאה דאורייתא בסטרא דשמאלא הוה, ובגין כך לאו איהו סימן ברכה, מאי טעמא, בגין דביה (נ"א דמניה) נפק ההוא חשך דאחשיך אנפי עלמא, וסימנא דא כד אתגלי רזא דעשו ועובדוי, בהאי ויהי הוה, דכתיב (שם כה כז) ויהי עשו איש יודע ציד, אתקיים בוייהי איש יודע ציד, לפתאה בני עלמא דלא יהכון בארח מישר.

> Since it says *Let there be light!* Why is it written *And there was light*? It would have sufficed to say *And it was so*. Well, *Let there be light!* – primordial light, which is the right. *And there was light* – for right generated left, and from mystery of right issued left. So, *and there was light* – left. From here we see that the first ויהי, *Va-yehi, and there was*, in the Torah was on the left side, and therefore it is not a sign of blessing. Why? Because by it emerged that darkness who darkens the face of the world. The mnemonic is that when the mystery of Esau and his actions was revealed, it was by this ויהי, *Va-yehi*: ויהי עשו, *Va-yehi Esav, And Esau was a cunning hunter* (Genesis 25:27) – to seduce inhabitants of the world not to walk on the straight path.

number of Zoharic passages. 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 the "Central Column," which "resolves the dispute between right and left" [אפריש מחלוקת דימינא ושמאלא].[115] This reconciliation between right and left can only happen after the emergence of the "darkness" and its crystallization into "Esau" – i.e., only after the expulsion of the abject and its consolidation into an adversary. Only after this departure of the inassimilable is the creation of light completed such that God "saw that it was good."[116]

The passage then goes on, 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 ודיוקנא דגופא, אקריש ההוא פשיטו ואקרי רקיע, ודא איהו רקיע בתוך המים, ולבתר דאקריש, כתיב ויקרא אלהי"ם לרקיע שמים, דהא אקריש ההוא לחותא (ד"א דאנגיד ואשתאר ההוא פסולת) דגופא דהוה גו אינון מים. כיון דאתבריר גופא ואתנקי בנקיו, ההוא לחותא דאתנגיד ואשתאר, הוה פסולת, דקא אתעבד גו התוכא, ואינון מים הרעים עכורין, ומנהון אתעביד פסולת, מקטרגא לכל עלמא, דכר ונוקבא[117]

Once the form and the image of the body was fashioned and engraved, that expansion congealed, and it was called "firmament" – and this is "a firmament in the midst of the waters" (Genesis 1:6). After it congealed, it is written: "Elohim called the 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

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[115] *Zohar* II, 167b.
[116] I interpret this passage in light of the closely related text at I, 17a.
[117] *Zohar* II, 167b.

the smelting. And those are evil, filthy waters. And from them refuse was made –
Accuser of the whole world, male and female.[118]

The engenderment of a fully formed individual "body," a term often identified in the
Zohar with the sefirotic structure as a whole or at least with its central personage, *Kudsha
Berikh Hu* or *Ze'er Anpin*, suggests that the "seed" and "water" might be identified here
with the sefirot of *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*, often referred to in the Zohar as the mother and
father of the divine son, *Kudsha Berikh Hu / Ze'er Anpin*.   Alternatively, they may refer
to the male and female dimensions internal to this male figure, the sefirot of *Ḥesed* and
Gevurah, though the pregnancy imagery would then seem far less apt.

After the engenderment 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" as such in the "smelting"
process [הוה פסולת, דקא אתעבד גו התוכא], a refuse which then comes to be named "filthy
waters." From this fluid refuse, identifiable, personified forms then crystallize, the
diabolical male and female. The demonic forces that emerge from the inassimilable
remainder, the inevitable byproduct of the process of procreation, thus emerge out of the
same process that leads to the crystallization of the divine "body."   In a parallel passage
in Zohar *Bereshit*, the 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.[119] 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 may lack the portrayal of abjection.[120]

A bit further on in the passage, the Zohar proceeds to a further portrayal of the purging of
refuse [פסולת] 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 from the right,

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[118] Matt V, 469 (translation substantially modified).
[119] *Zohar* I, 17a.
[120] See, e.g., *Zohar* I, 15b; I, 29b.

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and Seth as the complete purification.[121] 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 – *Ze'er Anpin* identified with Adam as father, the Matronita with Eve as mother, and Cain, Abel, and Seth as clearly metaphysical personages. Cain and Abel are associated with contaminated spirits, whose contamination is identified with their inassimilability into the divine structure, particularly its bounded subjectivity, its "body":

כל אינון כתרין דלא אתכללו בגופא, כלהו רחיקין ומסאבין, ומסאבן כל מאן דיקרב לגביהון, למנדע מנהון מלין :... וכי תימא, אי הכי הא מלאכין קדישין וליתהון בכללא דגופא, לא, דחס ושלום אי ליהוון לבר מכללא דגופא קדישא, לא הוו קדישין ולא מתקיימי ...[אלא] כלהו [מלאכין] בכללא דאדם, בר מהני דליתהון בכללא דגופא, דאינון מסאבין, ומסאבן כל מאן דיקרב בהדייהו[122]

> 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 if you say, if so, behold the holy angels, they are not included in the Body! No, heaven forbid, for if they were outside, not included in the holy 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 stress the notion that the test for holiness is identified with the possibility 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 subjectivity. Approaching too close to the abject is disastrous for the subject, contaminating it, ruining its bounded nature.

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[121] *Zohar* II, 167b-168a.
[122] *Zohar* III, 143a-b.

Before concluding this sub-section, I note that, in the middle of the "afterbirth" passage, the Zohar 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 [בלא דכורא ובלא נוקבא];[123] the gendered description is then ascribed to the "second Adam" [אדם תניינא].[124] 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),[125] 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].[126]

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 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."[127] According to Cordovero, the key difficulty that compels the Zohar to elaborate the alternative portrayal is that, otherwise, one would be imputing the presence of "waste" [מותר] to *Binah*.[128] Of course, given the identification of *Binah* with the Supernal Mother, this desire to avoid sullying *Binah* can only appear highly symptomatic to any psychoanalytically attuned reading. Cordovero's comment must also be associated with the complex dynamics I discussed above in relation to *Binah*, whose "sides" are the source of *din*. In any case, it is unclear how Cordovero would reconcile

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[123] *Zohar* II, 167b.
[124] Tishby declares that this is the only place in the "*Guf Ha-Zohar*" in which such a distinction is made within the divine sphere. *MZ* I, 157n.6.
[125] Liebes, *Perakim*, 187.
[126] *Zohar* II, 167b.
[127] For example, one Lurianic interpretation associates the "first Adam" with Aba and Ima and their non-gendered emergence with processes that transpire in the beard of *Atik*. 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 Kadama'ah*" in the Zohar, see Liebes, *Perakim,* 14. I have benefited from discussions of this passage with Yonatan Benarroch, Melilah Hellner-Eshed, Daniel Matt, and Ada Rapoport-Albert.
[128] *Or Yakar*, X, 92.

his comment here with the passage in Zohar *Bereshit* asserting the identity of the gestational processes in *Binah* and *Malkhut*.[129]

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 Zohar.   We may, of course, simply be faced with two different traditions or views juxtaposed by the author or compiler. We may be reading yet another portrayal of two conditions of the divine, to be placed in a series with such texts as the opening of the *Idra Raba*, with its two states of *Atika*, or the very different dynamics in the "Bald God" passage. In any case, I would argue their very obscurely explained co-presence within this passage suggests a particularly acute instance of the construction and management of ambivalence.

The structure of the passage, in which the non-gendered description is interpolated between two phases of the gendered description, could also be read 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.

b. *Brothers and Sisters*

I now turn to passages that emphasize the sibling relationship between the divine and demonic, a logical, or rather genealogical, corollary of the notion that the same progenitors give birth to both holy and unholy offspring. I have already touched on this

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[129] *Zohar* I, 29b. I note, though, that this passage does not mention the refuse of the afterbirth.

question in my discussion of the "afterbirth" passage, in which the birth of the "Body," usually synonymous with the central divine figure, *Kudsha Berikh Hu,* is a product of the same processes which give rise to the devil and his consort. In this section, I will focus on other examples, in which the sibling relationship between divine and demonic personages is the central focus of the text.

I first turn to an elaborate passage at Zohar III:55b-56a that discusses Isaac's paternity of both Esau and Jacob. Implicitly rejecting the view of a midrash endorsed by Rashi,[130] the passage stresses that Esau was formed from the first seminal "drop" emitted by Isaac, and Jacob from the second "drop."[131] Esau's ruddiness, the color of judgment and hence of the *Sitra Aḥra*, is attributed to the fact that he originated in this first, still unpurified "drop." This image, like that of the birth of Cain prior to Seth,[132] rests on the recurrent Zoharic notion of the necessity for an initial prior emission of refuse before the good form can be produced. In the graphic image of this passage, the Esau "drop" was not "perfected" [שלים], unlike the Jacob "drop." I note also that, while such an emission might be expected in the case of parents like Eve or Isaac, since the feminine (Eve) and *Gevurah* (Isaac) are associated with the left side, other Zoharic passages also portray such an emission with respect to Abraham.[133]

A genealogical corollary of this phenomenon is the intimate sibling relationship between the divine and demonic, associated respectively with good and bad offspring. One passage declares that the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael should be viewed as that between "gold" and its "dregs"[134] – with the familial and mineral images working together to reinforce the deep intimacy between the divine and demonic. The relationship between Jacob and Esau, however, receives much greater attention – indeed, their names often respectively signify *Ze'er Anpin* or *Kudsha Berikh Hu*, on the one hand, and Sama'el, the chief of the diabolical realm, on the other. Moreover, the twinning

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[130] *Bereshit Rabah,* I, 73d (63:8) and Rashi's commentary to Gen. 25:26.
[131] *Zohar* III, 55b.
[132] *Zohar* II, 167b-168a.
[133] See, e.g., *Zohar* I, 115b; III, 215a. See also *Ra'ya Mehemena* in *Zohar* III, 111b.
[134] *Zohar* I, 118b.

relationship between Jacob and Esau suggests an even more intertwined relationship than that between refuse and essence, although the latter image is also used.

The Zohar's tracking of the biblical narratives of the relationship between Jacob and Esau takes 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, this struggle occurred even within the womb, presumably once the initial "drops" stage passed. One extended 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 proceeds in the manner of a "crooked snake" with Esau, because the latter "drew upon *that* snake," i.e., Sama'el.[135] It is thus the struggle with the demonic sibling that *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 One): "And Elohim created the great *taninim*" [Genesis 1, 21] – this is Jacob and Esau" [ויברא אלהי"ם את התנינים הגדולים, דא יעקב ועשו].[136]

Moreover, even in the "drops" passage itself, after insisting on the difference between the two seminal emissions, the Zohar proceeds to two other homonymous relationships between the holy and unholy. Curiously, these relationships are not between Jacob and Esau, but between two other, much more unexpected, pairs. The first is Esau and David – both of whom the Bible calls "ruddy" [אדמוני],[137] a pair whose closeness and opposition are evoked a few pages earlier through a pun on the phrases *zohama di-dehava,* "refuse [*zohama*] of gold" [זוהמא דדהבא] and *zohara di-dehava,* "luster [*zohara*] of gold" [זוהרא דדהבא].[138] The second, even bolder parallel, is between Esau and *Kudsha Berikh Hu*, a comparison based on the fact that both are called "first" in the bible – "Esau is called first … and *Kudsha Berikh Hu* is called first" [עשו נקרא ראשון... וקודשא בריך הוא אקרי ראשון].[139] This homonymy appears to contribute to the ability of *Kudsha Berikh Hu* to destroy Esau,

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[135] *Zohar* I, 138a.
[136] *Zohar* I, 138b.
[137] Genesis 25:25; I Samuel 16:12.
[138] *Zohar* III, 51a.
[139] *Zohar* III, 56a.

here clearly a name for the chief of the diabolical realm.[140] The passage thus attributes an explicitly rhetorical, and implicitly ontological, twinning to the relationship between the divine and the demonic, indeed between God and the Devil, a twinning that is closely linked to the struggle between them – in a manner very similar to that of the "*taninim*" passage in its description of the relationship between Jacob and Esau.[141]

The movement in the "drops" passage – from the formless seminal emissions to homonymy between the divine and the demonic – is a paradigmatic, if foreshortened, example of the process 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 *Ra'ya Mehemena* draws out these dangers, focusing on the female version of the sibling relationship between the divine and the demonic.[142] This passage describes the Shekhinah and Lilith, the "woman of valor" and the "woman of harlotry," as "two sisters."

If we attend to the midrashic source for this passage,[143] this image becomes even more startling. The midrash describes an adulteress who faces the *sotah* ordeal and sends her pure sister, "who resembles her," to the priest so that she may undergo the test in the sinner's place. Read in light of that background, the *Ra'ya Mehemena* passage would be suggesting not only that the holy and demonic females are sisters, but that they may be readily mistaken for each other, even by the "high priest" – a common Zoharic term for

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[140] *Ibid.*; Matt VII, 355:

<div dir="rtl">

וזמין לאתפרעא ראשון מראשון
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      One day, *the first* will exact retribution from *the first*

[141] 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 a defective form ("תומים" rather than "תאומים"). The Zohar 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 "white" and "red" lights. Esau, by contrast, "turned aside by himself and strayed to the *Sitra Aḥra* in nothingness and destruction" [אתפרש לחודיה וסטא לסטרא אחרא באפיסה ושממו]. 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 *Sitra Aḥra*. 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.

[142] *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 97a.

[143] *Bamidbar Rabah* II, 79d (9:9).

the sefirah of *Ḥesed*, the first of the six sefirot of *Kudsha Berikh Hu*, the Shekhinah's consort. The midrashic source even implies that the holy female engages in a form of cooperation with her demonic sister. Ultimately, according to the *Ra'ya Mehemna*, it is only through a theurgic ritual, the barely-offering, which functions in the spiritual realm like the *sotah* ordeal in the human realm, that the two twins/opposites may be separated from each other.

This resemblance between divine and demonic personages due to their sibling relationship poses both cognitive and religious dangers – for if the two 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 even 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 person may be saved from this danger – and it is only thus that "Israel remains meritorious, without mixture, in relation to the mystery of faith."[144] The threatening "mixture," that between the divine and the demonic, is the ultimate religious danger, ever-latent within a conception of subject-formation that begins with abjection of refuse, proceeds to the crystallization of an autonomous Other Side as well as a holy 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 formation of demonic figures, to the antithetical homonymy of the divine/demonic doubles, to the dangerous ambiguity of the reference of any particular term. In my discussion in Chapter Three 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 "mixtures" of the holy and the demonic.

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[144] *Zohar* III, 97a.

C. *Ambivalences of Intimacy*

1. Dangerous Liaisons

I use the phrase "ambivalences of intimacy" primarily to refer to sexual liaisons between the divine and the demonic; however, I also intend the phrase to evoke a broader range of meanings, since intimate liaisons between divine and demonic personages are often portrayed with putatively non-sexual verbs – verbs which often seem to be used as something more than mere euphemisms for sexuality, but also evoke other associations suggested by their "literal" meaning. In all their variations, intimate relationships between the divine and demonic 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. They may also appear variously as episodic horrors, as the consequence of tragedy and sin, or as more integral and routinized aspects of the cosmic process. Finally, I note that the portrayal of such intimacies with the demonic can focus on a female or male divine protagonist.

The intimate relationships I discuss here transpire between already-crystallized personages. The abjection involved in such relationships primarily appears in the debasement undergone by the divine through the very fact of engaging in such intimacies, a debasement at times explicitly portrayed as involving a loss of identity – as one would anticipate in accordance with the theory of abjection. Nonetheless, abject emissions also play an important role in the portrayal of divine/demonic intimacies in the Zohar, particularly when the Shekhinah is the protagonist; they also appear with prominence in the writings of the 13th century Joseph of Hamadan, a writer close to the Zohar, in the portrayal of the divine male's relationship to demonic female consorts. In rhetorical terms, such portrayals may be described as a compound form of catechresis: to the prosopopeia of the emergence of mighty personages 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."[145]   These couplings are preceded, and made possible, by the irony of repulsive emissions issuing forth from divine power – to take the most striking example, in the form of 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 the Zohar's deep mistrust of, as well as desire for, this female figure. The variety of verbs the Zohar uses for this relationship – the demonic "rules" the divine, the divine "tastes" or "suckles" the demonic,[146] and so on – 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 *Sitra Aḥra* upon the coming of the Messiah; until then, separation only happens at certain privileged moments, such as the recitation of the Shema.[147] The power of the *Sitra Aḥra*'s hold on the Shekhinah is even offered as the explanation for the requirement that the verse after the Shema (" ברוך שם ....") be whispered. This requirement, according to the Zohar, was enacted so that the prayer may effect the unification of the Shekhinah with *Kudsha Berikh Hu* without alerting the *Sitra Aḥra*, as a way of minimizing the danger of the latter's participation in the union.[148]

The medium of the relationship between the *Sitra Aḥra* and the Shekhinah is the *zohama* that the diabolical male "casts" [אטיל] into her.[149] The Zohar's usage of this term in this context undoubtedly derives from its Talmudic usage in portraying the sexual act in the Garden between the snake and Eve.[150] Transposing this relationship to the divine sphere, the Zohar explains that the "casting of *zohama*" into the Shekhinah by the cosmic "snake" rendered it impossible for the divine male to have sexual relations with his

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[145] Ernst, 'Au-delà de la peinture', 256.
[146] The "suckling" imagery recurs in numerous passages. Some commentators have interpreted the term "*Sitra Aḥra*" in these passages as referring to the side of *Din*, 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 in Section C, pp. 208-220.
[147] *Zohar* II, 134a.
[148] *Zohar* II, 133b.
[149] E.g., *Zohar* I, 46b, III, 47a.
[150] *bShabbat,* 146a.

consort – for the "evil snake" thereby effected a "separation" so that the "sun could not have intercourse with the moon" [חויא בישא דאטיל זוהמא דעבד פירודא דלא ישמש שמשא בסיהרא].[151]

It is important to note that this term, *zohama*, is used throughout the Zohar to denote the abject, even in putatively non-sexual contexts. It is probable that all such usages ultimately derive from this Talmudic passage. One example that I have discussed above, which seems, at least on first reading, non-sexual, but which is generative of the *Sitra Aḥra*, is the *zohama* emitted from the "snow in the water" – the filth which first becomes "refuse" [*pesolet*], then "Tohu," and then crystallizes as a fully formed demonic force, "the mighty wind."

Another passage succinctly proclaims this process in relation to the generation of diabolical personages: "the *Sitra Aḥra* is male and female, the strong form of the *zohama* of hard judgment" [סטרא אחרא איהו דכר ונוקבא, תוקפא דזוהמא דדינא קשיא].[152] The personified *Sitra Aḥra* is here explicitly said to be the crystallization, the "strong form," of the abject. If we read this passage in conjunction with that portraying the sexual intimacy of the demonic as the "casting of *zohama*," we get the following result: the personified *Sitra Aḥra*, 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.

As I noted above, the fallen condition of the Shekhinah, its susceptibility to perverse intimacy with the demonic, is so central to the Zohar that it can only be redeemed episodically and precariously. Unifications of *Kudsha Berikh Hu* and the Shekhinah demand a preliminary affirmative act to separate the Shekhinah from the *Sitra Aḥra*. One passage portraying such a separation on the eve of the Sabbath, the "*ke-gavna*"

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[151] *Zohar* I, 46b.

[152] *Zohar* I, 74b (*Sitre Torah*). Cf. *bYoma* 28b: זוהמא דשימשא קשי משימשא, "the *zohama* of the sun is harder than the sun," whose meaning in context is something like "hazy sunshine is harsher than direct sunlight."

passage,[153] 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. As this passage declares, it is only through such a separation that the Shekhinah achieves her own unity, rendering her capable of unity with her consort[154] – or, in Kristevan terms, separation from the abject as a prerequisite for subjective coherence. Achievement of true intimacy between the holy male and female, and thus the completion of the construction of divine subjectivity,[155] must traverse abjection and its always only provisional overcoming.

This kind of perverse intimacy also troubles the divine male. Above all, one finds such a portrayal in the following passage, in which the divine King, particularly his phallus, the *Tsadik,* the sefirah of *Yesod*, consorts with the demonic female, the "bondwoman," elsewhere identified with Lilith.

יומא חד הוו אזלי חברייא עמיה דרבי שמעון, אמר רבי שמעון, חמינא אלין עמין כלהו עלאי, וישראל תתאי מכלהו, מאי טעמא, בגין דמלכא אשדר מטרוניתא מניה, ואעיל אמהו באתרהא, כמה דאת אמר, (משלי ל כא) תחת שלש רגזה ארץ וגו', תחת עבד כי ימלוך וגו', ושפחה כי תירש גבירתה. ...בכה רבי שמעון ואמר, מלכא בלא מטרוניתא לא אקרי מלכא, מלכא דאתדבק בשפחה באמהו (דילה) דמטרוניתא, אן הוא יקרא דיליה. וזמינא קלא לבשרא למטרוניתא, ולימא (זכריה ט ט) גילי מאד בת ציון הריעי בת ירושלם, הנה מלכך יבא לך צדיק ונושע הוא, כלומר צדיק הוא נושע, בגין דהוה רכיב עד השתא באתר דלאו דיליה, באתר נוכראה ויניק ליה: ועל דא כתיב, עני ורוכב על חמור, עני (דלא) הוה בקדמיתא, ורוכב על חמור, כמה דאוקימנא אינון כתרין תתאין דעמין דקטיל קודשא בריך הוא בוכרא דלהון במצרים, הדא הוא דכתיב, (שמות יא ה) וכל בכור בהמה: ... והשתא דיזדווגון כחדא, צדיק ונושע הוא, דהא לא יתיב בסטרא אחרא..., ומאי אבד, אבד למטרוניתא, ואתדבק באתר אחרא דאקרי שפחה[156]

[153] *Zohar* II, 135a-b.
[154] *Zohar* II, 135b:
כד עייל שבתא, איהי אתיחדת ואתפרשת מסטרא אחרא, וכל דינין מתעברין מינה, ואיהי אשתארת ביחודא דנהירו קדישא
When Sabbath enters, She unifies 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.
[155] "A king without a queen is not called a king" [מלכא בלא מטרוניתא לא אקרי מלכא]. *Zohar* III, 69a.
[156] *Zohar* III, 69a.

One day, as the companions were walking with R. Shim'on, he said: 'I see all other peoples elevated and Israel degraded below them. What is the reason? Because the King has sent the Matronita away from him and put the bondwoman in her place. As it is written: "For three things the earth is disquieted ... For a slave when he becomes king ... and a bondwoman who supplants her mistress" [Proverbs 30:21-23]. ...

R. Shim'on wept, and continued: 'A king without a Matronita is not called a king. A king who cleaves to the bondwoman of the queen, where is his honor? And 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", etc. (Zechariah 9:9).[157] 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.*). He was initially lowly and "riding upon an ass": as we have established, these are the lower crowns of the nations, whose firstborn *Kudsha Berikh Hu* killed in Egypt, as it is written, "and all the firstborn of beasts" (Exodus 11:5)… But now that they will couple as one, "a *Tsadik* who 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." The latter figure is portrayed in abject terms as an "ass," identified with the demonic "lower crowns," and, through the evocation of the Tenth Plague, as destined for destruction. The King's relationship to this "ass" is that of a repulsive, and obviously sexual, "riding." The abject dimension of this relationship, both degrading the subject and threatening its coherence, is explicitly stated: a king who engages in such behavior, about whom one can only ask, "where is his honor?", is not "called a king." The very identity of the king thus collapses as a result of this relationship – and it is this kind of

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[157] I have altered the KJV to conform to the Zoharic reading.

identity-collapse that is precisely the key experience of abjection. Despite the attempt to explain away the import of this passage by an ostensibly shocked Cordovero,[158] the text seems quite clear and has at least one parallel elsewhere in the Zohar.[159] Lurianic writings restate this notion, though, in at least one place, add reservations that remove some of its sting.[160]

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, as Liebes has shown, were associated with the circle of the Zohar.[161] In the next two sections, I discuss each of these writers in turn.

2. Seduction of *Yesod* and the Generation of the *Shedim*

In the "turban" passage I briefly mentioned in Chapter One, 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[162]

> 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[163] turban [or mitre] became enclothed in it. And from

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[158] See *Or Yakar* XIII, 57-58.

[159] *Zohar* II, 60b-61a:

דכתיב (משלי ל כג) ושפחה כי תירש גבירתה, דגרים לצדיק דאתדבק 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.

[160] 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.

[161] On Moshe of Burgos, see Liebes, 'Ha-Mashiaḥ shel ha-Zohar', 35-38; on Joseph of Hamdan, see Liebes, 'Ketsad Niṭḥaber', 32-67. See also Mopsik, 'Introduction' in Joseph de Hamadan, *Fragment d'un commentaire sur la Genèse,* 8-11.

[162] Moshe of Burgos, 'Ma'amar al Sod "Hasir Mitsnefet, Harim ha-Atarah"', 50.

[163] 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.

that time on, strange and evil bands were born, destroyers of the world above and
below.

This passage could not be any more explicit on the sexual level: the phallic "attribute" of
Yesod is seduced by Lilith and "enclothed with a turban," thus preventing it from
bestowing vitality on the cosmos, which would apparently have been through a proper
and holy ejaculation. Instead, the blockage produced by the demonic "turban" diverts the
Yesod's bestowal of vitality, causing it to give birth to demonic, destructive "bands."

I note that this passage, and related contemporaneous texts, embody a kabbalistic
reappropriation of at least three rabbinic sources about the generation of demonic spirits,
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 himself 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].[164] 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 demons. [165] A third rabbinic source is a midrash that portrays
the seemingly accidental creation of *shedim* by God himself on the first Friday. This
midrash portrays God as having created their spirits and then having run out of time to
create their bodies due to the entry of the Sabbath.[166] Each of these is an image of a
creative act going awry – in the first two accounts through sexual deviation, and, in the
last case, 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 section on "origin": the divine creative impulse

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[164] *bEruvin,* 18b.
[165] *Bereshit Rabah* I, 24b-c (20:11); *bPesahim* 54a; *mAvot* 5:6.
[166] *Bereshit Rabah,* I, 8c (7:5); *Yalkut Shim'oni* 1:12. This midrash has a somewhat ironic tone. The irony
is 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* – though, to be sure, 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.

becomes diverted from its goal and, rather than a perfect creation, gives rise to its opposite. The passage evokes the abject emission of a diverted ejaculation that goes astray due to the "turban" that covers the *Yesod* as a result of its seduction by Lilith. Again we are presented with an irony: the majestic divine *Yesod*, the 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 One, 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 is also strongly reminiscent of 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 "sides." The differences between these texts must also be noted. 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 that portrays *Binah*'s emanation of evil worlds, interrupting its preparations to bring forth holy worlds. It seems quite likely 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 rather 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 perversion of sexualized creativity at the level of *Yesod* – a teaching only later made explicit by his student.

I now turn to the Zoharic version of the kabbalistic reinterpretation of the midrashim about the generation of the *shedim.* I begin with the general statement about the *Sitra Aḥra* from the *Idra Raba* quoted above:

<div dir="rtl">כל אינון כתרין דלא אתכללו בגופא, כלהו רחיקין ומסאבין¹⁶⁷</div>

> All of these crowns that were not included in the Body are all distant and contaminated.

Though this phrase is used as a preface to an extended discussion of various kinds of *shedim*, "crowns" is a general Zoharic term for sefirot, and here refers to the demonic sefirot. The notion of the *Sitra Aḥra* as that which is not "included" in the "Body," highly significant for the theory of abjection, recurs in many passages in the Zohar, and refers to both divine and human bodies.[168] It also evokes two of the key midrashim about the creation of the shedim: although it primarily evokes the midrash about the divine creation of *shedim* without bodies on the eve of the Sabbath, it also evokes their generation through Adam's accidental sexual emissions that escape his body despite his fig-leaf encasement. Indeed, the latter midrash is particularly significant, since, for the Zohar, a body is only truly a "whole body" when consisting of a proper union between male and female.[169] The "inclusion in the body" theme is also evoked by the Zoharic notion that evil people become *shedim* after their death[170] -- a fate some passages attribute specifically to those who have sinned by not marrying and having children.[171] Such people have refused to become "Adam," i.e., male and female, and therefore, after death, they are excluded from the "holy body" and join the ranks of the *shedim,* those who are not "included in the body" and thus not "included in Adam."[172] The *shedim* are thus the abject of this body, those not assimilable to its "clean and proper" unity"[173] --

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[167] *Zohar* III, 143b. See also *Zohar* II, 214b; III, 43a.
[168] On the *Sitra Aḥra* as that which is not "included in the body," see Liebes, *Perakim*, 262.
[169] See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 81b; III, 143b; III, 296a;
[170] See, e.g., *Zohar* II, 118a.
[171] See *Zohar* III, 143b; *Zohar Ḥadash,* 33a.
[172] *Zohar* III, 143b.
[173] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 127.

those born, in the words of another Zoharic text, when Adam is not in the "*tikun* of his body, the *tikun* of his soul, in the direct way" [בתיקונא דגופא בתיקונא דנפשא בארח מישר].[174]

A text in the *Idra Raba*, part of the same passage as the "not included in the Body" quote, contains an even fuller synthesis of midrashic material about the creation of the shedim and their relocation to the divine level.[175] Indeed, the text is part of a passage which contains an elaborate transposition of the entire Genesis narrative of the creation of Adam and Eve to the emergence of the divine male and female, here called *Ze'er Anpin* and the Matronita. The passage portrays the newly emergent *Ze'er Anpin* in the process of creating *shedim* on the Sabbath eve. He engages in this activity until properly united with the Matronita – the prevention of which was due to the "heart of stone" that covers his "flesh," the divine phallus.[176] The "heart of stone" appears to be the Matronita in a deficient, pre-*tikun* form – for the perverse creation of the *shedim* is interrupted when the "heart of stone" is replaced by the "heart of flesh" with the arrival of the Matronita "in her *tikunin*" [בתקונהא]. This proper 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 were sweetened *this one* with *this one*" [ואתבסמו דא בדא].

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[174] *Zohar* I, 55a.

[175] The *Idra Raba* passage relevant here is at *Zohar* III, 142b-144a. The specific text I am interpreting is at III, 142b-143a:

הדא הוא דכתיב (בראשית ב כא) ויסגור בשר תחתנה, וכתיב (יחזקאל לו כו) והסירותי את לב האבן מבשרכם ונתתי לכם
לב בשר ובשעתא דבעא למיעל שבתא, הוה ברי רוחין ושדין ועלעולין, ועד לא סיים לון, אתת מטרוניתא בתקונהא
ויתיבת קמיה, בשעתא דיתיבת קמיה, אנח לון לאינון ברייאן ולא אשתלימו, כיון דמטרוניתא יתב ואתחברו אנפין באנפין,
מאן ייעול ביינייהו, מאן הוא דיקרב בהדייהו:

> 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 finishing 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 and they were united face to face, who could come between them, who could approach them?

[176] The passage is based on a reading of the end of the verse portraying the creation of Eve, Genesis 2:21, "ויסגר בשר תחתנה". The usual understanding of these words may be paraphrased as "And he closed up the flesh that was in its place" [i.e., God closed up the flesh that was in the place from which he had taken Adam's "rib" or "side" to create Eve]. The Zohar understands the word תחתנה, "in its place," as "in its stead" and the prounoun "its" as referring to the "heart of stone" in the Ezekiel passage, and, more significantly for the Zoharic narrative, and in keeping with the gender of the Biblical pronoun, as "in *her* stead," i.e., instead of the deficient Matronita, he placed the proper Matronita, the Matronita of "flesh."

The Zohar's narrative of the creation of the *shedim* due to the blockage of the divine phallus closely parallels Moshe of Burgos' account of their creation by the *Yesod* when it is covered by the "turban" whose presence is due to its seduction by Lilith – and both are undoubtedly modeled on the generation of *shedim* by the Talmudic Adam's fig-leaf encased body.   The key difference between the passages is that, in the Moshe of Burgos passage, the blockage is due to Lilith, whereas, in the *Idra Raba* passage, the improper female partner appears to be a deficient version of the future Matronita, a stage when she has not yet received her proper "*tikunin*." Yet, the image of the divine female (and in the case of the "Bald God," the divine male) providing an ontological base for the *Sitra Aḥra* is one I have identified in the Zohar itself in a number of forms, as in the "*zohama* of the fingernail" passage. Indeed, one Zohar passage portrays the divine female being transformed, as a result of human sin, into a clearly Lilith-like figure, arousing demonic forces in the world.[177] Moreover, the interpretation of the Genesis verse (2:21) about the creation of Eve as actually portraying the replacement of Lilith by Eve – the same verse used as a proof-text in the *Idra Raba* passage I have been discussing – appears in the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam,* is alluded to in another passage in the *Guf Ha-Zohar,* and closely resembles a passage in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*.[178] That the deficient Matronita and Lilith could play a similar role in closely related texts should not, by this point in this dissertation, be altogether surprising, even if always shocking, and I shall return to this kind of notion in the Conclusion.

The generation of *shedim* through the earthly or divine primordial man's improper emissions vividly expresses the production of menacing entities through "abjection" of

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[177] *Zohar* III, 79b describes the effect on the divine female of the casting of "*zohama*" into her by the "snake":

ונוקבא אסתאבת, ושערהא 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 דטופרין

> 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 sanctuary of YHVH" (Ex. 19:20). The sanctuary 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 *zohama* that the fierce *ḥivya* cast and all are aroused in that *zohama* of the nails.

[178] Thus, like the passage I have been discussing, *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam*, in *Zohar Ḥadash,* 16:c, interprets "תחתנה" in Genesis 2:21 as "in place of *her*" – but the "her" in question is Lilith, rather than the deficient Matronita. *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 96a 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." *Zohar* I, 34b also alludes to the same notion.

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 Zohar, such a body requires a proper union between proper male and female consorts. When the primordial male is blocked from such a union due to the "turban" or the "heart of stone," whether associated with Lilith or the deficient Matronita, it prevents him from properly constituting his "body." The *shedim*, the crystallizations of the abject, are entities which Adam/*Ze'er Anpin* both cannot and must acknowledge as his offspring – beings that he "begat" but which were not in "his image."[179] In transferring the midrashic story on the earthly level to the emergence of the divine male subject and its relation to the demonic, kabbalistic texts like those of Moshe of Burgos and the *Idra Raba* forcefully, if implicitly, acknowledge the unavoidability of abjection as a prerequisite to the construction of *any* subject and as an ever-present danger to the maintenance of the subject's proper boundaries. In this context, this danger is posed by unseemly liaisons, the union of the divine male with an improper mate – most starkly, that of the divine phallus with Lilith: liaisions at least as catastrophic for the cosmos, and scandalous theologically, as the union of the divine female with the demonic male.

3. Routinization of Abjection

I now turn to Joseph of Hamadan. The sexual nature of the liaisons between divine and demonic figures is very explicit in the work of this kabbalist – specifically, between the "Holy One blessed be He" (which appears in both its Hebrew and Aramaic forms) and Lilith (under various appellations). This relationship occurs as part of the regular cosmic process, rather than as a result of contingent, tragic and scandalous misfortunes as in both the Moshe of Burgos and Zohar passages discussed above. In Joseph of Hamadan, the sexual relationship to the demonic female becomes routinized – though no less abject.

In his commentary on Genesis, Joseph of Hamadan seems to take for granted the routinized nature of these relationships by simply declaring that the *Kadosh Barukh Hu*, like Adam in the Lilith myth, took two wives, the Shekhinah and one "from the sect not

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[179] *bEruvin,* 18b.

that of purity."[180] The abject nature of the latter appears in her designation as the mere "shadow" of the Shekhinah, a byproduct of her divine counterpart, who has nonetheless also crystallized as a "whore" and a "concubine"[181] – and whose union with the divine leads to the emergence of evil and murderousness.

In another text, he recounts the difference between the two relationships: the relationship with the Shekhinah is conducted openly, "for all know that she is his wife and mate," whereas the relationship with the "concubine" is conducted "in secret, at night, because of the honor of his wife."[182] The shameful quality of the latter relationship is also reflected in the medium of the sexual liaison: the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* mates with the Shekhinah through "pure channels" and with the concubine through "covered channels," those of "impurity."[183] Yet, this shameful quality only serves to emphasize the overpowering nature of the divine desire for his demonic consort. The latter agrees to the liaison only at a price, the *Kadosh Barukh Hu*'s agreement that the sons that result from their union will "rule in your kingdom"[184] – a price to which He agrees in the form of assuring the Moabite lineage of the House of David.

Joseph of Hamadan makes explicit the nature of the two "channels" in another work, the *Sefer Tashak*.

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[185]

[180] Joseph de Hamadan, *Fragment d'un commentaire*, 22 (pagination from the Hebrew section): וכת שאינו של טהרה.

[181] *Ibid.*: יושבים בצל שכינה ולפי' נקר' 'צלה' – "they [the 'impure sects'] sit in the shadow of the Shekhinah and therefore she [Lilith] is called 'Tsilah' [read hyper-literally as "her shadow"].

[182] 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.

[183] *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.

[184] Idel, 'Seridim Nosafim', 48: [יש]לטו במלכותך.

[185] *Sefer Tashak*, 267-268. This passage is quoted by Cordovero, with incorrect attribution, in *Pardes*, I, 34b.

Under the chariot of the Holy King is the mystery of the holy covenant of *Kudsha Berikh Hu*, which is called *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 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 medium of the relationship with the impure side 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 is through the "orifice" that contains sperm. This positing of two channels within the "holy King," specifically within 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 liaison with the two conjugal partners of the divine male described in the author's Genesis commentary:

דאת צ' אית ליה תרין ראשין דרמיז מדת צדיק והנהו תרין מבועין קדישין חד שפיך ושאיב מתמן למטרוניתא ומתמן מתברכין עלאין ותתאין, ... ומבועא דא דמתמן אתבריו מלאכין קדישי' ואתבריו כמ' נשמתין קדישין. ומבועא תניינא איהו שפיך לסטר שמאלוי דקב"ה ומתמן יניקו דאשה זרה ואשה מנאפת. ואי זכיין ישראל ההוא מבועא סתים ופתיח מבועא קדישא דימינא. ואי לאו, אפתח ההוא מבועא דשאיב אשה זרה כחות הטומאה היושבים חוץ לישיבה עליונה שנקראו אחרים ... ומשם יוצאין [יונקין] שדין ורוחין ולילין ומזיקין ורשעים מצד השמאל 186

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186 *Sefer Tashak*, 278-279. The textual variant "יונקין" for "יוצאין" is given by Cordovero. *Pardes* I, 34b. Again, Cordovero misattributes the text.

For the letter *Tsadi* has two heads which allude to the attribute of *Tsadik*. And these 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 *Kudsha Berikh Hu*, 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 forces 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.[187]

In the four passages I have discussed here, three reasons are advanced for these liaisons with the demonic. In the two "concubines" passages, they are a product of divine 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 Zohar. Nonetheless, I have discussed it here not only for comparative purposes but also because it provides an entry into a theme that

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[187] 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." *Ibid*., 279.

does appear with some frequency in the Zohar, that of the ongoing sustenance of the demonic by the divine through "suckling." Rather than a contingent misfortune, "suckling" evokes routinized and ongoing relationships, as does, even more explicitly, Joseph of Hamadan's portrayal of Lilith as God's "concubine" or "whore." As a result of this importance of this theme, I will discuss it separately in the next section, though it is closely related to the intimate relationships that are the main topic of this section.

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 Zohar. In the *Or Yakar,* Cordovero rejects the seemingly clear meaning of the Zohar passage cited above concerning the consorting of the divine male with Lilith, seeking to distance the divine from any direct relationship of this kind.[188] By contrast, in *Pardes Rimonim*, he quotes extensively from Joseph of Hamadan[189] on the "two channels" within the divine phallus and makes even more graphic their abject implications – for example, explicitly informing us that the emission from the "second orifice" of the *Yesod*, as from its human counterpart, is repulsive refuse.[190] This seems strange: at least upon a first consideration, this parallelism between *Yesod*'s relationship to the "Matronita" and the "Adulterous Woman" in the Joseph of Hamadan passages seems at least as scandalous theologically as the notion of the replacement of the Matronita by the "ass" or "bondwoman" in the Zohar passage whose plain meaning Cordovero so vociferously disavows.

One can only speculate about Cordovero's seemingly incompatible stances in relation to the two formulations – about 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

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[188] *Or Yakar* XIII, 57-58.
[189] Though he misattributes the quotations.
[190] *Pardes,* I, 34b.

male sustains and impregnates both – indeed, coming perilously close to Joseph of Hamadan's notion that the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* 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 Zohar's 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 focus on ambivalence that I am developing in this study. It is as though the relationship to the demonic female were both indispensable and yet unacceptable. It is also striking that, in Lurianic writings, in which a very similar tension appears, [191] 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[192] – a kind of danger we have already seen above.

Be that as it may, 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. [193] In that passage, he declares that the theory of the two channels helps explain the puzzling mechanics of the nourishment of the demonic side from the holy side. He implicitly 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 cosmology of the "four worlds,"

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[191] 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 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*.

[192]*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…

[193] *Pardes,* I, 53c-d.

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such a stance is impossible, due to the fact that the genesis of evil is in the level of "*Gevurah* of *Atsilut*" and that there are many holy levels below that. The theory of the two channels puts the demonic side directly in touch with this quite high level of the holy side, circumventing the need for impure nourishment to traverse holy levels on its way to the unholy side. It thus serves to shore up the kabbalistic affirmation of the reality of evil, its parallelism with the holy side, and its source in the holy side – even while paying the price of apparently positing direct and intimate contact of the holy with the unholy, a notion firmly rejected by Cordovero as theologically unacceptable in the context of the Zohar passage about the substitution of Lilith for the Shekinah.[194] 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 the divine and the 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).[195] 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.

D. *Ambivalences of Sustenance: "Suckling"*

A key manner in which Zoharic passages portray active relationships between the divine and the demonic is through images of sustenance, frequently expressed by the term "suckling," portrayed through various conjugations of the infinitive "לינקא."[196] As demonstrated by Ellen Haskell, the imagery of suckling is deeply implanted in thirteenth

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[194] Indeed, in another passage in the *Pardes*, I, 56a-b, he uses the notion of the two channels to interpret the passages in the Zohar 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 Zohar passages.

[195] See, e.g., *Pardes,* I, 80c.

[196] 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.

century kabbalah, taking its most vivid form in the Zohar.[197] Haskell shows that suckling is one of the main ways 13th century texts portrayed the bestowal of vitality from higher levels to lower levels, both within the divine sphere and between the divine and humanity. However, though Haskell does not discuss this feature, it is also one of the main verbs used by the Zohar and some related texts to portray the relationship of the divine and the demonic – considerably complicating the import of the various meanings of the term. In the Zohar, the term may be read in a number of different ways: "literally," evoking maternal and nutritive imagery; figuratively, evoking sexual imagery; polysemically, evoking both at once; or catachrestically, evoking a unique meaning, an "unspeakable" relationship, as it were, for which no other term exists. I note also that the Zohar's portrayal of such relationships feature both male and female divine protagonists.

The abject nature of suckling between the divine and demonic does not generally manifest itself in the Zohar in the form of inchoate emissions, though there is at least one exception; by contrast, Joseph of Hamadan foregrounds that kind of abjection, as suggested in the passages cited in the preceding section. In the Zohar, the abject nature of such relationships lies in the scandalous and repulsive mixtures that are intrinsic to relationships of suckling between the two realms.   Like repulsive and inchoate substances, such improper mixtures evoke the horror of the collapse of the proper boundaries of the subject. Such mixtures 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."[198] This aspect of the abject as an improper "composite" often appears in the Zohar – most explicitly, perhaps, in the use of the word *irbuvia* [ערבוביא, confusion, tumult, motley crowd] to describe the *Sitra Aḥra*.[199] 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 life-giving and tender deed, that of suckling, into an

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[197] Haskell, *Metaphor and Symbolic Representation: The Image of God as a Suckling Mother in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah*, *passim.*
[198] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs,* 12.
[199] See, e.g., *Zohar* I, 28b-29a, III, 87a.

action that empowers malevolence and destruction.   Rhetorically, such "unspeakable," monstrous perversions can only be evoked through various forms of catachresis.

Before discussing suckling in the context of divine-demonic relationships, however, it is necessary to take a brief detour through the debate about the meaning of the term in the context of relationships among two or more holy entities. Zoharic and other texts use the term in such contexts in ways that evoke sustenance (both maternal and masculine) 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 evokes the beneficent bestowal of vitality from higher to lower levels in the cosmos, with the term's literal, maternal meaning coming to the fore in the Zohar. In Haskell's summary:

> In these Zoharic texts, we see the fullest kabbalistic expression of the image of God as a suckling mother. As in the writings of Isaac the Blind and Ezra of Gerona, the suckling image serves as a metaphor for spiritual transmission of overflowing divine energy, both among the *sefirot* and between divinity and humanity. However, in *Sefer ha-Zohar* the image takes on an immediate and experiential quality absent from earlier literature, because it is thoroughly embedded in an explicit network of metaphoric connotations that provide anthropomorphic and anthropopathic references for the reader.[200]

The spirit of Haskell's interpretation, emphasizing the dimension of maternal love in the suckling imagery, runs directly counter to some of the central theses of the early work of Elliot Wolfson.   Wolfson asserts that, in the Zohar, and kabbalah 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."[201] Wolfson thus displaces the literal meaning of suckling as maternal nurturance in favour of reading

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[200] Haskell, *Metaphor and Symbolic Representation*, 264-265.
[201] Wolfson, *Circle in the Square,* 109. Cf. Haskell, *Metaphor and Symbolic Representation*, 280-281.

it figuratively as masculine sexuality – or more precisely, argues that such a tropic displacement is effected by the kabbalistic texts.   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* (the "supernal Mother," אמא עילאה) and as animated by a theurgic aspiration to reintegrate the sefirah of *Malkhut* (the Daughter or "lower Mother") into the masculine identity of the divine, specifically, into the corona of the divine phallus.[202]

Haskell concedes that Wolfson's reading may at times be appropriate, but rejects it as the dominant meaning of suckling in the Zohar. She emphasizes the considerable presence in thirteenth century kabbalah of the "image of God as a breasted, suckling mother who nurtures children with life-giving spiritual overflow."[203] For Haskell, the "nurture, dependence and tenderness" associated with such images are "often better suited to expressing the relationships between the *sefirot* and humanity than the connotations structuring the image of cleaving to the divine phallus."[204] 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 might agree that his distinctive interpretation is not necessarily appropriate for all instances of the suckling imagery – or at all levels of interpretation. Perhaps the difference between Wolfson and Haskell is less an absolute matter and more a question of a passage-by-passage discussion.

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 personages, or righteous human beings, to maleficent occurrences, the sustenance provided by a divine entity to unholy sefirot, demonic personages, or evil human beings. 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

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[202] Wolfson, *Circle,* 79-121.
[203] Haskell, *Metaphor and Symbolic Representation*, 281.
[204] *Ibid*.

on this "other side" of suckling may be roughly divided into three modes: 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 relationships, one cannot ignore either the nutritive or sexual senses of suckling. Rather, the power of the passages portraying these relationships often depends precisely on the polysemy of the term. At a rhetorical level, the use of suckling is often limited neither to its literal sense nor to its figurative sense of copulation, but rather uses the double meaning in a number of ways, including: 1) shifting 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 the divine and the demonic so shocking, improper, indeed impossible, that it defies any existing term. The third use may be viewed as a prime example of catachresis, the use of a term which seems to function figuratively but for which no "proper" term exists.

The perversity ascribed to the liaisons between the divine and demonic make them particularly suited for portrayal by catachresis. As I noted in the Introduction, citing 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. Similarly, Jacques Derrida attributes the "monstrous" quality of his own writing, which he also describes as marked by catachresis, to its "hybridisation," for a "composition that puts heterogeneous bodies together may be called a monster."[205] Finally, a doubled meaning of suckling, simultaneously sexual and maternal, may, of course, be understood in classical psychoanalytical terms. Indeed, it is precisely such instances of *double entendre*, of shifting between the sexual and maternal, which the term "Freudian" in its popular sense often evokes. However, I will also show a more precise way in which psychoanalysis can shed light on the ontological dimension of the sexual/maternal term suckling.

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[205] Derrida, *Points: Interviews 1974-1994*, 385. On his own writing as marked by monstrous catachresis, see Derrida, 'Deconstruction and the Other', 123.

A complex Zoharic passage, which I have already introduced above, illustrates a number of different uses of the term in the context of divine/demonic relations. This passage concerns a verse symptomatically relevant to this topic: "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk" (Ex. 34:26). Since the Zohar generally associates goat imagery with the *Sitra Aḥra* and maternal imagery with the Shekhinah, it is hardly surprising that one sage offers the interpretation that the verse should be taken as a prohibition on the intermixture of the divine and the demonic. Another sage, however, offers a seemingly theological objection to this interpretation, based on the verse's use of the possessive "*his* mother": can the holy Shekhinah really be viewed as the mother of the *Sitra Aḥra*? In his quintessentially Zoharic response to this question, Rabbi Shim'on offers a narrative embrace of the theological 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 אסתאב, וחויא תקיפא שארי לאתגלאה, כדין גדיא ינקא מחלבא דאמיה, ודינין מתערין. ... בגיני כך לא ייכול בשרא בחלבא כל זרעא קדישא, וכל מאן דאתי מסטרא דא, דלא יהיב דוכתא למאן דלא אצטריך, דהא בעובדא תליא מלתא, בעובדא דלתתא לאתערא לעילא 206

> When are they [i.e., the forces of the *Sitra Aḥra*] joined with Her? When this Mother suckles from the Other Side and the sanctuary is defiled and the mighty serpent [*ḥivya*] begins to reveal himself. Then the *kid sucks of his mother's milk* and judgments arouse. ... Therefore all holy seed and anyone who derives from this side should not eat meat with milk, so as not to provide a place for those for whom it would be improper. For the matter depends on action, an action below arousing above.[207]

Two relationships of suckling occur in this narrative, portrayed with the same verb, *yanka* [ינקא]. Under certain conditions – for example, under the impact of the "black theurgical" effect of human consumption of milk with meat – the Shekhinah will "suckle" from the *Sitra Aḥra*, specifically the *ḥivya*, implicitly Sama'el. As a result, the "kid,"

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206 *Zohar* II, 125a.
207 Matt V, 172-173 (translation modified).

here a lower demonic force, will, in turn, "suckle" from the Shekhinah. Under such conditions, the Shekhinah can, indeed, be accurately described as the "mother of" 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 ḥivya 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 "mighty ḥivya" – evoking the snake of Eden, already sexualized in the Talmud, as noted above.[208] 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 among the various meanings of suckling. It evokes a maleficent mother, even if one whose maleficence may be the product of coercion, who 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" [אימא קדישא]; by contrast, the male figure in this passage is the diabolical "mighty ḥivya," who sexually "suckles" the Shekhinah, thus diminishing the power of the divine male figure, *Kudsha Berikh Hu*. This interpretation is supported by other Zoharic passages in which the separation of the holy male and female leads to the latter sexually "suckling" from the *Sitra Aḥra*.[209]

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[208] E.g., *bShabbat,* 146a.
[209] E.g., *Zohar* III, 58a, III, 291b.

For the theory of abjection, it is highly significant that such monstrous, parasitical, and perverse relationships are brought about by a forbidden "mixture." Indeed, the entire discussion of the "kid/mother's milk" verse begins with the pronouncement: "for one should not mix a lower thing with an upper, so that the external dimension should not suckle from the internal dimension" [דלא לערבא מלה תתאה בעלאה, דלא ינקא סטרא דלבר מסטרא פנימאה].[210] The "upper" and "lower" are thus identified with the "inside" and "outside" [דלגו and דלבר], as well as with the "holy side" and "contaminated side" [סטרא דקדושה and סטרא דמסאבא]. The constitution of subjectivity through abjection is threatened by any illicit mixture which puts into question the subject's proper boundaries. And here, indeed, this illicit mixture 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 from passages concerned with the constitution, as well as the sustenance, of the demonic, the passage closely associates the emission of milk from the holy side to the unholy side with creating a geographical site for the demonic: mixing meat and milk is forbidden lest it "give a place for those for whom it would be improper" [יהיב דוכתא למאן דלא אצטריך].[211] Though the emphasis here is on the monstrous effect of the mixture rather than on the fluid nature of the milk, the establishment of a solid foothold for the demonic in the cosmos, the "giving of place" to them, is implicitly identified with the vivifying effect of the suckling of milk by the "kid."

It is even more significant that both perverse mixtures, both sinister "sucklings," evoked in this passage concern the maternal body, that primary locus of abjection for Kristeva. Indeed, the "kid/milk" verse serves as a key proof-text for Kristeva in her argument about the relationship of abjection to biblical dietary laws.[212] Kristeva views the prohibition as a "metaphor of incest,"[213] because it is directed at forbidding an improper relationship between mother and child. Of course, any psychoanalytically informed reading would notice this dimension and would not be distracted by the rabbinic extension of the prohibition to cover meat and milk generally. For Kristeva, however, this verse provides the key to the whole edifice of biblical purity laws: "Far from being *one* of the semantic

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[210] *Zohar* II, 124b.
[211] *Zohar* II, 125a.
[212] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs*, 123-124.
[213] *Ibid.*, 124.

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values of this vast project of separation which is the biblical text, the taboo on the mother seems to be its originary mytheme."[214] The entire biblical "logic of differences dictated by a divine Ego is based on the prohibition of incest."[215] 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 unnatural maternal relationship against which the verse warns. Second, it highlights the threat to bounded identity this relationship constitutes. Third, it reinforces the double meaning of the suckling relationship evoked in this verse, both sexual and nutritive (even though the Zoharic and psychoanalytic 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 Zohar 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 while shifting from one semantic valence to the other.[216]

Indeed, the foregrounding of the maleficent character of suckling precisely through the use of the term to portray different kinds of relationships seems to render of subsidiary importance an interpretive choice between its lactic or 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 *Sitra Aḥra* and that of the demonic "kid" from the Shekhinah – as relating *either* to suckling *or* to copulation. This passage, like the many other passages in the Zohar in which the Shekhinah is said to "suckle" from the *Sitra Aḥra*, could be read in either of these two ways, or as both at once.[217] Even the

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[214] *Ibid*.
[215] *Ibid*.
[216] 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.
[217] See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 58a, III, 62a, III, 72a, III, 180b, III, 291b.

reference to "his mother" does not 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. This doubled, indeterminate, and/or novel meaning of suckling may be explained in psychoanalytic terms as displacements between sexuality and maternity; it may be articulated in rhetorical terms either as displacements between literal and figurative meanings, or as a catachresis, in which no "literal" meaning exists – i.e., as an image of a relationship which is so "improper" that no word exists to describe it. As I suggest throughout this thesis, the portrayal of divine-demonic relationships seems particularly well-suited for such catachreses.

Finally, I note that, although the emphasis in the suckling passages is on the portrayal of the perverse relationships between already-constituted personages rather than on their generation *via* the emission of repulsive substances, or, to put it in rhetorical terms, on prosopopeia rather than on irony, the latter dimension is far from wholly absent. First, implicit throughout the "suckling" imagery is the perversion of maternal milk from its proper role in the nourishing of life to its improper role in the empowering of evil and destruction – an imagery close to that of a child's sudden and shocking experience of milk as repellent that is for Kristeva a paradigmatic experience of abjection.[218]

Moreover, a passage in Zohar *Ḥukat* provides a much more 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 Zohar, however, reads it hyper-literally, construing it as something like: "for waters of a menstrual woman, for she is sin." The "menstrual woman" of the verse becomes the Shekhinah and her condition the direct result of her "suckling" from the *Sitra Aḥra*:

[218] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs,* 10.

האי דכתיב למי נדה חטאת היא, בגין דכל דינין תתאין, וכל אינון דאתו מסטרא דמסאבא, כד איהי

ינקא מסטרא אחרא, ויתיבת בדינא, כמה דאת אמר (ישעיה לד ו) מלאה דם, הודשנה מחלב, כדין

כלהו מתערי ומסתלקי, ושראן בעלמא[219]

> That which is written, "for waters of a menstrual woman, for she is sin": for all
> the lower judgments [i.e., demonic forces] and all those who come from the side
> of impurity, when she suckles from the *Sitra Aḥra*, 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.[220] Menstrual blood, a
distinctively female secretion, is here emitted as a result of her "suckling" from the *Sitra
Aḥra*, which generally in the Zohar entails intimacy with a male partner, the "mighty
ḥivya."[221] The abject substance, the contaminating menstrual blood, is emitted as a result
of this intimacy – the converse of the process I have shown in the context of the origin of
the demonic, whereby the abject substance crystallizes into the demonic. It is as though
this perverse coupling causes a reversal of the process of crystallization, a regression to a
more primal state (a phenomenon I have noted above in my discussion of demonic male
zohama). To be sure, this blood, in turn, leads to the further crystallization of mighty
demonic forces who are thereby "aroused" and "prevail in the world."

I now turn to the suckling relationship of the divine male to the demonic. In the Zohar,
by contrast with Joseph of Hamadan, there are substantially fewer usages of suckling to
portray this relationship than in the context of the Shekhinah. Nonetheless, I have
already cited a crucial instance above, concerning the perverse substitution of Lilith for
the Shekhinah as the consort of the "King," and specifically, of the "*Tsadik*," the divine

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[219] *Zohar* III, 180b.

[220] 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.

[221] Commenting on a related passage in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, Cordovero explicitly portrays the process
whereby the "*zohama*" cast into the Shekhinah in the course of her coupling with the serpent becomes
menstrual blood. *Pardes,* II, 56a-b.

phallus: "for he was riding until now in a place not his own, in an alien place, and was suckling it" [באתר דהוה רכיב עד השתא באתר דלאו דיליה, באתר נוכראה ויניק ליה].[222] As in several instances I have discussed in the female context, the phrase "suckles it," [יניק ליה, *yanik le*], here operates at the junction of its sexual and nutritive meanings. It may be a simple reiteration of "riding in a place not his own, in an alien place" – i.e., an additional figurative evocation of copulation between the holy *Yesod* and Lilith. Alternatively, it may signify that, a result of "riding in that place," it then sustains, 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 crucial force of the passage is the evocation of the scandalous link between the holy *Yesod* and Lilith. Finally, as I noted above, the passage emphasizes the abject nature of this relationship, the way it puts into doubt the identity of the king, cast down, without "honor," to intimacy with an "ass," losing even the name of "king."

Joseph of Hamadan, who makes suckling a central and routine feature of divine-demonic relations, also moves more seamlessly between its various meanings.   The two passages from the *Sefer Tashak* quoted above, especially when read together, show the same kind of playing on the multiple meanings of suckling that appear in the Zohar's "kid/milk" passage. On the one hand, they use the verb to refer to the *Yesod*'s relationship to both the "Matronita" and to the "Alien Woman," both involving "suckling" 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 suckling seems primarily used in one sense or another depending on the relationship, the evocative force of the passages clearly depends on this shifting between senses.

The usage of suckling to describe the relationship between the divine and the demonic by the Zohar and by Joseph of Hamdan requires a different approach than that of either

[222] *Zohar* III, 69a.

Haskell or Wolfson. It is neither an act of maternal beneficence and tenderness, as Haskell would have it, nor an instrument 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 – of menstrual blood and, implicitly, semen in the Zohar, and of urine in Joseph of Hamadan – leads to an abject relationship that debases divine subjectivity. The emissions vivify the *Sitra Aḥra*, and links the holy phallus not only with the "Alien Woman" but with her minions, the "impure hosts," both metaphysical and earthly.

In Joseph of Hamadan, suckling becomes a routinized feature of the cosmos whereby the divine enters into relationship with an autonomous *Sitra Aḥra*. He most often portrays this sustaining link with the demonic neither as a catastrophic "black theurgical" result of human sin nor as a perverse outcome of demonic seduction, but as an inevitable organic process and thus a regular feature of cosmic process. By contrast, the "ambivalences of origin" explored in this chapter concerned the generation of the demonic either at the very incipience of the constitution of the cosmos or its reconstitution at moments of crisis; the "ambivalences of intimacy," for their part, primarily concerned links between already constituted personages or structures, links that were for the most part episodic and tragic contingencies. In suckling, at least as portrayed by Joseph of Hamadan, 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.

E. Conclusion: A Theurgical Parallel

A passage in the *Hakdamah* of the Zohar[223] gives a fresh look at the themes in this chapter through a discussion of abjection on the human level and its "black 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

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[223] *Zohar* I, 5a.

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"my people," the Zohar declares that this verse describes the partnership between the kabbalist and God in the creation of heaven and earth.

This partnership with God, however, only applies to a proper kabbalist, not to one for whom engagement with the "secrets of the Torah" is not properly "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 בְּרָזִין דאורייתא, וחדש מלין דלא ידע על בורייהון כדקא יאות ...תלמיד חכם דלא מטי להוראה].[224]   On the contrary, such a person enters into a creative partnership with Sama'el, here called the "perverse man" [איש תהפכות], a word whose root [הפך] highlights its relationship of reversal in relation 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 רקיעא דשוא ... ואשתתפת ביה... בגין דכד קיימת בההוא רקיעא, אית לה רשו ויכולתא למהוי טס כל בההוא עלמא].[225] 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 "black theurgy" closely tracks the themes I have been discussing in this chapter. The proclamation of esoteric words by an improper person is described in a manner which evokes perversity, implicitly of a sexual nature – for such a person is described as one who "does not know" in an "appropriate" way, a description whose sexual resonance is brought out by the phrase that esoteric study is not "his way" [לאו אורחיה]. This phrase, in both its Aramaic and Hebrew variants, is widely used in rabbinic writing to describe sexual perversity.[226] The notion of the destructive effect of a sage's premature instruction also has the resonance of inappropriate or failed sexuality.

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[224] *Ibid.*
[225] *Ibid.*
[226] See, e.g., *bSanherdrin* 73a.

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 terms for Lilith. In the Talmudic source of this Zoharic passage, the premature sage is not merely viewed as a collaborator with this destructive woman, but is actually identified with her.[227] Finally, the verb used for the act of killing by this woman, "הפילה," is also probably intended to evoke prematurity, in the sense of abortion or miscarriage, due to the play on the word "נפל," as Rashi explains – 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 passage from the *Hakdamah* presents the central themes of this chapter set in the context of "black theurgy." It begins with the nourishment and partial creation of the *Sitra Aḥra* by the emission of refuse before the proper formation of the creative individual, in short, by the process of abjection – though here it is a not yet fully formed human being, rather than a divine subject as in most of the passages discussed above. The unripe sage emits perverse, unnatural creative forces in the cosmos, leading to the creation of the space of the *Sitra Aḥra*, the "vain firmament." He also brings the two key diabolical figures into this stable, if "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, the murderous and perverse activities of Lilith are now given free rein.

We can even identify fairly precisely the moment in the cosmic process in which this black theurgy occurs. It is a moment in which Sama'el and Lilith have already been constituted, and thus it is somewhat subsequent to the stage portrayed in the "smoke" narrative in Zohar *Pekude* or the "anger" narrative in Zohar *Va-Yetse*. Yet, it is also a moment in 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

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[227] *bAvodah Zarah,* 19b and *bSotah,* 22a.

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 movement from the remote *Sitra Aḥra* to the proximate and concentric *Sitra Aḥra* – for, as I have shown in Chapter One, the term "firmament" [רקיעא] is used in the Zohar as an image of the concentric *Sitra Aḥra*, associated with the "curtains" of which the impure form surrounds the pure form. This entire perverse creation and cosmic restructuring is brought about by the premature emission of refuse by the not-yet-fully-formed individual, the improper kabbalist – in short, by abjection.

Chapter Three.
Dangerous Consequences:
Impersonation and the Abyss

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 Holy One blessed be He, who is called "A man of war" [Exodus 15:3]. "And he plucked": this is as though he disrobed himself of the *kelipot*, which alludes to the shoe. "And he gives it to his neighbor": this is Sama'el. "For also this confronted with this hath made the Elohim" [Ecclesiastes 7:14]

- Ḥayim Vital[1]

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[2]

A. *Introduction*

In this chapter, I discuss two polar consequences of the processes discussed in the preceding chapters. First, in a world in which the *Sitra Aḥra* has crystallized into fully

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[1] Vital, *Sefer Ha-Likutim*, 246b-247a.

[2] *Pardes,* I, 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.

formed structures and personages (Chapter Two) and in which these forms come to double those of the holy side (Chapter One), impersonation of the divine by the demonic increasingly moves to the foreground as a central danger. As the process of crystallization of the demonic becomes further and further extended, it yields a world of entities almost impossible to distinguish from their divine counterparts – a reified world of simulacra. In its most dangerous form, impersonation results from an ontological amalgamation between divine and demonic entities produced through coercion. While I have already broached the problem of impersonation a number of times, I focus in this chapter on a specific variant of it, which I call "aggressive enclothing," a kind of forced metaphysical cross-dressing. This phenomenon is latent in the Zohar, explicitly emerges in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* and *Ra'ya Mehemena*, and then becomes a major theme in later kabbalah.

I then turn to a challenge which is the diametrical opposite of impersonation, that posed by the utterly formless *tehom*, the abyss. The abyss, which ever threatens to dissolve all form and meaning, and which thus shares much, indeed at times may even be identified, with the abject, is that from which both the holy and demonic sides emerge and to which they return (Chapter Two). Nonetheless, in a world in which reified demonic simulacra have become cognitively and ontologically powerful, it may seem that it is only through a plunge back into the dissolving abyss that creativity can be resumed – in Kristeva's words, "rebirth with and against abjection." [3]

B. *Impersonation through Aggressive Enclothing*

I first turn to one of the most troubling variants of divine/demonic relations: the possibility that the divine can come to be aggressively enclothed [לאתלבשא] by the demonic. The portrayals of this phenomenon in kabbalistic texts span a wide range, from those that view it as posing the ultimate cosmic and religious dangers to those that view it as secretly holding the key to redemption. Aggressive enclothing shares some features with other antagonistic, yet intimate, relationships between the divine and the demonic,

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[3] Kristeva, *Pouvoirs,* 39.

such as "suckling" and "cleaving"; it is also, in some ways, modeled on them.
Enclothing resembles those other relationships in that it produces the parasitical
empowerment of the demonic by the divine, while also posing the distinctive hazard of
impersonation.

The valence of 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 the capture of the divine by the demonic and the reversal of the proper
hierarchy between clothing and the enclothed.   When portrayed as redemptive, it is a
tactic, even a ruse, by means of which the divine dominates the demonic from within.
That the aggression involved in enclothing has been portrayed as working in both
directions may perhaps be partly attributed to the ease with which one can imagine the
donning and doffing of garments. Indeed, in Lurianic texts, as I shall show, the struggle
over enclothing becomes a central way of describing the oscillations between the fortunes
of the divine and demonic realms throughout cosmic and human history. I note that,
although the image of enclothing is usually reserved for the encasing of the divine in a
demonic garment, this is not exclusively the case;[4] in any event, the successes of the two
sides in such struggles come to be portrayed in increasingly parallel terms.

Aside from its ever-increasing importance for the portrayal of divine/demonic relations as
kabbalistic history progresses, a key aspect of aggressive enclothing for my study is that
it brings together the dominant themes of the first two chapters: splitting and abjection-
and-crystallization. Upon first consideration, the notion of the enclothing of the divine
by the demonic may be seen as primarily a form of splitting – here, between a divine core
and a demonic exterior. As with other kinds of splitting, enclothing would thus be a
technique for the construction and management of ambivalence. Psychologically, of
course, if one views an entity as bearing contradictory traits, or if one experiences

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[4] 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, ועופרת 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 liar – his mouth is good and his heart is bad.

contradictory affects towards it, then the notion that the entity is split between a good core and a bad exterior validates that ambivalence – revealing that the conflicted perception of the entity is a result of an incompatibility in the object itself. Subjective ambivalence is transformed into objective contradiction, human anxiety into an ontological struggle between antagonistic cosmic forces.

Aggressive enclothing, from this perspective, might thus be viewed as providing an etiological explanation, an ontological back-story, as it were, for the confusions and indeterminacies of worldly experience. The "homology" aspect of "splitting," described in Chapter One, yields the demonic as a realm of fully structured and organized entities, homologous to the divine and therefore difficult to distinguish from it. Aggressive enclothing takes this one step further: the difficulty of distinguishing between the two realms is here not simply a cognitive problem but rather a perversion of the real itself, an impersonation made possible by the actual capture of the divine by the demonic. Thus, while this back-story takes some of the onus off the ambivalent subject, it is hardly reassuring, for at least two further reasons. First, aggressive enclothing combines extreme forms of the key dangerous feature of the "concentric" *Sitra Aḥra*, its proximity to the divine, with the key dangerous feature of the "homologous" *Sitra Aḥra*, its indistinguishability from the divine. Second, in a world in which impersonation is pervasive and rooted in reality itself, avoiding the gravest religious pitfall, the confusion of the divine and demonic, seems almost impossible.

I have thus far discussed the relationship of aggressive enclothing to splitting; I now turn to its relationship to the theme of abjection, a relationship that increasingly comes to the fore as kabbalistic history progresses. At the simplest level, 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, intrinsically lifeless creatures granted perverse vitality by divine names inserted into them. Such narratives, kabbalistically adapted from rabbinic sources, are particularly blatant examples of monstrous prosopopeia – in which language itself becomes an expression of abjection. At a deeper ontological level, however, particularly in Lurianic texts, abjection also

comes to be the very means of the combat between the 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, reconstructs its wholeness, "completes its *partsuf*." As I shall describe in detail, the vital core itself thus comes to be paradoxically portrayed as the refuse that is fought over and violently exchanged between one realm and the other. In these struggles, the paradoxes of abjection become particularly acute as refuse becomes identified with substance.

The origins of the idea of aggressive enclothing, in my view, lie in an innovative composite, created by the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, of two processes that are quite distinct in the Zohar: enclothing and capture.   Enclothing is a common way the Zohar portrays benign and necessary cosmic and divine processes.[5]   Although such portrayals take many heterogeneous and complex forms, the "garments" [לבושין] are generally appropriate to the entity being clothed. 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.[6] On the cognitive level, 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. Moreover, the Zohar reserves holy garments for the holy and unholy garments for the unholy. For example, in one passage, the Zohar refers to bodies as garments for the spirit – with pure bodies enclothing holy spirits and contaminated bodies enclothing contaminated spirits.[7]

A consideration of their relation to the *kelipot* reinforces the benign nature of garments in the Zohar. Athough the images of "garment" and *kelipah* may be viewed as quite closely related on a phenomenal level, the Zohar generally keeps the two notions quite distinct – and certainly does so when *kelipah* is used in a clearly demonic sense. The "benign *kelipah*" passage, discussed in Chapter One, may, on a first reading, be viewed as an exception. I note, first, that, even in the "benign *kelipah*" passage, we do not find a complete overlap between the terms "garment" and "*kelipah*." At the upper levels, as I

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[5] See generally, Cohen-Alloro, *Sod ha-Malbush u-Mar'eh ha-Mal'akh be-Sefer ha-Zohar, passim.*
[6] See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 184a on the need for a proper garment for a proper *yenikah* to take place
[7] *Zohar* I, 20b.

have shown, the term "garment," and not "*kelipah*," is used to describe the relationship between successive sefirot. From *Gevurah* downward, however, the term "*kelipah*" is used, as well as, indeed 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" [ואע"ג, דא מוחא ודא קליפה, דא לדא, ודא לדא, עד דאשתכח דא לבושא לדא, דדא לבושא, אתעביד איהו מוחא לדרגא אחרא]. Still, one could say that it is precisely the unusual, benign conception of the *kelipah* in that passage which makes it the exception that proves the rule.

More importantly for my discussion here, however, is that the fact that a higher level 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 by which Lilith attempts to capture the "small faces" [אנפי זוטרי]: she sought to "cleave to them and to portray herself through them" [לאתדבקא בהו ולאצטיירא בגוייהו][8]. This comes very close to the monstrous prosopopeia I discuss below – but, significantly, it does not use the imagery of enclothing to portray it.

By contrast with its benign portrayal of enclothing, the Zohar describes aggression against, and capture of, the holy by the demonic with words like "domination,"[9] "cleaving,"[10] and "suckling."[11] The description of capture as an aggressive "cleaving" or "suckling" portrays it as 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, she is

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[8] *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."

[9] E.g., *Zohar* I, 210b.

[10] E.g., *Zohar* II, 134a.

[11] E.g., *Zohar* II, 125a.

described as "separating" herself from intimacy with the *Sitra Aḥra* [וכדין איהי אתפרישת מההוא סטרא].[12]

I argue that the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar* create a composite of these two Zoharic processes: on the one hand, the "enclothing" of one level by another, a process always portrayed in the Zohar as benign, and, on the other hand, the "cleaving" of the *Sitra Aḥra* to the divine, a process always portrayed as malign. This composite yields a novel use of "enclothing" to portray hostile capture, a composite that seems intended to identify a specific set of cognitive and religious dangers. If the enclothing of the divine by the demonic is also the capture of the former by the latter, a world in which this phenomenon was pervasive would be truly terrifying. The cognitive and spiritual dangers would be akin to those involved in the "sisters" allegory or the seductive powers of *nogah* – above all, the possibility that a person might be lead to perceive the demonic as divine, and thus to worship the former, or draw on its metaphysical powers, instead of the latter. In the case of enclothing, however, the danger is more acute than in those two other examples – for this religious perversion has an ontological basis, rather than merely indicating a perceptual illusion. We are confronting not a covert alliance between opposites/twins, nor an already-constituted phenomenal resemblance between antagonists, but rather, impersonation brought about through aggression, capture, and ontological hybridization.[13]

In the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, the enclothing of the Shekhinah by the *kelipot*, and the Shekhinah's effort to "disrobe" herself from them, is often found precisely at the kind of textual moments whose equivalents in the Zohar use the notion of

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[12] *Zohar* II, 134a.

[13] 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-Atzilut', 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" [אוהב, אויב – words that in eastern Europe would have been pronounced nearly identically]. *Toledot Ya'akov Yosef*, 250. The Zoharic parable of the prostitute sent by the king to test his son may also be added to this series of texts. *Zohar* II, 163a.

the "cleaving" of the *Sitra Aḥra* to the Shekhinah and of 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.[14]

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.[15]

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].[16]

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[14] *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 243b.
[15] *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 69a-b.
[16] *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 36b.

Such passages use enclothing as the key trope to portray perverse intimacy between the Shekhinah and the *Sitra Aḥra*. "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, as I have hinted above, the directionality of the aggression involved in this new notion of enclothing is not always univocal. Thus, despite the clear description of enclothing in some texts as the capture 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[17], למהוי
כפויין תחותוי כתרין תתאין

> The lower crowns are *kelipot* in relation to the upper crowns. In them [the lower crowns – n.b.], the ten letters are enclothed in exile – in order that the lower crowns be subjugated beneath them.[18]

Rather than defeat of the divine by the demonic, this passage thus declares that such enclothing is an intentional act by the divine to subjugate the demonic.

In another, lengthy, passage, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* propounds a full range of heterogeneous interpretations of aggressive enclothing – including the establishment of divine omnipresence and omnipotence, the sympathetic accompaniment of Israel into exile, the "black 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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[17] 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.
[18] *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 קליפין אינון מחיצה
בין ישראל לאביהם שבשמים, באלין קליפין מתלבש קודשא בריך הוא ושכינתיה, לקיימא בשכינתיה
ומלכותו בכל משלֹה

> 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*, *Kudsha Berikh Hu* and his Shekhinah are enclothed,
> in order to fulfil, through the Shekhinah, "and his kingdom ruleth over all."
> [Psalms 103:19][19]

The triumphalism of the end of this excerpt is, to be sure, somewhat undermined by the
immediately preceding notion that this 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,
in a passage in which the complex relationship between "*kelipot*" and "garments"
receives some attention:

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 לֹו צר[20]

> His *kelipot* above are garments of several beautiful colors of light, from which
> *Kudsha Berikh Hu* 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*, or, perhaps, that the upper "*kelipot*"
are really benign, indeed beautiful, garments. In any case, *Kudsha Berikh Hu* disrobes
from these beautiful garments and dons the unholy *kelipot* in order to follow Israel into

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[19] *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 108b.
[20] *Ibid*.

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 by virtue of his donning the demonic garments.

Finally, and still within the same passage, we learn that enclothing of 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.

ההיא קליפה דגרים בר נש לאתלבשא שם ה' ביה נטיל נוקמא, ובגין דא לא תשא את שם ה' אלקי"ך
לשוא[21]

> This *kelipah*, in which the person has caused the name of God to be enclothed, takes revenge. And therefore, "Thou shalt not take the name of YHVH your Elohim in vain" [Exodus 20:7].

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 enclothing here happens as a coercive act of black theurgy. The human sinner causes the divine to be enclothed in a *kelipah*. More precisely, the sinner causes a linguistic deportation from divine to demonic – reading the Third Commandment hyper-literally as "Thou shalt not transport the name of YHVH _to_ the [realm of the] vain," i.e., the demonic realm. This linguistic deportation also has immediate ontological consequences. The sinner is punished by the black theurgical consequences of his own act, delivered into the hands of a demonic entity that he himself has empowered. I note that just as ambivalence is expressed in the first, triumphalist, interpretation by the notion that enclothing constitutes a "barrier" between Israel and God, so it is expressed in this third interpretation by the notion that the sinner's coercive

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[21] *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 *Sitra Aḥra* to Sama'el. *Ibid*.

perversion of the divine name brings about his punishment at the hand of the monstrous product of that very perversion.

Moreover, we can only grasp the full horror of the situation created by the sinner when we consider that this monstrous avenger 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 *badad,* "solitary" [בדד], which has the numerical value of ten, the number of sefirot possessed by each realm. Bringing together this kind of antithetical homonymy, familiar from the Zohar, with the notion of aggressive enclothing of the divine by the demonic, means that such enclothing is a strictly imperceptible process – since it consists in the covering over of the divine by its identical demonic adversary. Again, the danger is not merely one of subjective perception because aggressive enclothing is a simultaneously rhetorical and ontological event – the actual deportation of the divine into the demonic through the black theurgy of human sin. The passage tightly links the rhetorical and ontological processes through its hyper-literal reading of the Third Commandment in which it is precisely the divine "name" that is actually deported into the realm of the "vain," the realm of demonic language and being.[22]

One final speculation on this passage. 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 into a demonic entity through deporting it into the demonic realm. I would argue that the denomination of the sinner's punishment as "revenge" by the *kelipah* favors this last interpretation, that the sinner is submitted to the retributive wrath of a monstrously transmogrified divine entity 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

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[22] For the antecedents of this usage in the Zohar, see I, 5a.

a monster. The shared name, *badad*, would, in this reading, not be merely a case of homonymy, but a sign of the horrifying identity of ostensible opposites.

The dangers of impersonation are made even more explicit in another passage in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* which also uses as a proof-text the prohibition of "taking" God's name "in vain" – again interpreted as deporting it to the demonic realm.[23] The text describes a black theurgical act whose consequence is the intermixture of "the name of *Kudsha Berikh Hu* and idolatry," producing the hybrid "tree of good and evil."   This act, drawn from a midrashic source, is the insertion of the name of God into Nebuchadnezzar's idol – a very literal instantiation of the deportation of the divine name into the demonic – enabling the idol to utter the words, "I am YHVH your Elohim."[24] The *Tikune Ha-Zohar* interprets the speaking idol as an ontological intermixture of the divine and demonic, brought about by black theurgy – rather than merely, as in the midrashic source, as an illusory effect of black magic.   On the rhetorical level, this monstrous ontological perversion is a strikingly clear, as well as openly sacrilegious, case of prosopopeia.

Such monstrous ontological and rhetorical hybrids lead inevitably both to religious disorders and distortions of subjectivity:

ובזמנא דישראל אינון בגלותא, כאלו הוו מעורבין באילנא דטוב ורע, ובגין דא אוקמוהו קדמאין,
ישראל בגלותא עובדין עבודה זרה בטהרה הם[25]

> 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."

In its original Talmudic context,[26] the notion of the "idol worshippers in purity" is a byproduct of contingent social constraints and does not actually affect interior religious experience; here, by contrast, it is viewed as a metaphysical inevitability and

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[23] *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 97a-b.
[24] *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 97b. The source I have found for this story is *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabah*, III, 61a (7:15).
[25] *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 97b. The internal quote is from *bAvodah Zarah*, 8a.
[26] *bAvodah Zarah, 8a.*

ontologically enmeshes the person with demonic forces.[27] In a fallen world, in which the demonic and divine are intermixed, many good faith attempts at religious engagement – specifically, in this passage, to theurgically "use any angel" or "any [holy] name" – inevitably involve one with this lethal "mixture" or "confusion."[28] The dangerously indeterminate meaning of such religious acts – expressed in the paradoxical phrase, "idol worshippers in purity" – is the ultimate menace posed by aggressive enclothing.

I have thus far traced the development of the notion of enclothing from its Zoharic role as an inevitable and salutary vehicle of protection and revelation to its emergence as an ontological basis of heresy and a terrain of struggle between the divine and demonic in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*.   These developments are crucial for understanding the unfolding of the *Sitra Aḥra* in kabbalistic history. Aggressive enclothing occupies an important place in the teachings of both Cordovero and Luria. And as kabbalistic history proceeds, aggressive enclothing becomes ever-more prominent as a portrayal of the dangerous intimacy of the divine and demonic, undoubtedly accelerated by its distinctive appearance in Sabbateanism.

To be sure, 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 figures, *Kudsha Berikh Hu* and the Shekhinah, as garments for the upper ones, *Aba* and *Ima*,[29] and the lower world of *Beri'ah* as a garment for the upper world of *Atsilut*.[30] Such usages became widespread in Lurianic kabbalah, for which "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].[31] This notion of the garment in its beneficial and inevitable senses coexists side by side with its usage in its antagonistic, episodic, and often catastrophic senses. In the latter contexts, and in direct opposition to the Zohar's "benign *kelipah*" passage, it is the

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[27] Cordovero elaborates on this phenomenon in several places. See, e.g., *Pardes*, I, 44c-d and *Or Yakar*, XVI, 122b.

[28] 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.

[29] *Ibid*., 63b.

[30] *Ibid*., 116a.

[31] See, e.g., *Ets Ḥayim*, 63d.

very geographical proximity and structural concentricity of the garments that facilitates antagonistic confrontations between the divine and the demonic, with reciprocal attempts at capture and subjugation. It is also that which makes possible the danger that the demonic may impersonate the divine and be worshipped in its place. Indeed, the coexistence of the benign and malign portrayals of enclothing may partly explain the 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 relationship between the divine and the demonic 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*, the foreskin of the divine phallus, let alone the rapacious "suckling" by the demonic – though perhaps it is precisely this seemingly non-threatening quality that makes them so dangerously deceptive. They also seem less integrally related to the holy entity which they cover, in contrast with the other images which all relate to organic processes. This more contingent relationship to the covered entity could have a variety of divergent consequences. On the one hand, garments are more easily discarded than husks, hair, or foreskins – and, therefore, it may be easier to purify an enclothed holy entity than one that is, for example, uncircumcised. From this perspective, theurgy would seem more effective if one is merely dealing with garments rather than an organic covering.[32] On the other hand, garments are also more easily donned, making black theurgy seem more possible and dangerous.[33] In short, the greater contingency of garments in contrast with

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[32] 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.

[33] 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, to the theurgical effects of human action, associated with the Lurianic model of *yosher*. See *Sefer Pitḥe She'arim,* II, 14a-b

organic coverings makes them more susceptible to all kinds of human action, whose effects on them appear 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, such counter-factual uses of images are commonplace in the kabbalistic imagination), and even hair requires a good deal longer to grow back than garments require to be put back on.

Finally, I note that one might imagine 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, the portrayal of aggressive enclothing in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* and *Ra'ya Mehemena*, with its distinctive blending of the Zoharic notions of enclothing and erotically charged "cleaving," entails the notion that enclothing can cause the deepest kind of contamination. Repudiating any impression that enclothing is merely external, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* uses the verse, "he hath defiled the sanctuary of YHVH" (Numbers 19:20) [את מקדש יהוה טמא] to describe the effects of demonic garments on the divine.[34] 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.[35] By associating the seemingly external notion of enclothing with the "defilement of the sanctuary," and then with a garment marked by 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 consider that the "defilement of the sanctuary" verse is often cited in the Zohar to portray the illicit sexual union of the Shekhinah with the *Sitra Aḥra*, the "casting of *zohama*" into her. And it is this association of enclothing with both sexual contamination and monstrous ontological

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[34] *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*, I, 17b. In any event, the very attempts at such mitigation suggest the seriousness of the perceived threat of contamination from enclothing.
[35] Leviticus 19:19.

hybridity that demands further reflection on the relationship between aggressive enclothing and the two processes described in Chapter Two, abjection and crystallization.

In Chapter Two, I described the emergence of the demonic realm in relation to the two processes of abjection and crystallization. In the fullest elaborations of this emergence, the Zohar narrates 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." Nevertheless, the phenomenal link between the two stages, as I noted in Chapter Two, is shrouded in mystery. No explanation is given for this facility of abjected miasma to crystallize into a mighty structured realm of evil. By contrast, in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*'s use of the "contamination of the sanctuary," tightly associating the Zoharic "casting of *zohama*" with aggressive enclothing, we find, not merely a link, but an implicit identification of the two seemingly incongruous, yet successive, processes of abjection and crystallization. In aggressive enclothing, crystallized demonic "garments" paradoxically converge, or even become identified, with miasmic "*zohama*." Far from constituting a superficial contiguity, the enclothing of the divine sefirot by the demonic sefirot simultaneously casts implicitly sexual "*zohama*" in 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 "*sha'atnez*." This monstrous hybrid is the product of the deep blending of the divine and demonic sefirot, which is simultaneously their ostensibly superficial enclothing relationship. To be sure, the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*'s identification of sexual contamination with enclothing, the convergence of the Zoharically distinct encounters with the abject and with the crystallized demonic, yields formulations that are just as catachrestic as the Zohar's portrayals of them as distinct processes. Indeed, 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 seemingly non-Hebraic and semantically obscure.

In Lurianic texts, the convergence of the themes of abjection and crystallization comes to play a key role in the cosmic drama, though in a very different way than in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*. In such texts, it is the vital core of divine identity itself that is violently abjected from the divine to the demonic and back again. I refer here to the Lurianic portrayal of a combat in which one set of elements, the nine upper sefirot of *Malkhut*, shift violently between the two realms – specifically between the Shekhinah and Lilith. Thus, in the *Ets Ḥayim*, Vital describes the black theurgical consequences of Adam's sin as the enclothing of the nine upper sefirot of the Shekhinah by her demonic counterpart, 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].[36] Tishby explains this process as the "transformation of the holy sefirot themselves into the sefirot of the female of the *kelipah*"[37] – enclothing as destroying the existing identity of the enclothed and bestowing upon it a new identity.

Moreover, Vital cites the rabbinic dictum, "Tyre was only filled from the ruins of Jerusalem" [לא נתמלאה צור אלא מחרבנה של ירושלים],[38] to describe the construction of Lilith through her enclothing the nine upper sefirot of the Shekhinah. The ruins of "Jerusalem," a common kabbalistic name for the Shekhinah, would thus be identified with her nine sefirot, "destroyed" by being taken from her and deported to the demonic. The "filling" of Lilith, in turn, would consist of the ruins of the Shekhinah as they become the core of her rival. This deportation, this abjection of the sefirot from the one to the other, is understood as their violent wresting away from one garment, the "one point" of the Shekhinah, and their enclothing by the demonic "one point" of Lilith. Lilith's identity would thus be constructed on a foundation of ruins, the "destroyed" nine sefirot, which paradoxically become the core of her subjectivity, as they formerly were of that of the Shekhinah. Destruction and construction, abjection and crystallization, become identical processes in the deportation of the sefirot from one realm to the other.

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[36] *Ets Ḥayim*, II, 110b. See Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra,* 89.
[37] Tishby, *Torat Ha-Ra,* 89.
[38] E.g., *Ets Ḥayim*, II, 110b. 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.

While the "Tyre/Jerusalem" dictum may suggest only the construction of the demonic from the refuse/core of the divine, the logic of the "enclothing" struggle is that it should be reversible. And, indeed, a reversal of the dictum is formulated in a late text written within the Lurianic framework, Shlomo Elyashiv's *Sha'are Haleshem*: "for the construction of Jerusalem is from the destruction of Tyre" [כי בנין ירושלים הוא מחורבנה של צור].[39] Elyashiv associates these terms, 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. Thus, not only is the demonic built from the ruins of the holy side, the holy side is constructed from the ruins of the demonic.

The uses of the Tyre/Jerusalem dictum by Vital and Elyashiv can, moreover, be viewed as an elaboration of an allusion to it in a passage 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][40] – an implicit reference to the Tyre/Jerusalem dictum. Indeed, the *Ra'ya Mehemena* makes this statement in the context of comparing the clothing of the two females, and their inversely related dignified and abject states.[41]

In sum: in post-Zoharic texts, aggressive enclothing gradually becomes the crucial weapon of violent combat between the divine and the demonic. In Lurianic texts, it becomes the means by which each rival seeks to take possession of the vital core of identity. The construction, the "filling," of one figure is the depletion of other, as the sefirot are cast from one realm to the other. The Lurianic "nine sefirot" are thus both inchoate, abject ruins and the vital core, the crystallization of identity. These

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[39] *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.

[40] *Ra'ya Mehemena*, in *Zohar* III, 272b.

[41] To be sure, the use of the clothing imagery in the *Ra'ya Mehemena* is very different than in the Lurianic texts I am discussing here. The *Ra'ya Mehemena* passage compares the states of the two females on Friday night. The Shekhinah is adorned with crowns 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, manifested by her degraded garments.

ruins/foundations are repeatedly, and simultaneously, destroyed and rebuilt through human and cosmic history as they are cast from one realm to another. This convergence between the themes of abjection and crystallization in later kabbalah, like the notion of aggressive enclothing itself, is a considerable development beyond its Zoharic sources, though latent in them.

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. Shabetai Tsevi's conversion to Islam was described as putting on a "garment," that of Ishmael, a description often focused on a specific garment, the Turkish turban.[42] Nathan of Gaza cites 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][43] to refer to Shabetai's donning of the turban.[44] Significantly for my argument, Nathan connects this "bad garment" in the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* to a passage in the *Ra'ya Mehemena* which portrays the Shekhinah "imprisoned" by Lilith, who is the "grave" as well as the "evil handmaiden."[45] The *Ra'ya Mehemena* passage stresses that the two females are structurally homologous, each composed of seven levels. Nathan's association of Lilith with the "bad garment" may suggest that he interprets the passage as portraying the aggressive enclothing of the Shekhinah (and the messiah which he associates with her) by Lilith, associated with the turban – the latter association already made, as we have seen, three centuries earlier by Moshe of Burgos.

Moreover, in accordance with the convergence in aggressive enclothing between crystallization and abjection, the *Ra'ya Mehemena* portrays Lilith not only as a substantial, 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, though only from the side of the "Tree of Good and Evil." This image of

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[42] 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.
[43] *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, 93b.
[44] 'Igeret Natan Ha-Azati', 244; 'Letter to Shemu'el Primo', 270-271.
[45] *Ra'ya Mehemena*, at *Zohar* III, 282a.

the abject-as-fertilizer provides an organic explanation for the link between abjection and crystallization, absent from the Zohar itself.   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 juxtapose abjection and crystallization: impregnable grave *and* miasmic filth, constraining prison *and* productive fertilizer.

The ambivalence toward the demonic expressed in this *Ra'ya Mehemena* passage is highlighted in Nathan of Gaza; indeed, the passage itself refers to Lilith by none other than the name "Shabetai."[46] This ambivalence becomes elaborated in Sabbatean writing about garments, in the form of the shifting valorizations of the "turban," already described in Nathan's early post-apostasy writings as both a "bad garment" and the "holy turban."[47] Another Sabbatean writer quotes Shabetai Tsevi himself as declaring that the meaning of the turban is indeterminate, that both the turban and the traditional Jewish headcovering can signify either good or evil.[48] The vicissitudes of enclothing in Sabbatean writings thus highlight the dangerous indeterminacy intrinsic to aggressive enclothing, the possibilities of impersonation that can work in both directions of the divine-demonic divide.

Indeed, according to the 18th century Moshe Ḥayim Luzzatto, it was precisely the cognitive and spiritual dangers implicit in enclothing that led directly to Sabbatean error. In the following passage from his anti-Sabbatean tract, *Kin'at Hashem Tseva'ot*, Luzzatto concisely portrays the danger of impersonation that can result from enclothing:

דע לך אחי, כי כאשר חטאו ישראל, גרמו לשכינה להיות מתלבשת בקליפות בעבורם, וההתלבשות
הזה נעשה בבחינה פרטית... כי צריך שיהיה בבחינה פרטית אשר תניח מקום לס"א להיות סובבת
והולכת. 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

[46] In context, of course, this name refers to Saturn. Cf. *Idel, Saturn's Jews: On the Witches' Sabbat and Sabbateanism*, *passim.*

[47] 'Igeret Natan Ha-Azati', 244; 'Letter to Shemu'el Primo', 270-271.

[48] Scholem, *Meḥkerei Shabta'ut*, 111.

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.[49]

> Know my brother, that when Israel sinned, they caused the Shekhinah to be
> enclothed in the *kelipot* because of them, and this enclothing was done in a
> particularized fashion. … It was necessary to do this in a particularized fashion in
> order to leave room for the *Sitra Aḥra* to move about. And this place is a place of
> great danger, because it is there that the *Sitra Aḥra* 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 *Sitra Aḥra* 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 impersonation and
prosopopeia very similar to that cited by the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*, though this time the
speaking idol is not that of Nebuchadnezzar but of Jeroboam:

ועתה אודיעך בזה סוד גדול מאד מאד. כי ירבעם הלביש את הקדושה בס"א בעבודתו, 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 *Sitra Aḥra* through his [idol-]worship and, thereupon, this
> caused the calf[-idol] to say, "I am YHVH your Elohim."[50]

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[49] Luzzatto, *Kin'at Hashem Tzeva'ot*, 91-93.
[50] *Ibid.*, 104. The Talmudic sources for this incident are *bSotah,* 47a and *bSanhedrin,* 107b.

It is 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.[51]

Moreover, citing the Lurianic description of the construction of Lilith by means of enclothing the fallen nine sefirot of the Shekhinah, Luzzatto constructs a brief, but vivid, fable that brings together many of our themes.[52] The fable begins with a Lilith who has achieved completion through this enclothing, as a result of human sin. Demonic creatures crowd around her, baying for her capture, because they are able to perceive that the Shehkinah is enclothed within her. The Shekhinah succeeds in escaping from total capture by these demonic forces only at the last moment.

Luzzatto further explains his fable by identifying it with the midrashic-style gloss found in the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and *Tikune Ha-Zohar* about Esther, a figure he identifies with the Shekhinah.[53] These works declare that it was a demonic twin, and not Esther, who had sex with Ahasuerus. (It is, of course, significant for my argument here that this gloss about impersonation is found specifically in these post-Zoharic works.) Moreover, Luzzatto further links this gloss to the themes of this section by declaring that the demoness was constructed from the "*zohama* of Esther herself," from a "defect" in her that "required purification."[54] By declaring that the demoness was constructed from the "*zohama*" of Esther, and affirming the identity of this story with the construction of Lilith from the nine sefirot of the Shekhinah, this passage in Luzzatto explicitly pronounces the

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[51] *Kin'at Hashem,* 104.

[52] *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 הקליפות, 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*. And all the ranks of the *kelipot*, when they see that the Shekhinah is enclothed there, think, heaven forbid!, that they can dominate her. Indeed, 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.

[53] *Ra'ya Mehemena*, at *Zohar* III, 276a; *Tikune Ha-Zohar* 58a.

[54] *Kin'at Hashem*, 96:

והנה השידה הזאת היתה מבחינת הזוהמה של אסתר עצמה...איזה פגם שצריך טהרה

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identity of the abject (the "refuse" of Esther) with the core of the subject (the nine sefirot).

These passages from Luzzatto bring together a variety of themes I have discussed in this section, above all the deep intertwining of abjection and crystallization implicated in aggressive enclothing as it developed from the Zohar to the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* / *Ra'ya Mehemena* to Lurianic kabbalah and beyond. 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 subjectivity-disintegrating effects that are the hallmarks of experiences of abjection, as well as the subjectivity-constituting effects that are the hallmarks of crystallization.

The full unfolding of this dynamic required two steps beyond the Zohar. First, the *Ra'ya Mehemena* and the *Tikune Ha-Zohar* developed the notion of enclothing as capture of the divine by the demonic (to be sure, mitigated by those passages which portray it as the domination of the demonic by the divine!). The freeing of the divine consists in the divine divesting itself of the demonic garments and replacing them with "beautiful garments." The second stage is 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 mutual expropriation.

In the later texts, we thus see the *Sitra Aḥra* constructed not through the two stage process of abjection followed by crystallization, but rather through a convergence of the two processes: the simultaneous destruction/construction of filth/foundations as they are cast from the divine to the demonic. The imagery of enclothing also facilitates reversibility, yielding 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 subjectivity.

The notion of aggressive enclothing emerges, by definition, after portrayal of the initial abjection and construction of the two realms, for it is only after the construction of each that 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 authors of the Zohar 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 metaphysical history of the cosmos.

C. *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 Holy One blessed be He works a great miracle, he sifts siftings [or, clarifies clarifications/purifies purifications] from the mystery of this *tehiru* … And on this *tehom* stand Sama'el and his female consort.

> - Nathan of Gaza[55]

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 shifting back and forth of long-standing elements. As Luzzatto warns, a world in which the divine is doubled by the divine, 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. It is a world in which the production of dualism, to use the terms I elaborated at the beginning of Chapter Two in questioning Tishby's notion of Lurianic "catharsis," can no longer achieve its goal. Lurianic kabbalah portrayed divine emanation as a mechanism to separate out evil

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[55] Nathan of Gaza, 'Derush Ha-Taninim', 19.

into an autonomous realm, as a preliminary step for its ultimate destruction.[56] The phenomenon of aggressive enclothing thoroughly undermines this process. The strategy of purification-through-separation becomes meaningless if the *Sitra Aḥra* builds itself precisely through capturing fully constituted structures of the divine, and if, conversely, the divine builds itself through re-capturing those structures. Above all, it cannot work if the demonic structures produced through the purification of the divine themselves become the means by which the divine is re-contaminated with the demonic. Ultimately, aggressive enclothing is the ultimate proof that the paradox of abjection – the need to separate oneself from that which it is impossible to separate oneself – defeats all strategies that depend on a segregation, as well as unification, of the two realms.

This dilemma compels us to look for another way out of 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 means of new crystallizations, which requires a return to the formless abject. This path to 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 the crystallized demonic back into the abject, as a precondition to the re-creation of the divine. This alternative to the oscillating capture and re-capture of old, reified elements, the alternative of new crystallizations, indeed of unlocking new paths to creativity, is the theme of this section.

In the *Derush Ha-Taninim*, Nathan of Gaza asks, "why has the *tehom* [the abyss, תהום] remained in this world [מדוע נשאר התהום בעולם הזה]?"[57] Nathan's defines the term *tehom* by associating it with a number of other terms – above all, with the bottom part of the *tehiru* [טהירו], which, in one version of the Lurianic expropriation of Zoharic terms, is the empty space left behind after the *tsimtsum.* For Nathan, this is the part of the *tehiru* that has not yet received form from the direct light of emanation, the *kav ha-yashar* [קו הישר]. He also associates this region with the term "*golem*,"[58] used in medieval philosophical

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[56] See Tishby, *Torah Ha-Ra,* 53.
[57] 'Derush Ha-Taninim,' 19.
[58] *Ibid.*

writing to refer to unformed matter,[59] as well as Zoharically associated with the *tehiru*.[60] These associations are consistent with Nathan's notion that "all the worlds were emanated" from the *tehiru*.[61] Together, they produce a portrayal of the *tehom*, the abyss, as indispensable to creativity, indeed, as its privileged site.

The *golem*, however, is not only in need of form, but of *berur* [בירור], the separation of its good from its bad elements. Nathan associates the *kelipot* with the series of terms *tehiru/tehom/golem*, defining them in almost identical terms: "for all the *kelipot* are called *golem*, something which is not *mevorar* [כי כל הקליפות נקראות גולם דבר שאינו מבורר]."[62] The *tehom* seems to be both the locus of the *kelipot* and also at least partly identified with them. This identification of the *tehom* 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."[63]

Nathan's question – "why has the *tehom* remained in this world?" – thus concerns the existence of the *kelipot* as well as the persistence of a formless region of the cosmos. 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 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 formlessness:

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.[64]

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[59] Nathan's identification of the *tehom* with the golem is also undoubtedly a distant progeny of Naḥmanides' identification of Tohu with "hylic matter" in his commentary to *Bereshit* 1:1.

[60] *Zohar* I, 15a. I note that these terms, particularly *tehiru*, have a very different sense in the Zoharic context.

[61] 'Derush Ha-Taninim', 18.

[62] *Ibid.* 17.

[63] Avraham bar Ḥiya, *Hegyon Ha-Nefesh*, 2a: שני חלקי ההיולי יש ממנה זך ונקי ויש ממנה טינופת ושמרים.

[64] 'Derush Ha-Taninim', 19.

The reason is that each time the *Kadosh Barukh Hu* 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 *El* creates through his wonders. And this is the mystery of "the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea" [Exodus 15:8]. Also the King Messiah has already sifted [clarified/purified] several times from it.

The *tehom*/*tehiru*/*golem*/*kelipot* function 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 *Kadosh Barukh Hu* and Shabetai Tsevi, an association that, of course, grew increasingly important as Sabbateanism developed.

The notion of a deep link between the highest divine creativity and the lowest, demon-ridden depths is strikingly prefigured in a well-known passage from *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, though I have not yet found explicit reference to it in the relevant kabbalistic texts. Foreshadowing Nathan's interpretation of the *tehom* as the part of the *tehiru* where the divine light has not yet reached, 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[65]

> The wind of the northern corner: 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).

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[65] *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, 8b.

In bold mythological fashion, the *Pirke 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 Rabbi Eliezer*, as much later in Nathan, associations between the unfinished quality of the cosmos and the demonic are undoubtedly distant echoes of the older midrash which portrays the demons as not fully finished creations, which I discussed in Chapter Two. In Kristevan terms, the unfinished "North" with its not-fully-constituted demonic denizens is the realm of the abject, that which has not been able to be assimilated into bounded identities.

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 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 kabbalistic texts claim makes the adept a partner with the divine – indeed, able to participate in the very construction of the divine *partsufim*. The *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* passage, perhaps against its intentions, can be read 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." I would maintain that this possibility is made explicit in the words of Nathan of Gaza, "and on this *tehom* stand Sama'el and his female consort."[66]

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[66] 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.

In between the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* and Nathan of Gaza lies classical kabbalah, above all the Zohar. The portrayal of creation as requiring engagement with the *tehom* after battle with a diabolical being is the subject of the lengthy Zoharic passage I broached in the Introduction, the so-called *Ma'amar Ha-Taninim*, whose exegesis forms the basis of Nathan's *Derush Ha-Taninim*. The key text is the following:

בגין דהא תהומא לתתא לא הוה נהיר, מאי טעמא לא הוה נהיר, בגין דהאי התנין הגדול הוה נשיב רוחא על תהומא ואחשיך ליה, ולא מרפרפא לתתא, ועבר (נ"א ועכ"ד) רוחא אחרא דלעילא, ונשב (נ"א דנשב) ובטש בההוא רוחא ושכיך ליה, הדא הוא דכתיב ורוח אלהי"ם מרחפת על פני המים, והיינו דתנינן דקודשא בריך הוא בטש רוחא ברוחא וברא עלמא. ויאמר אלהי"ם יהי אור ויהי אור, נהיר נהירו דלעילא, ובטש על גבי רוחא דנשיב, ואסתלק מעל תהומא, ולא חפא ליה, כיון דתהומא אתנהיר ואיהו אסתלק, כדין הוה נהירו[67]

> For the *tehom* below did not shine. Why did it not shine? Because this Great Dragon blew upon the *tehom*, darkening it, not undulating below. Another wind - from above – blew, striking that wind, taming it, as is written: *and the spirit of Elohim moved upon the face of the* tehom (Genesis 1:2). This corresponds to what we have learned, that *Kudsha Berikh Hu* struck wind against wind and created the world. *Elohim said, Let there be light! And there was light* (Genesis 1:3) Radiance from above shone, striking the blowing wind, and he [the Dragon] withdrew from the *tehom*, covering it no more. Once the *tehom* was illumined and he withdrew, then there was illumination.[68]

As I noted in Chapter Two, the necessary prerequisite to the achievement of the third verse of Genesis ("let there be light") is the defeat of the dragon who blocks access to the *tehom*, identified by Nathan with Sama'el and his consort. Moreover, this text stresses that the illumination of which that verse speaks is precisely the illumination of the *tehom*, an illumination which would thus be the key to the creation of the cosmos, indeed to creativity itself.

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[67] *Zohar* II, 34b-35a.
[68] Matt IV, 154 (translation of the text and the biblical quotations modified).

Another Zohar passage that shows that the full construction of the divine must engage with the abyss takes its imagery from the re-construction of Jerusalem, implicitly identified with the Shekhinah, in the time of the final redemption.

זמין קודשא בריך הוא למבני יסודי ירושלם, מיסודין אחרנין דישלטון על כלא, ומאן אינון, ספירין, דכתיב (ישעיה נד יא) ויסדתיך בספירים, דאלין אינון יסודין וסמכין תקיפין ועלאין, דלית להון חלישו כקדמאי, מאי טעמא, בגין דאבנין קדמאין מאינון יסודי, 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 ספירין דינהרון לעילא ותתא[69].

> *Kudsha Berikh Hu* will one day build the foundations of Jerusalem out of other foundations that will prevail against 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 supports, without any weakness like the first ones. How so? Over the former stones of the foundations, other nations could prevail. Why? Because they lacked suitable supernal radiance. But these will shine with supernal radiance and be embedded in the abysses [*tehome*], so that no one can overpower them. These are sapphires that will shine above and below.[70]

The strength of the renewed cosmic structure will lie in the fact that the new "supernal foundations and pillars" will "plunge into the *tehome*."   It is only such a structure that is immune from domination by the forces of the *Sitra Aḥra*, here figured as the "other nations." By contrast, the passage implies, the initial "pillars" did not engage with the abyss and therefore were subject to destruction.

The role of the *tehom* in these passages is not altogether unambiguous. The passages 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 *tehom.* 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. However, whether the *tehom* is itself a

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[69] *Zohar* II :240a-b.
[70] Matt VI, 391 (translation modified).

neutral, potentially good entity 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, is not altogether clear. It is possible to read the first passage as more in line with the former interpretation and the second with the latter, but these associations are far from obvious.

Indeed, the *tehom* appears in the Zohar in a number of divergent roles – divergences which may make it one of the Zohar's mythological images *par excellence*, resistant to univocal interpretation. Perhaps most often, particularly when it appears in the phrase "the crevice of the great *tehom*" [נוקבא דתהומא רבא], it is clearly the domain of the demonic, the place from which evil forces emerge and to which they retreat when defeated.[71] Indeed, when the demonic forces retreat to the *tehom*, they may even be viewed as undergoing de-crystallization to abject formlessness. In this role, the *tehom* is clearly the locus of the abject – or perhaps more precisely, the abject itself, the condition wherein entities dwell at their most disintegrated and degraded.

On the other hand, in at least one passage, the *tehom* is clearly associated with the Shekhinah. In this passage, the "six supernal days" [שיתא יומין עלאין] (evoking the six sefirot of *Kudsha Berikh Hu*) bring the "waters of the streams" [מיא דנחלי] (evoking the divine vitality from the upper levels of the sefirot, particularly *Binah*) into the "great *tehom*" [תהומא רבא] (which, following these evocations, must be the Shekhinah).[72] In a play on words, the passage associates this conveyance of vitality by the "six [שיתא, *shita*] days" to the *tehom* with the rabbinic image of the conveyance of fluids by the "pits" or "drains" [שיתין, *shitin*] below the altar in the Temple to the *tehom*.[73] The association of the *tehom* that lies below the *shitin* with creation is also a theme familiar from midrashic sources.[74]

In pre-kabbalistic midrashim, the connection between the entrance to the *tehom*, which lies beneath the altar, and creation, either the initial act of creation or the preservation of

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[71] E.g., *Zohar* I, 48a.
[72] *Zohar* I, 30a.
[73] See, e.g., *bSukah* 49a.
[74] See, e.g., *Midrash Tehilim*, 200b.

the world's existence, always involves the restraint of the *tehom*. [75] Such motifs do appear several times in the Zohar, at times with a very similar sense as in the earlier sources. [76] However, it is telling that the emphasis is just as often on transforming the *tehom* as with restraining it – often by penetrating it with light as in the excerpt from the *Ma'amar Ha-Taninim*. Some passages explicitly weave the midrashic motif of the destructively rising *tehom* into this newer portrayal, as in the following brief excerpt:

לבתר תהומא רבא הוה סליק בחשוכא, וחשוכא חפי כלּא, עד דנפק נהורא ובקע בחשוכא, ונפק ואתנהיר, דכתיב (איוב יב כג) מגלה עמוקות מני חשך ויוצא לאור צלמות. [77]

> Afterwards the great abyss [*tehoma*] arose in darkness, and darkness covered all, until light emerged and cleft the darkness and came 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). [78]

The transformations evoked by the verse from Job are, in the terms I have been using throughout, the emergence of new crystallizations from the abject; or, in Nathan of Gaza's language, the miraculous creation of wonders through the "congealing" of the *tehomot* [קפאו תהומות].

The most elaborate portrayal of such processes is provided in a lengthy passage in (not coincidentally) Zohar *Noaḥ*. [79] In this passage, the operation of light on the *tehom* 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 "*tehomin*" [תהומין] involved in this process – beginning with the action of seven lights on seven *tehomin*, as "each knocked on its own *tehom*" [כל חד בטש בתהומא דיליה]. [80] The influence of the lights on the *tehomin* leads to the construction of an elaborate system of "channels" [צינורין], "veins" [גידין], and "nets"

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[75] *bSukah* 51a-b; *bSanhedrin* 52b; *Midrash Shemu'el*, 41a.
[76] E.g., *Zohar* II, 91b.
[77] *Zohar* I, 30b.
[78] *Soncino* I, 116 (translation modified).
[79] *Zohar* I, 51b-52a.
[80] *Zohar* I, 51b.

[רשתין], overseen by two "thrones" [כורסוון], to conduct the various flows and interactions among light, darkness, and water. The passage appears to state the goal of this structured interaction at the outset: "and they blend as one, lights, darknesses, and waters, and they become lights whose darkness is not visible" [ואתערבו כחדא נהורין וחשוכין ומיין ואתעבידו מנייהו נהורין דלא אתחזאן חשוכאן].[81] Formlessness becomes so completely permeated by structure until it is no longer perceptible as such.

While this passage is a highly elaborate example of the structuring, rather than the restraint, of the *tehom*, it still accords it a rather unequal, passive role compared with the light. Another passage, however, gives it a more equal role, in which the *tehom*, more precisely a "drop" from the *tehom*, becomes one of two indispensable poles in the process of creation. The other pole is a flame from the *botsina de-kardinuta*, which emerges, as we learn at the beginning of the Zohar *Bereshit*, from the *tehiru* – which, for the Zohar, is the highest level of the divine or proto-divine, perhaps identified with the sefirah of *Keter* or its proto-form. 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 דקודשא בריך הוא למברי עלמא אפיק חד שלהובא דבוצינא דקרדינותא, ונשף זיקא בזיקא חשכאת ואוקידת ואפיק מגו סטרי תהומא 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 ודסליק נחית אתקטרו דא בדא נפיק מבינייהו רוח שלים כדין אינון תרין סטרין אתעבידו חד ואתייהיב בינייהו ואתעטרו חד בחד כדין אשתכח שלם לעילא ושלם לתתא[82]

> When it arose in the will of *Kudsha Berikh Hu* to create the world, He generated a single flame from the lamp of impenetrable darkness [*botsina de-kardinuta*], and blew spark against spark. It darkened and ignited. From the recesses of the abyss [*tehoma*], He brought forth a single drop and joined them as one, thereby creating the world. The flame ascended, crowned on the left; the drop ascended, crowned on the right. They arose, one in one; they exchanged places, this to this side, this

[81] *Ibid.*
[82] *Zohar* I, 86b-87a.

to this side. The one that descended ascended, that which ascended descended. They were bound each to the other, this to this. Amidst them issued perfect spirit, so those two sides turned into one; it was placed between them – they were crowned one with one. Then peace prevailed above, peace below…[83]

The very emergence of light in this passage is contingent on the dance between the "flame" and the "drop," the *tehiru* and the *tehom*, the highest and lowest levels of the cosmos. The indispensable exchanges of places and reversals of roles between these poles sheds light on the otherwise puzzling phenomenon that the Zohar's *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 and, indeed, to be identified with the *tehom*.[84] It can also make sense of the fact that the *tehom,* in some post-Zoharic kabbalistic texts, can signify the highest reaches of the divine, the sefirot of *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*.[85]

Indeed, in the Zohar itself, the two seemingly opposite cosmic poles, the *tehom* and the *tehiru,* have much in common. Both are limitless regions about which little can be said beyond their limitlessness; both need to be limited in order to create a structured, articulated cosmos. It is significant in this context that, in the passage just quoted portraying the creation of the world out of the interaction between the *tehiru* and the *tehoma*, it is the "flame of the *botsina de-kardinuta*" that engages the *tehom*. It is, of course, the *botsina de-kardinuta* that, in the beginning of Zohar *Bereshit*, sets a limit on the infinite *tehiru* to yield particularity, there in the form of determinate colors.

Moreover, just as one can find in the Zohar and post-Zoharic kabbalah a set of ambivalences about the *tehom* – ally and enemy of form-giving light, highest and lowest region of the cosmos – so one finds a set of ambivalences about the threshold between the *tehom* and the cosmos, specifically about a hard slab, either stone or pottery, that controls access between them. The Zohar's accounts of this threshold are constructed through

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[83] Matt I, 54-55 (translation modified).
[84] On this transformation of the Zoharic *tehom* in some strands of Lurianic kabbalah, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 29
[85] *Pardes,* I, 15c; Horvitz, *Sefer Shefa Tal*, 48b.

merging and adapting a number of distinct rabbinic narratives. One narrative, of which several versions are extant and which is important here for the way it combines linguistic and ontological power, portrays King David's excavation of the Temple Mount, preparing the channels to serve as drainage for the altar. At 1500 cubits, he finds a slab of pottery – which then speaks, informing him that it descended to that point, blocking up the *tehom*, as a result of an act of divine power, either the Sinai epiphany or the "splitting of the earth," perhaps alluding to the Koraḥ cataclysm. Undeterred, driven on by an erotically charged hubris, David removes the pottery and the *tehom* rises up and threatens to destroy the world. David inscribes the divine name on another slab of pottery and casts it into the *tehom*, thereby taming it and saving the world.[86] A second narrative concerns the *even ha-shtiyah* [אבן השתיה], a stone which God casts, or kicks, into the *tehom* to serve as the foundation of the world, also called the "navel [טבור] of the world."[87] A third source is the Talmudic definition of Bohu: "smooth (or slimy) stones, submerged in the *tehom,* from which water issues forth" [אבנים המפולמות המשוקעות בתהום שממנו יוצאין מים].[88] Note that the *tehom* may be viewed as differently valorized 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 reappropriated, in the Zohar. One short passage in the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam* on *Bereshit* restates all three in barely altered form without much attempt to synthesize them.[89] The more elaborate Zoharic passages, however, transform these midrashim, though with different emphases and in divergent, sometimes incompatible ways. Most significantly for my purposes, they generally refuse to take for granted the dichotomy between the formed and the formless, slab and abyss, but rather, explore the opposition narratively in a number of ways. First, they provide a genealogy for the slab, often implying that it is a congealment of the *tehom* itself. Second, as in the portrayals of abjection-and-crystallization that I have

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[86] I have presented something of a composite of three sources: *Midrash Shemu'el*, 41a; *bSukah,* 53a-b; *ySanhedrin*, 52b.
[87] *Midrash Tehilim* 91.
[88] *bḤagigah*, 12a.
[89] *Zohar Ḥadash,* 2d.

analyzed at length in Chapter Two, they portray congealment, de-congealment, and re-congealement as recurrent processes, their vicissitudes depending on the state of the cosmos. Third, they suggest the necessity of engagement with the *tehom* for the creative process. Finally, they all emphasize the overlap of linguistic and ontological processes, a theme already contained in the rabbinic sources and central to my study.

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* begins by portraying the stone that disciplines the *tehom* as originating in the divine casting of snow into the waters – an image whose source, as I discussed in Chapter Two, is the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*. This act freezes one region of the *tehom*, yielding a stone "submerged in the center of the *tehom*" [אבן אחת משוקעת באמצא התהום] that rises up to become the "point of the world" [נקודת העולם].[90] 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 covered it, and were only pacified when God took a "*tseror*" [צרור][91] of pottery, inscribed his "name of 72 names" [שמו של ע"ב שמות] upon it, and cast it into the waters.[92] The Zohar *Yitro*'s version picks up the story at this point. In the spirit of earlier midrashic sources, but more explicitly, it personifies the *tseror*; like the *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam*, it also portrays it as particularly susceptible to the theurgical impact of human action. In keeping with the simultaneously linguistic/ontological dimensions of the *tseror*, this susceptibility particularly concerns oaths – performative linguistic acts. When a human being makes an oath, the *tseror* "ascends to receive that oath" [ההוא צרורא סלקא לקבלא ההוא אומאה]. If it is a true oath, the power of the *tseror* to "prevail on the *tehoma*" 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:

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[90] *Zohar Ḥadash*, 76a.
[91] צרור. The semantic range of this word in rabbinic literature includes knot, bundle, pebble, stone, and a piece of earthenware. Jastrow, *Dictionary,* 1300.
[92] *Zohar Ḥadash*, 76b.

ובשעתא דאומו בני נשא אומאה לשקרא, ההוא צרורא סלקא לקבלא לה לההיא אומאה, כיון דחזי
דאיהו דשקרא, כדין ההוא צרורא דהוה סליק תב לאחורא, ומיין אזלין ושטין, ואתוון דההוא צרורא
פרחן גו תהומי ואתבדרן, ובעאן מיא לסלקא לחפייא עלמא, ולאהדרא ליה כמלקדמין[93]

> At the moment when human beings swear a false oath, that *tseror* rises to receive
> that oath. As soon as it sees that it is false, then that *tseror* falls backwards, and
> the waters start surging, and the letters of that *tseror* fly into the *tehome* and
> scatter. And the waters seek to rise up and cover the world and to return the
> world 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 *tehome* and scatter, and the waters seek to rise up
and cover the world and to return it to its primordial state." This dissolution of identity,
produced by an encounter with a perversion such as a false oath in the name of God, is an
experience of abjection by now familiar in this study. The *tseror*'s experience of
abjection is both linguistic and ontological: with the dissolution of its language, it de-
crystallizes to become part of the *tehom* 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 יעזריא"ל, די ממנא על שבעין מפתחן ברזא דשמא קדישא,
ואעל לגביה דההוא צרורא, וחקיק ביה אתוון כמלקדמין, וכדין אתקיים עלמא, ואהדרו מיין
לדוכתייהו[94]

> … until *Kudsha Berikh Hu* summons one officer, *Ya'azri'el,* who is appointed
> over seventy keys of the mystery of the holy name. And he enters in to that

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[93] *Zohar* II, 91b.
[94] *Ibid.*

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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 of the *tseror* after its disintegration in the
tehom is reminiscent of, if not strictly identical to, the reconstruction of the "pillars"
through their "plunging" into the *tehom* 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 *tehom* – for since its material and linguistic substance dissolves into the *tehom*, its
reconstruction would seem to require a re-assemblage and re-congealment from there.

The notion of the slab as a congealment also appears in a very different, indeed inverse,
configuration, which appears in two closely related versions in the *Guf Ha-Zohar* and the
Sitre Torah in Zohar *Va-Yetse*.[95] 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 holy twin of the *tehom;* the slab here thus
threatens, rather than facilitates, the life of the cosmos. This configuration is presented as
the meaning of the 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). 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 *Guf Ha-Zohar* version tells us that the stone is a product of the cosmic "North"
[צפון] that causes the waters to "congeal" [למקרש].[96] The stone is also described as "the
strong form of hard judgment, that which freezes and congeals" [תקיפו דדינא קשיא, ההוא
דגליד וקריש].[97] The "North" that is identified with "hard judgment" is here either a
hypertrophied aspect of *Gevurah* which is very close to the demonic or is actually

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[95] *Zohar* I, 152a (*Guf Ha-Zohar* version); I, 151b-152a (*Sitre Torah* version).
[96] *Zohar* I, 152a.
[97] *Ibid.*

demonic. The stone that is a crystallization of this dimension can only be dissolved when the "South," the locus of *Ḥesed,* "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 "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 and a rock of offence' [Isaiah 8:14]" [אבן דמינה כשלי בני עלמא אבן נגף וצור מכשול].[98] It also equates Jacob's removal of the stone from the well with the "confusion of Satan" [ערבוביא דשטן].[99] The stone, like the *tseror* but with an inverse valence, is both a material object, in this case, a material impediment to the flow of vitality, and also a linguistic agency, a prosecutorial figure seeking to "demand judgment on the whole world, in order that nourishment and good not descend upon the world" [למתבע דינא דכל עלמא, דלא יחות מזונא וטב לעלמא].[100]

The Zohar thus gives us two diametrically opposed slabs, each set up as barriers to unlimited flows of metaphysical water. Both are congealments of flows that are themselves doubled, posing, respectively, the supreme cosmic danger and the supreme blessing. This doubling is expressed concisely in another passage marked by rhetorical parallelism and 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 corner stone' (Isaiah 29:16), rock of Israel, and all exists 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.].[101]   I note also that the positioning of Satan on the well recalls the positioning of the dragon on the *tehom* in the Zohar's "Ma'amar Ha-Taninim," as well as the positioning of Sama'el on the *tehiru* in Nathan of Gaza.

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[98] *Ibid.*,151b (*Sitre Torah*)
[99] *Ibid.*, 152a (*Sitre Torah*).
[100] *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.
[101] *Zohar* II, 249b. The "precious corner stone" is explicitly associated elsewhere with the *even ha-shtiyah.* *Zohar* I, 231a-b.

Significantly for the perspective adopted in this study, 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, מיין גלידין ולא נגדין לבר, ולא אשתקיין, בגין דדינא תליא, וקרירו דצפון גליד מיא].[102] For its part, the beneficent stone may be a congealment of the *tehom*, 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 *tehome*" [האי אבן אתברי מאשא ומרוחא וממיא, ואתגליד מכלהו ואתעביד אבנא חדא, וקיימא על תהומי].[103]

In light of these features of the two "stones" – viz., their doubling of each other and their formation as a congealment of fluid forces – I return to the proposition I stated at the beginning of this section: that the secret to renewed creativity lies in de-reification followed by a new crystallization from the formless. This process is easiest to see in the passage cited above about the "freezing" of the divine waters by the "north wind." The reversal of the process is their de-crystallization through unfreezing:

וכד אתער רוח דרום, מתחממי מיא ואתעבר גלידו דלהון ונגדין, כדין אתשקיין כלא, בגין דחמימו דדרום שראן מיא [104]

> And when the southern wind is aroused, the waters warm up and their ice passes away, and they flow. Then all is watered. The waters are released due to the warmth of the South.

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[102] *Zohar* I, 161b.
[103] *Zohar* I, 231a.
[104] *Zohar* I, 161b.

This de-crystallization is accomplished by the "south wind," the forces of *Ḥesed*, which releases the waters and bestows vitality on the cosmos. The Zohar explicitly gives this "warming" a sexual sense, a "heat" that leads to procreation.[105] Thus, the very substance that becomes a barrier to life, the waters in their frozen state, becomes the source of the renewed creation of life upon its de-crystallization.

I conclude with a very obscure passage in Zohar *Bereshit* which brings together many of these themes – though its thorough decipherment must be left for another day. This passage, I contend, is yet another reading of the first three verses of Genesis. It portrays the initial creation of the world as effected by letters in a seal, perhaps impressing themselves on something like hylic matter. After this initial creation (presumably an allusion to the first verse), they penetrate deep into the earth, causing the *tehom* to rise up and darken the world (presumably an allusion to the second verse).

סלקין אתוון לעילא ונחתין לתתא ...טופסרא דקילטא בהני שכיחי בחותמא דגושפנקא, 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

> 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 [*ḥivya*]. They struck and penetrated chasms of dust 1500 cubits. [*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 penetrated chasms of dust 1500 cubits"; 2)"They entered the seal, permutated, and the world endured. With the cudgels of the mighty serpent, they struck and penetrated chasms of dust 1500 cubits."*] Then the immense abyss [*tehoma*] ascended in darkness, and darkness covered all.[106]

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[105] The passage is a comment on Jacob's method of inducing his flocks to reproduce in specific ways in Genesis 31.

[106] Matt I, 182-183 for the main translation. 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 this parsing of the two sentences, though not the details

We then arrive at the passage's version of the third verse, with the disciplining of the abyss by light.

...עד דנפק נהורא ובקע בחשוכא ונפק ואתנהיר דכתיב (איוב י"ב) מגלה עמוקות מני חשך ויוצא לאור צלמות[107]

> ...until the light emanated, split the darkness, and radiated, as is written: *He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death.* (Job 12:22).[108]

In this passage, the signet inscribed with letters is the instrument of the creation of the world, which is capable of "enduring." Yet, like the midrashic David, the letters are driven on to "penetrate the chasms," an act that leads to "darkness covering all," endangering that cosmos. This penetration is not explained, although it is associated in some way with the demonic. In the Matt translation I have transcribed above, the world as initially created endures "by the cudgels of the mighty *ḥivya*." In this reading, the penetration of the "chasms" appears to have been necessitated, despite the severe dangers it involves, because the vitality of the primordial cosmos was blocked by its premature reification in the form of the "mighty *ḥivya*." The narrative would thus resemble the blockage of the *tehom* by the dragon in the "Ma'amar Ha-Taninim" 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* passages. The first "alternative translation" I have given above – in which the letters strike against the *ḥivya* in order to gain access to the *tehom* – directly aligns this breaking of the demonic blockage with those other passages. In either case, the seal must burrow down to the abyss, incurring the danger 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 multiplicity. The need to break this blockage of the *tehom* is thus

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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 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.
[107] *Zohar* I, 30a-b.
[108] Matt I, 182-183. I have substituted the KJV for Matt's scriptural translation.

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 that this releases are far from unequivocally beneficent. Rather, they are quintessentially ambivalent: both mortally dangerous *and* indispensable for the further unfolding of the creative process.

A second interpretation of this passage presents an even more radical possibility. This second interpretation, which is suggested by the second "alternative translation" above, allocates the "cudgels of the serpent" not to the place where the "world endured" but rather as the means by which the letters penetrate the chasms. This interpretation provides an intriguing link with the David narrative cited above. David's insistence on digging below the divinely implanted pottery, an act of hubris which some of the sources leave unexplained but to which the *Midrash Tehilim* implicitly attributes a desire for sexual conquest, seems to partake of a demonic character. The noun *kulfa*, קולפא, the instrument of the penetration of the "chasms," has elsewhere in the Zohar an explicitly phallic meaning, indeed in a context of sexual impropriety;[109] the term "chasms," moreover, is here denoted by the possessive of the term נוקבא, which can also simply mean a female being. In this reading, the penetration of the chasms is a demonically and erotically charged act, which threatens to destroy the cosmos. Yet, it is a demonic act which is, at the same time, indispensable for the unfolding of the creative process.

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[109] *Zohar* I, 57b.

Conclusion:
The Divine/Dunghill, or,
The Self ~~is~~ the Other

The confrontation with the demonic in the Zoharic tradition is an encounter with
"Otherness," with all its attendant fears, desires, violence, and hopes. This
characterization is by no means the imposition of a term familiar from recent academic
jargon, but rather, is drawn from the key Zoharic name for the demonic, the *Sitra Aḥra*.
Indeed, I would argue that the vicissitudes of the relationship to an Other who is both an
intimate, and yet an absolute opponent, of the Self is one of the key guiding threads that
runs through the Zoharic labyrinth as a whole. The vast set of discourses and rituals
concerned with evoking, naming, repressing, domesticating, annihilating, and embracing
the demonic Other are central to the Zohar's ontology, poetics, and, indeed, its
reinterpretation of Judaism as a whole. It is also my conviction that the Zohar's 13th
century discussions of the demonic have rich and complex consequences for current
concerns about Otherness, whether of the interpersonal, ethnic, racial, national, gendered,
or sexual varieties – though an elaboration of these consequences would take me far
beyond the scope of this thesis.

I have sought here to explicate the diversity, ambivalence, and often contradictory quality
of the Zohar's portrayals of Otherness. In particular, I have argued that the Zohar
portrays the demonic Other as inextricably related to divine and human subjectivity, and
have explored that relationship in terms of two main paradoxes. In relation to the initial
construction of subjectivity, the Other is both its precondition *and* the threat of its
dissolution; in relation to the already-constituted subject, it is both a terrifying *and*
fascinating double. These paradoxes inevitably required attention to the complex
relations in Zoharic textuality between poetics and doctrine, form and substance, rhetoric
and ontology.

On one level, these concerns about the relationship of language and being are simply in
keeping, not merely with kabbalistic discourse and ritual, but with a timeless tendency in
the Jewish tradition, going back at least to Genesis. However, when the very constitution
of subjectivity, including divine subjectivity, is in question, these dynamics take on a

particularly fraught quality. From the Zoharic perspective, the quintessential convergence of language and being in the Jewish tradition – Genesis 1:3's "Let there be light" – cannot even be uttered until the epic battle with the demonic Other, in the person of the Great Dragon, has been engaged. Divine speech itself, one might say, is thus only rendered possible through dangerous and never definitively decided struggles with Otherness.

If speech depends on the outcome of such struggles, any attempt to portray them in language necessarily puts one in a paradoxical, if not impossible, position. The stylistic distinctiveness of the Zohar – the heterogeneous imagery that defies phenomenal coherence, the trance-like schemes that shatter hermeneutic consistency – can be traced to this paradoxical condition. The ever-present possibility of non-correspondence between signifier and signified is not simply due to some general ineffability of the deepest secrets, but rather, is a consequence of the perennial threats posed by the demonic Other to the articulation of a stable meaning by a coherent subject. The Zohar portrays these threats, as I have shown, in terms of specific hazards, all of which have their rhetorical and ontological dimensions, including deception, seduction, and dissolution. But it also insists that engagement with the demonic is indispensable for linguistic and ontological creativity.

In Chapter Two, I showed how the Zohar portrays the emergence of an elaborately structured demonic realm as inextricably bound up with the emergence of the holy realm, as an inevitable byproduct of the constitution of divine subjectivity through processes of abjection. The links between theogony, cosmogony, abjection, and language are also evoked intriguingly in a non-Zoharic, kabbalistic appropriation of a Talmudic allegory, to which I made brief reference in that chapter. The allegory appears in the Talmud's discussion of the opening Mishnah of the second chapter of the tractate *Ḥagigah*, a chapter known by its significant 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 most esoteric secrets, 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 תרווייהו משל למלך בשר ודם שאמר לעבדיו בנו לי פלטירין
גדולין על האשפה הלכו ובנו לו אין רצונו של מלך להזכיר שם אשפה[1]

> [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 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 are intended to restrict human knowledge, it is useless to prohibit
knowledge of the past, because "what happened, happened." The allegory's answer
appears to be that the prohibition is not a restriction on knowledge, but a restriction on
speech, indeed a definition of the proper boundaries of human speech. On the temporal
plane, those boundaries begin subsequent to the "dunghill" stage; on the structural, even
architectural, plane, they begin above it.

To be sure, in a performative contradiction, enacting the violation of the very prohibition
it establishes, 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 is also implicitly suggesting

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[1] *bḤagigah* 11b, 16a .

that the Bible itself is engaged in such a violation.[2] Like many restrictions on speech, it seems impossible to establish the prohibition without transgressing it.

The allegory's interpretation by the 14th century *Sefer Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* 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.[3]

> 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. Nonetheless, the masters of the 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 revision 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 thus requires a reinterpretation of the Talmudic phrase "that which is before": for the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*, the "before," refers to the most primordial stage, the stage of the divine-as-dunghill, prior to the crystallization of the divine in forms amenable to human experience. This ontological association, even identification, of the

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[2] 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*, I, 1d (1:5).

[3] *Sefer Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut*, 131a.

abject with the primordial divine may be placed alongside the series of such portrayals in the Zohar.

The consequences for the relationship between language and being are no less significant than for ontology itself. In the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*, the prohibition on speaking of the "dunghill" becomes virtually irrelevant. No prohibition is necessary, for the 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 *portrayal 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 psychology, a portrayal of the threat posed to the subject when confronted with the genealogy of all subjectivity, even divine subjectivity, in abjection. Taking the human and divine implications of the allegory together, one arrives at the following: the primordial divine, the abject, must crystallize in a proper form in order to become the God of religion, the divine that can be an object of worship rather than of revulsion. To be sure, there is still room in the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* to argue that the "dunghill" quality of the divine is a result of a human incapacity to perceive the divine rather than something in the essence of the divine. The latter step, however, is overtly made in both the Lurianic and Zoharic readings of the allegory.

There are several explicit interpretations of the allegory by writers in late Lurianic texts.[4] These interpretations read the "dunghill" as referring to the dregs and refuse that are present in the seven lower sefirot, the vessels that "break" during the first series of emanations. The cosmos is "built on the dunghill" in the sense that it can only be firmly established after the dregs and refuse contained in the seven broken vessels have been

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[4] Gaon of Vilna, *Tikune Ha-Zohar Commentary*, 32b (*Tikune Zohar Ḥadash* section); Ḥaver, *Sefer Afike Yam*, 205; Yosef Ḥayim ben Eliyau, *Sefer Ben Yehoyada,* III, 49b.

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purified.[5] These readings thus combine aspects of the uses 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 divinely created world (as in the Talmudic allegory) as well as the notion that the "dunghill" may be identified with an aspect of the divine itself (as in the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut*, but even more boldly). To my mind, the persuasive strength of these readings is such that they might even suggest 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.[6]

How should the Zohar be situated among these options? The Zohar contains no explicit mention of the dunghill allegory or any identification of the word "dunghill" with the divine. Nonetheless, one may read Zoharic texts like those portraying the "the Kings of Edom," the precursors of the broken Lurianic "vessels" whose "repair" is identical to the construction of our cosmos, as implicitly referring to it.   Indeed, the opening section of the *Idra Raba* may be read as closely related, in the very details of its order of exposition, to the Talmudic passage cited above. The *Idra Raba*, one of the boldest mystical and mythological sections of the Zohar, is prefaced by a long discussion of the prohibition on revealing the deepest secrets as well as of the simultaneous necessity of doing so. Following this preface, we are told that the "place shook and the Companions shuddered" [אזדעזע אתרא, וחברין אתחלחלו][7] – a destabilization indicating that the secrets about to be expounded concern the most primordial levels of the cosmos, prior to its firm foundation. Rabbi Shim'on then commences the *Idra*'s first substantive exposition by quoting the verse about the Kings of Edom and proclaiming that it contains the deepest secrets. In a seemingly ironic reversal, however, he then exclaims that, on first reading, 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 Children of Israel and prior to

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[5] I am using this verb here as convenient shorthand for differently conceived processes in different texts.
[6] 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.
[7] *Zohar* III, 128a

דלא הוה ליה למכתב הכי, דהא חזינן כמה מלכים [!there being a king for the Children of Israel

[.הוו, עד דלא ייתון בני ישראל, ועד דלא יהא מלכא לבני ישראל [8]

The order of exposition here tracks very closely that in the Talmudic passage. The *Idra* begins with a discussion of the dangers of revealing secrets – just as the restrictive Mishnah "One May not Expound" is the preface to the boldest mystical and mythological pages in the Talmud. The specific matter which induces this overwhelming effect concerns the archaic past, the primordial Kings of Edom – evoking the Talmudic "what came before." Although the Zoharic challenge to the import of speaking about the past is the converse in form to that posed by the Talmud, it is very close in substance: i.e., 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 Talmud's question) or even speaking about it at all (the Zohar's question). 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 – evoking the Talmud's proceeding to its dunghill allegory.

And here the Zohar's story diverges from that of the Talmud in a direction similar to the *Ma'rekhet Ha-Elohut*, but making the ontological dimension more explicit – though in a way that brings out the darker side of the Talmudic allegory itself. The Talmudic 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 Zohar tells us that the Kings who perished were ontologically hidden away by *Atika Kadisha*, as a necessary step before he could proceed to a proper construction of the cosmos.[9] Most strikingly and theologically scandalously, the Zohar declares that the reason for the perishing of the Kings lay in the defective state of *Atika Kadisha* himself, in the fact that he had was not properly prepared in his *tikunin* and therefore produced defective creations.[10]

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[8] *Ibid.*

[9] "Until He put them aside and hid them" [עד דאנח להו ואצנע להו]. *Ibid.*

[10] See, e.g., *Zohar* III, 128a:

מנלן, מעתיק יומין, דעד דלא אתתקן הוא בתקונוי, לא אתתקנו כל אינון דבעו לאתתקנא, וכלהו עלמין אתחרבו, הדא הוא
דכתיב (שם) וימלוך באדום בלע בן בעור:

> Whence [do we know this]? From the Ancient of Days, for until he was rectified in his *tikunin,* all those who needed to be rectified were not rectified, and all the worlds were destroyed. This is as is written, "And there reigned in Edom Bela son of Be'or" [Genesis 36:32].

This last explanation clarifies a mystery I have so far left unexplored in the Talmudic allegory itself: its silence as to the reason that the King desired to build his palace on a dunghill, a desire of which he seems to feel ashamed. This desire, key to the Talmudic allegory, itself hints at a primordially abject divine subjectivity, its intimate, archaic connection with "dung." This primordially flawed nature of divine subjectivity is finally made explicit centuries later in the *Idra Raba*. Reading these texts together, we find that the most unspeakable and deepest secret of the Jewish esoteric tradition, first broached in the Talmud, is that the primordial divine is inextricably related to, indeed indistinguishable from, the abject – and that the simultaneous desire for the abject and revulsion from it, experienced by the divine subject itself, is an effect of their common origin.

As I have shown throughout this thesis, the abject is "unspeakable," both because of its miasmic state and because of the revulsion and horror it evokes. Encounters with it provoke linguistic and ontological dissolution. The effort to segregate it, however pyrrhic, is indispensable for the construction of the divine subject and thus of the cosmos. The Talmudic King forbids us to speak of it; the *Ma'arekhet Ha-Elohut* describes the dissolution of any subject who would approach it; the *Idra Raba* tells us that *Atika Kadisha* thoroughly concealed its byproducts [ואצנע להו].[11] Yet, the Zohar teaches us, such efforts also yield a crystallized form of the abject, the structured realm of the demonic with its own sefirot and *partsufim*. The two realms then come to double each other, and to engage in fraught relations of enmity, nurturance, seduction, and impersonation.

I thus 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 the thesis, I would suggest that this consequence is the notion that the demonic, even in its crystallized, separately nameable state, is another dimension of the divine – or, to put it as starkly as possible, that the Devil is another face of God. I have already given several examples of this possibility:

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[11] *Zohar* III, 128a.

Lilith as the Shekhinah in her initial, defective state; the diabolical, Esau-like Red-Haired *Ze'er* as the initial, defective state of the holy, shaven *Ze'er*, the divine "*Ish*," itself a lesser form of the divine "*Adam*";[12] and the *Tikune Ha-Zohar*'s image of the vengeful *kelipah* as the transmogrified God. One could add images from Lurianic kabbalah, such as the notion that the nine sefirot of Malkhut shift back and forth from divine to demonic forms, discussed in Chapter Three.

I would also add one more image, suggested by Yehudah Liebes, and related to my brief discussion in this Conclusion of the opening passage of the *Idra Raba*. Liebes speculates that the passage comes very close to identifying Edom, the realm of the Kings destined to perish, with the unrectified *Atika Kadisha* himself.[13] I recall that the passage explicitly lays the blame for the production of a defective cosmos, the realm of the Kings who "ruled in the land of Edom," on *Atika* himself, the *Atika* who is not "prepared in his *tikunin*." In accordance with Liebes' reading, we should read the "of" here as possessive, the land belonging to a figure called "Edom" – who must be none other than the (defective) creator of the "Kings," the flawed *Atika*. Like the proposal made by Wolfson that the "red-haired *Ze'er*" may be associated with Esau, this is a shocking suggestion, given the close associations in the Zohar between Sama'el and both Esau and Edom. Indeed, Liebes can only footnote a Sabbatean text for explicit support for this reading.[14] Nonetheless, given the *Idra*'s insistence that the defective state of the Kings of Edom reflects the defective state of their creator, the suggestion seems "only one step" beyond the explicit text, as Liebes declares. Taking the suggestions by Wolfson and Liebes together, the metaphysical Edom who is the quintessential adversary to the divine is the divine itself in its primordial state, a state it both desires and seeks to repress. Transposed to the human domain, an analogous set of notions applied to the earthly Edom, who always symbolizes in Jewish tradition the quintessential adversary of Israel, would have complicated political and ethical consequences beyond the scope of this work.

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[12] I take this notion from Wolfson, 'Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar', 81 n. 29.

[13] Liebes, 'Ha-Mythos Ha-Kabbali be-fi Orpheus', 30.

[14] *Ibid*., n. 89. The text is *Va-Avo Ha-Yom el Ha-Ayin*, often attributed to Yonatan Eybeschutz.

The ultimate teaching about the *Sitra Aḥra* would thus be that the demonic Other is the primordial condition of the holy Subject (human, national, or divine). As the name *Sitra Aḥra* suggests, the Other haunts the subject as its secret, never definitively locked away in a sealed-off temporal or geographical elsewhere, rendering its annihilation or incorporation forever impossible. It is thus far from gratuitous that both the Talmud and the Zohar attribute the deepest secrets to "that which came before": for in that primordial past lie secrets that can make the "earth shake and the companions shudder." 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.

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