

Assaulting the Border: Kabbalistic Traces in the Margins of Derrida

Elliot R. Wolfson

This study explores the thought of Jacques Derrida in relation to the esoteric wisdom of the traditional kabbalah, a comparison suggested by Derrida himself, who on occasion utilizes kabbalistic symbols to elucidate central tenets of deconstruction. This relationship should be construed as convergence rather than direct influence. In particular, two elements of the worldview of kabbalists bear close resemblance to Derrida: the belief that the materiality of being is textual and the special role assigned to the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable name, in illuminating the double bind of language, the unsaying that makes each saying (im)possible. It is especially in Derrida's analysis of the gift and secrecy that the resemblance to kabbalistic hermeneutics is most conspicuous: Just as the gifting of the gift is annulled in the giving of the gift, so the secret can be a secret only if it is disclosed as the secret that is hidden. In a manner consonant with kabbalists, moreover, the rite of circumcision is affirmed by Derrida as the figurative instantiation of the nexus that links language, secrecy, and the gift. For all of these similarities, however, there remains a fundamental difference between the ontological orientation of kabbalists and the heterological perspective of Derrida, a difference best illustrated in their respective understandings of the trace. For kabbalists the trace is a demarcation of the negative presence

Elliot R. Wolfson is the Abraham Lieberman Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University, New York, NY 10012-1075.

Journal of the American Academy of Religion September 2002, Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 475–514.
© 2002 The American Academy of Religion

of absence, whereas for Derrida it is the sign of the wholly other that is neither a presence nor an absence.

We dance around in a ring and suppose,
But the secret sits in the middle and knows.

—Robert Frost

PERHAPS THE MOST expedient way to discuss the relationship of Derrida and Jewish mysticism is to remain silent. This reticence is due neither to the traditional paradox of negative theology—how to speak of the unspeakable transcendence of God—nor to the contemporary challenge of deconstruction—how to speak at all when the meaning of words can never be rendered unambiguously clear.¹ The difficulty I face is far more prosaic: With all his literary accomplishments, and they are considerable, Derrida has not overtly professed expertise in any area of Judaic studies, let alone an area that is limited to a handful of specialists spread about several continents.² To be sure, in at least one context, Derrida delineates the three major components of kabbalah as “negativity in God,” “exile as writing,” and the “life of the letter” (Derrida 1974: 74; see Kilcher: 354–357). Elsewhere Derrida utilizes various kabbalistic motifs, including the image of the ungraspable column of air from zoharic literature, which he relates more generally to the depiction of the *sefirot* as a column of numerations; the Lurianic symbol of the “pneumatic layer” (*tehiru*) in which the contraction (*tsimtsum*) occurs, to which Derrida refers as the dramatic crisis of self-determination within God; and the notion of the messianic Torah of invisible letters written in white fire upon black fire, a theme that he associates especially with the Hasidic master, Levi Isaac of Berdichev, to articulate the polysemous nature of the text (Derrida 1981a: 342–345).³ In that context, Derrida offers an alternative taxonomic account of the Jewish occult tradition: “The Kabbalah is not only summoned up here under the rubric of arithmosophy or the science of literal permutations . . . it also cooperates with an Orphic explanation of the earth” (1981a: 342).⁴ In an-

¹ For discussion of Derrida and negative theology, see Foshay 1992a; Klemm; Srajek: 214–233, 255–257; Taylor: 33–39, 46–50; Devries; Caputo 1997: 26–57; and Marion 1999, which includes a brief response from Derrida.

² For a critical assessment of the Jewish dimension of Derrida’s philosophical writings, see Ofrat 2001. The possible influence of kabbalah is noted on 13–14.

³ See Wright: 114. In the conference “Interpreting the Sacred Word: Jewish Hermeneutics in the European Context,” held at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, 11–13 December 2000, Moshe Idel presented a paper in which he mentioned this text of Derrida and, correctly in my opinion, identified his source as the description of Levi Isaac of Berdichev in Scholem: 81–82. See below, n. 24.

⁴ Idel (1986: 149) suggests that reflected in the words of Derrida is Abulafia’s technical understanding of letter combination, which is a cornerstone of his prophetic kabbalah. Idel’s suggestion

other essay, Derrida summons the lore of kabbalah, reflected especially through the interpretative prism of Gershom Scholem, to articulate the view that the “power of language” is

an enveloped virtuality, a potentiality that can be brought or not to actuality; it is hidden, buried, dormant. . . . This is indeed an explicit motif in certain trends of the Kabbalah. The magical power of the name produces effects said to be real and over which we are not in command. The name hidden in its potency possesses a power of manifestation and of occultation, of revelation and encrypting [*crypte*]. What does it hide? Precisely the abyss that is enclosed within it. To open a name is to find in it not something but rather something like an abyss, the abyss as the thing itself. (Derrida 2002: 213–214)⁵

In the autobiographical *Circonfession*, Derrida refers somewhat enigmatically to the acronym of *Pardes*, first used by medieval kabbalists to name the four levels of meaning in Scripture,⁶ *peshat*, “literality denuded like a glans”; *remez*, “crypt, allegory, secret, diverted word”; *derash*, “morality, homily, persuasive and pulpit eloquence”; and *sod*, “profound, cabbalistic” meaning. After delineating the four levels, which he tellingly labels the “quaternary model of a paradisiac discourse of Jewish ‘rationality,’” Derrida remarks:

is accepted by Ofrat (2001: 14). This is certainly a plausible explanation, but it is necessary to emphasize that Derrida utilizes this definition in a broader context that engages technical theosophic symbols derived, at least in part, from zoharic literature.

⁵ Here it is of significance to note Derrida’s ruminations on the *tallit*, the traditional Jewish prayer shawl, in Cixous and Derrida: 21–108. Although Derrida does not refer explicitly to kabbalistic literature, he embraces the fundamental paradox of concealing and revealing in his account of the fringe garment that hides nothing but that nevertheless calls forth to memory the obligation to heed the command, the un/showing that fosters envisioning the sign of the covenantal law that must be appropriated by the individual person through the gaze because it can never be owned by another, the paradox that marks the way of dissimulation, the doubling of the secret in the withholding of the bestowal: “It veils or hides nothing, it shows or announces no Thing, it promises the intuition of nothing. Before seeing or knowing [*le voir ou le savoir*], before fore-seeing or fore-knowing, it is worn in memory of the Law. You still have to see it in another way for that, have it to yourself, have oneself [*s’avoir*] that skin, and see it indeed. . . . So there would be, on sight, *your* sight (‘see,’ ‘look’), an appropriation (‘to you,’ ‘you will have,’ ‘for you’), a taking possession. But this is the property (the fore-self) that at bottom does not belong and is there only to recall the Commandments. . . . As if everyone discovered his own shawl to his own sight, and right on his own body, but only with a view to hearing and recalling the law, of *recalling* oneself to it or of *recalling* it to oneself. And so to do more or something different, through memory, than ‘seeing.’ Each time is signed the absolute secret of a shawl—which can of course, at time for prayer, say the precepts, be lent, but not exchanged, and especially not become the property of someone else. The secret of the shawl envelops one single body. One might think that it is woven for *this* one body proper, or even by it, from which it seems to emanate, like an intimate secretion, but this is less through having engendered it thus right up close to oneself than through having already opened it or given it birth into the divine word that will have preceded it. For a secretion, as is well known, is also what separates, discerns, dissociates, dissolves the bond, holds to the secret” (43–44).

⁶ Idel 1995; Scholem: 53–61.

Although I've got the PaRDeS of this partition "in my blood," it does not correspond exactly to the one imposing itself on me, some laborious translation of it is not forbidden. . . . it was the last time, the mirror on my right, her left, sudden terror faced with the secret to be kept, of no longer being able to form the letters and words, fear of absolute inhibition through fear of betraying oneself. . . . it was like a beehive sponge of secrets, the buzzing rumor, the mixed-up noises of each bee, and yet the cells near to bursting, infinite number of walls, internal telephone. (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 110–111)⁷

In both contexts, Derrida turns to the kabbalistic tradition to elicit support for the notion of an amorphous text, that is, a text whose language is no longer broken conventionally into discrete words, a fore-text, we might say, that serves as the hermeneutical basis for polysemy, the "white fire" of the primordial Torah, according to kabbalists, which is infinite and thus not fixed in any form,⁸ the "text written in letters that are still invisible" (Derrida 1981a: 343). In the second passage, this idea is linked more specifically to the notion of secrecy, a theme to which I shall return, but suffice it here to note that Derrida does consciously relate his conception of the secret as a text without discernible parameters to the kabbalah.

Notwithstanding these occasional asides, which assuredly are not marginal or inconsequential, Derrida hitherto has neither offered a sustained analysis of Jewish mysticism in any of his writings nor has he intimated that a grasp of this material is critical for an understanding of his philosophic orientation. It is not even obvious that we should refer to Derrida as a Jewish writer or as someone who writes primarily about themes of Jewish concern. Surely, Derrida struggles with aspects of his Jewish heritage, but he does not position himself primarily as a thinker trying to determine his place within Judaism. On the contrary, he has expressed the view that if he is to be considered inside the tradition, it is by being outside it, that for him the covenant, *alliance*, is a cut that has cut both ways, tearing him apart from the very thing to which he is bound.⁹ As he instructs himself in the entry of

⁷ In a second passage from this work, Derrida utilizes the kabbalistic acronym again: "A circumcision is my size, it takes my body, it turns round me to envelop me in its blade strokes, they pull upward, a spiral raises and hardens me, I am erect in my circumcision for centuries like the petrified memory . . . we have just enough breath left to ask for pardon, for the Great Pardon, in the languages of the PaRDeS, for all the evil that my writing is drawn, withdrawn and drawn out from, an eternal skin above not you, but me dreaming of him who dreams of the place of God" (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 242–243, see also 246, 247–248, 252, 312).

⁸ Idel 1986: 141–157; Scholem: 48–49.

⁹ Smith astutely comments on this aspect of Derrida's thought when he notes, "What cuts also closes; what closes also cuts. It cuts both ways. The *annulment* creates the circle of 'anneau,' the ring" (78). The degree of Derrida's alienation from Jewish tradition may be determined from his reflection on the childhood trauma in Algiers of being thrown out of school together with other Jewish children: "From that moment—how can I say it—I felt as displaced in a Jewish community,

30 December 1976, in *Circonfession*, “leave nothing, if possible, in the dark of what related me to Judaism, alliance broken (*Karet*) in every aspect, with perhaps a gluttonous interiorization, and in heterogeneous modes: last of the Jews, what am I . . . the circumcised is the proper” (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 154).

It is significant that Derrida glossed the comment about the broken covenant with the Hebrew *karet*, for in ancient Israel this term referred to the gravest of punishments, being permanently cut off from the community of Israelites, a reversal, one might say, of the rite of circumcision by which males were attached to the community. Inverting and subverting the meaning of the traditional idiom, Derrida understands circumcision as the cut that loosens him from rather than binds him to the Abrahamic community into which he was born, but, of course, in being cut off he somehow remains bound, indeed being bound for him consists in being cut off.¹⁰ “Circumcision is a determining cut. It permits cutting but, at the same time and in the same stroke [*du même coup*], remaining attached to the cut” (Derrida 1986: 41). In virtue of this cut that binds, Derrida identifies himself as the “last of the Jews,” *le dernier des Juifs* (Bennington and Derrida 1991: 145), not as someone who is no longer a Jew whether through assimilation or conversion, and not even as a modern day Marrano, inwardly Jewish but outwardly not.

closed unto itself, as I would in the other (which they used to call ‘the Catholics’). . . . Symmetrically, oftentimes, I felt an impatient distance with regard to various Jewish communities, when I have the impression that they close in upon themselves, when they pose themselves as such. From all of which comes a feeling of non-belonging that I have doubtless transposed” (Wood and Bernasconi: 75). Derrida’s alienation from Judaism is also attested in the comment he made in an oral conversation about prayer recorded in Shapiro, Govrin, and Derrida: “And I was, of course, rebelling when I was a young Jewish boy in Algeria, and they forced me to pray in a language which was totally unintelligible to me. But, I think that at that moment, I understood something essential of the prayer. One can pray without understanding the words. . . . For me Hebrew is this. And it has to do with the book too. Because, of course, for the same reason pure prayer should be improvised” (59). On Derrida’s sense of alienation from French, which he identifies as his “only mother tongue,” see Derrida and Ferraris: 38. Derrida’s relationship to Judaism is one particular instantiation of a larger sense of belonging-by-not-belonging that has informed his way of being in the world. See Derrida and Ferraris where the matter is depicted in terms of the characterization of the place of philosophy as *unheimlich*: “Philosophy has a way of being at home with itself [*chez elle*] that consists in not being at home with itself, whence this double bind with respect to the philosophical” (55). The title of the volume, *A Taste for the Secret*, is related directly to this sense of not-belonging (see Derrida and Ferraris: 59). On the essential nonbelonging of the secret, “the *Unheimlichkeit* of the *Geheimnis*,” see Derrida: “It is perhaps there that we find the secret of secrecy, namely, that it is not a matter of knowing and that it is for no-one. A secret doesn’t belong, it can never be said to be at home or in its place [*chez soi*]” (1995a: 92). An important source for Derrida’s observations on the phenomenon of *Unheimlichkeit* is Freud. For example, see Derrida 1994b: 172–174.

¹⁰ For discussion of circumcision in Derrida, culminating in the observation that circumcision is “another name for deconstruction,” see Caputo 1997: 250–263.

What he is, by his own classification, is the last of the Jews, and as the last of the Jews, he is still a Jew, albeit a Jew whose Jewish identity is problematic because he does not envision the possibility of meaningfully perpetuating the tradition:¹¹

I am perhaps not what remains of Judaism, and I would have no trouble agreeing with that, if at least people really wanted to prove it . . . but after all what else am I in truth, who am I if I am not what I inhabit and where I take place . . . today in what remains of Judaism to this world . . . and in this remainder I am only someone to whom there remains so little that at bottom, already dead as son with the widow, I expect the resurrection of Elijah, and to sort out the interminably preliminary question of knowing how they, the Jews and the others, can interpret circumfession, i.e. that I here am inhabiting what remains of Judaism, there are so few of us and we are so divided. (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 302–303)

The messianic resonance here cannot be missed unless one is utterly tone-deaf. What is particularly noteworthy is that death surrounds the messianic hope, for Derrida describes himself “already dead as son with the widow,” expecting the resurrection of Elijah, a name that traditionally denotes the prophet who heralds the coming of the messiah and the imaginal form present at each circumcision, but it is also the author’s Hebrew name.¹²

Lest there be any misunderstanding, let me state unequivocally that I am not suggesting that Derrida affirms traditional Jewish messianism, whatever the contours of that phenomenon might be. The intent of his eschatological leanings and the portrait of the apocalyptic ideal are formulated lucidly in *Specters of Marx*, published originally in 1993:

Well, what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructible as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice—which we distinguish

¹¹ In evaluating the remarks about Jews scattered in Derrida’s writings, one must also consider the fact that Judaism can stand metaphorically for something broader than an ethnic, cultural, or religious identity. For example, see Derrida: “What is called the ‘mother’ tongue is already ‘the other’s language.’ If we are saying here that language is the native land, namely, what exiles, foreigners, all the wandering Jews in the world, carry away on the soles of their shoes, it is not to evoke a monstrous body, an impossible body, a body whose mouth and tongue would drag the feet along, and even drag about under the feet. It is because this is about the *step*, once again, of progression, aggression, transgression, digression” (2000b: 89). Clearly, in this context, the epithet “wandering Jews” does not apply exclusively to those born or converted into Judaism. It is of interest to note that Derrida ends this lecture with an exegesis of Genesis 19:1–9 and Judges 19:23–30 in an effort to elucidate the possibility of placing the law of hospitality above morality or ethics (2000b: 151–155). This does not, however, have any bearing on the question of the author’s ethnic identity.

¹² The double role of Elijah as the messianic prophet and as the one who holds the infant at the rite of circumcision is duly noted in Derrida 1994a: 62.

from law or right and even from human rights—and an idea of democracy—which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today. (Derrida 1994b: 59)

In the essay “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” written in April 1995, Derrida elaborated this notion of “messianicity without messianism,” that is, a messianic aspiration that entails the “opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration. . . . Possibilities that both open and can always interrupt history, or at least the ordinary course of history” (Derrida and Vattimo: 17).¹³

Messianicity, which implies the hope of what is to come without expectation and the possibility of repetition without indebtedness to heritage, is “older than all religion, more originary than all messianism” (Derrida and Vattimo: 47). The very prospect of religion endures in the “space and time of a spectralizing messianicity beyond all messianism” (Derrida and Vattimo: 51). In a lecture honoring Levinas delivered in Paris on 7 December 1996, Derrida refers to his view as a “structural or *a priori* messianicity,” which is not an “ahistorical messianicity, but one that belongs to a historicity without a particular and empirically determinable incarnation. Without revelation or without the dating of a given revelation” (1999a: 67). From these passages, and undoubtedly others that could have been cited, we see how far removed is Derrida’s eschatological stance from traditional forms of Jewish messianism. Nevertheless, he does retain something of the sanctioned rhetoric. Derrida has grasped the paradoxical implication of the conventional Jewish, messianic belief: The possibility of the messiah’s coming is predicated on the impossibility of the messiah’s arrival.¹⁴ “There has to be the possibility of someone’s still arriving, there has to be an *arrivant*

¹³ See Derrida: “Not to-come without some sort of messianic memory and promise, of a messianicity older than all religion, more originary than all messianism” (1997a: 326). On the “double bind” of the messianic posture, which embraces the concomitant belief in the coming and deferral of the future, see Derrida 1997b: 173–174. A more comprehensive assessment of the messianic dimension of Derrida’s thought would require a detailed analysis of other twentieth-century Jewish thinkers influenced by and responding to modes of philosophical eschatology. For a representative study, see Gibbs. On the messianic implications of Derrida’s thought as they relate to his quest for a “God beyond God,” that is, the wholly other liberated from the ontological chain, see Wallace.

¹⁴ One thinks of the provocative insight of Kafka: “The messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last” (81). Kafka’s remark resonates with the traditional messianic hope harbored by Jews through the generations, which is based on the belief in the future coming of the messiah, a coming that is possible only as long as the messiah has not come. An interesting formulation of this dialectic is found in the teachings of Nahman of Bratslav, especially in the tale of the seven beggars. According to the Bratslav tradition, the footless beggar, the last of the seven, who does not come to the wedding symbolically represents the messiah. See Wolfson 2002b: 121.

. . . someone absolutely indeterminate . . . who may be called the Messiah” (Derrida and Ferraris: 31). In the distinctive language of Derrida’s style, messianicity involves the constant advent of what is to come (*l’avenir*),¹⁵ a present perpetually deferred to the future, a givenness always yet to be given, the wholly other (*tout autre*) that refuses incorporation into any category of the same.¹⁶ The messianic figure is ghostlike according to the following depiction offered by Derrida: “But one has to realize the ghost is there, be it in the opening of the promise or the expectation, *before its first apparition*: the latter had announced itself, from the first it will have come second. *Two times at the same time*, originary iterability, irreducible virtuality of this space and this time. That is why one must think otherwise the ‘time’ or the date of an event” (1994b: 163). Derrida’s messianicity is a doctrine of “hauntology,” the haunting “apparition of the inapparent,” that disrupts ontology (1994b: 161). What appears from the first is second; at the beginning is repetition of the same that is always different.

The extent to which Derrida feels detached and estranged from the patrimony of his youth may be gauged from another rather dark and brutally honest comment in his notebooks, “and the last of the Jews that I still am is doing nothing here other than destroying the world on the pretext of making truth” (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 190–191). Derrida returned to the question of his Jewish upbringing in *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin* (1999b), a study originally published in 1996 based on an oral presentation from April 1992. At one point he candidly comments, “Such, in any event, would have been the radical lack of culture from which I undoubtedly never completely emerged. From which I emerge without emerging from it, by emerging from it completely without my having ever emerged from it” (1999b: 53). In the continuation of this passage, Derrida admits that he was not capable of breathing new life into an ossified and necrotized Judaism because he carried the “negative heritage” of an “amnesia,” which he never had the courage, strength, or means to resist, and because he did not feel he was qualified to do the original work of the historian. Significantly, Derrida tacitly admits that historical scholarship in the study of Judaism, which is based on the philological competence that has eluded his grasp, could have redemptive or restorative value. In an astonishing moment of self-disclosure, Derrida acknowledges that he has been influenced by “an insidious Christian contamination: the respectful belief in inwardness, the preference for intention, the heart, the mind, mis-

¹⁵ See, for example, Derrida: “The affirmation of the future to come: this is not a positive thesis. It is nothing other than the affirmation itself, the ‘yes,’ insofar as it is the condition of all promises or of all hope, of all awaiting, of all performativity, of all opening toward the future, whatever it may be, for science or for religion” (1996: 68).

¹⁶ Caputo 1997: 69–87, especially 77–81, and 117–159, especially 147–151; 1999: 199–200.

trust with respect for literalness or to an objective action given to the mechanicity of the body, in short, a denunciation, so conventional, of Pharisaism” (1999b: 54). To his credit, it must be recalled that in a number of his discussions about circumcision, he does emphasize that the notion of an inward circumcision of the heart is expressed by the prophet Jeremiah and thus has textual roots in Judaism independent of Christianity (Cixous and Derrida: 75–76; Derrida 1994a: 64). Nevertheless, he concedes that his attitude toward Judaism reflects a bias against Pharisaic literalism well attested in the history of Christian polemic with Judaism.

This stark self-portrait of one who depicts the specific behavioral patterns of Judaism as parochial would seem to leave little room to consider Derrida in any meaningful way a living link in the chain of Jewish mysticism, which has steadfastly affirmed the central and unwavering significance of ritual behavior even if the latter must be abrogated to be fulfilled. Indeed, the very notion of considering kabbalah as an influence on Derrida strikes me as embracing the impossible, the jarring realization that the moment the matter is uttered its truth rests on being false and its falsity on being true. Yet it is precisely the impossibility of appropriation that yields the possibility of writing. As Derrida confides to us about his own autobiographical praxis, “only write here what is impossible, that ought to be the impossible-rule” (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 194).

To grasp the intent of this comment, one must bear in mind that, for Derrida, inscription more generally, and not simply autobiographical writing, constitutes the signature of being that “remains an other whose law demands the impossible. It does not demand this thing or that, something which could turn out to be impossible. No, it demands the impossible, and demands it because it is impossible, and because this very impossibility is the condition of the possibility of demand” (1984: 14–15). To write I must confront “the thing that would be other, the other thing” (*la chose serait donc l'autre, l'autre-chose*) that

gives me an order or addresses an impossible, intransigent, insatiable demand to me, without an exchange and without a transaction, without a possible contract. Without a word, without speaking to me, it addresses itself to me, to me alone in my irreplaceable singularity, in my solitude as well. I owe to the thing an absolute respect which no general law would mediate (*un respect absolu que ne médiatise aucune loi générale*): the law of the thing is singularity and difference as well. An infinite debt ties me to it, a duty without funds or foundation. I shall never acquit myself of it. Thus the thing is not an object; it cannot become one. (Derrida 1984:14–15)

The “rule of the impossible,” *la règle-impossible* (Bennington and Derrida 1991: 181), hinges on the fact that the writer is indebted to bear

through verbal discourse the other that addresses one without speaking, the thing that can never become object, the presence that cannot be represented except as the absence of the presence that it could not presently be. In a profoundly tragic and ironic turn, Derrida observes that inscription requires “the muteness of the thing” (*le mutisme de la chose*), for the thing that must be written is an “insatiable *thou must*” (*tu dois insatiable*) that “remains beyond exchange and priceless” (1984: 14–17). The thing imposes itself as that which must be written, but it offers no specific direction or content; it demands to be heard from the depth of its muteness. Had the other spoken, there would be an exchange and an ensuing contract binding writer and what is written, but in its muteness, there is asymmetry that defies exchange, the indebtedness of the gift that cannot be negotiated contractually. Of the gift and the impossibility of representation I will have more to say at a later stage of this analysis. For the time being, suffice it to note that in writing this article I have found it impossible not to follow the rule of the impossible, which cannot be followed unless it be broken, for writing the impossible, the only writing that is possible, indeed the impossibility that facilitates the possibility of writing, is a rule about breaking rules, a law fulfilled when abrogated.

What sense, then, can we ascribe to the admittedly impossible task that marks our path? Is there an advantage to speak of Derrida, deconstruction, and Jewish mysticism in one breath? Can we think this triad together in a manner that provokes thoughtfulness? A key here will lie in understanding Jewish mysticism primarily in semiological terms, with particular emphasis on the mystical experience of contemplative envisioning, which rests on the ontic presumption regarding the textualization of reality, that is, the idea that reality is a text, for the most basic stuff of existence consists of twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and these twenty-two letters are comprised in the four letters of the name *YHWH*, the mystical core of Torah. The divine being, and by implication all beings of the worlds contained therein, is circumscribed in the book that is signified by the proper name *par excellence*. The proper name, which may also be envisioned as the prism of *sefirot* variously configured, signifies what lies beyond signification, the dimension of divine being that is without name, even beyond signification by any of the letters. The name, itself a curious phenomenon insofar as it is ineffable, its articulation through the cloak of the epithet, leads one to the nameless, in/significant other that demarcates all that is signified, inaudible voice that differentiates all that is articulated. This portrait of *YHWH*, which may be elicited from medieval kabbalistic literature, bears comparison with some views expressed by Derrida, a point to which I shall return. However, at this juncture, it is

important to stress that addressing the question of Derrida and Jewish mysticism from a strictly historiographical or textological point of view is not terribly productive. On the contrary, as I have noted, it is easy to dismiss the matter when cast in this way, for there is no definitive proof that Derrida has been influenced by Jewish mystical sources directly and only scanty evidence for a secondary influence.¹⁷

In an essay published in 1982, "Derrida, Jabès, Levinas: Sign-Theory as Ethical Discourse," Shira Wolosky argues that in the studies on Jabès and Levinas included in *L'Écriture et la différence*, which appeared in 1967, Derrida acknowledged the relationship between his grammatological scheme and the theory of language found in kabbalistic writings. I will not investigate each of the passages to which she refers as support of her argument, but let me say that the gist of my concern is that it is not obvious that Derrida's exegetical remarks on either Jabès or Levinas are meant to be taken as statements of his own views. Let me offer one example of the methodological problem. After citing Derrida's remark, "Jabès is conscious of the Cabalistic resonances of his book" (Derrida 1978: 74), Wolosky comments on "a consciousness which Derrida shares, and which can be applied to his own work as well. Jabès' path, which Derrida also follows, leads into the kabbalistic world of linguistic mysticism, where claims for grammatological primacy open into an extensive and radical system" (1982: 292). There is nothing in Derrida's remarks that would necessarily substantiate this claim. It is conjectural, at best, to assert that the kabbalistic resonances of the poetic fragments of Jabès apply equally well to Derrida, for Derrida's observations are a commentary to Jabès, a commentary that surely is written on the basis of attentive reading—attunement to the voice of the other resonating in the written text—but as commentary there is distance between text and interpreter, a distance that can never be entirely overcome in the hermeneutical act no matter how astute one's interpretative prowess. As Derrida himself puts it in this very essay on Jabès, writing is a "tearing of the self toward the other within a confession of infinite separation" (1978: 75). To assume unequivocally, as Wolosky does, that Derrida's comments about Jabès can be transferred to him without disruption, one would have to efface all difference between reader and text, an effacement that would fly in the face of the deconstructionist hermeneutic affirmed by Derrida.

¹⁷ Here it is important to emphasize that Derrida 1995b: 25–26 insists that the notion of the secret in which he is interested is not mystical in nature, related either to the negative theology in Christian tradition or to an esoteric doctrine in the Pythagorean, Platonic, or Neoplatonic community. It does not seem imprudent to assume that the secrets promulgated by kabbalists would also be rejected by Derrida.

I am prepared to grant that Derrida is correct in ascribing kabbalistic import to the views of Jabès expressed in *Le Livre des Questions*.¹⁸ What is at stake, however, is how to interpret this affinity as it relates to Derrida's own views. It is not at all certain that his explication of Jabès is meant to be read as an account of Derrida's opinions. Support for this position, however, may be culled from the passages in Derrida's writings that are suggestive of the influence of traditional kabbalistic symbolism, or at the very least the convergence of that symbolism and his own thought, particularly some of the technical tropes in sixteenth-century Lurianic kabbalah such as the notion of the trace (*reshimu*) in primordial space (*tehiru*) that results from contraction (*tsimtsum*) of the infinite from itself unto itself.¹⁹ The point has not gone unnoticed in scholarly literature. Harold Bloom, for instance, proposed an influence of kabbalistic hermeneutics on Derrida's critical notion of *différance*: "Though he nowhere says so, it may be that Derrida is substituting *davhar* for *logos*, thus correcting Plato by a Hebraic equating of the writing-act and the mark of articulation with the word itself. Much of Derrida is in the spirit of the great Kabbalist interpreters of Torah, interpreters who create baroque mythologies out of those elements in Scripture that appear least homogeneous in the sacred text" (1975a: 43). In another context, Bloom compared the kabbalistic notion of "writing before writing," articulated especially in Lurianic theosophy, and the Derridean notion of the trace. Bloom casts kabbalah as a "theory of *writing*" akin to this brand of French criticism, emphasizing, in particular, the denial of an absolute distinction between writing and speech shared by both. Yet he is mindful to draw the following contrast: "Kabbalah too thinks in ways not permitted by Western metaphysics, since its God is at once *Ein-Sof* and *ayin*, total presence and total absence, and all its interiors contain exteriors, while all of its effects determine its causes. But Kabbalah stops the movement of Derrida's 'trace,' since it has a *point* of the primordial, where presence and absence co-exist by continuous interplay" (1975b: 52–53). In a third study, Bloom reiterates the affinity between the "overdetermined" conception of language as a "magical absolute" in kabbalistic tradition and the "*absolute randomness*" of language in the "linguistic nihilism" advocated in deconstruction (1979: 4).

On balance, it strikes me that the scales of judgment regarding the relationship of Derrida to Jewish esotericism should be tipped in the direction of convergence rather than influence, but even presuming the

¹⁸ For an elaboration of Derrida's claim, see Mole: 87, 116–117. On the resemblance between Jabès and kabbalistic notions of textuality and writing, see also my brief remarks in Wolfson 2002c: 138–139.

¹⁹ See above, n. 3.

former is not without problems. To illustrate this point let me note that in the lengthy essay “How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” which was delivered as a lecture in Jerusalem, Derrida discusses negative theology as it has been formulated in the history of Christian mysticism, focusing most notably on Pseudo-Dionysus and Meister Eckhart, but he does not mention a word about kabbalah or Jewish mysticism. Lest one protest that this observation is trivial, I remind such a person that Derrida himself makes a point of noting that in the address he cannot treat negative theology “in a tradition of thought that is neither Greek or Christian,” that is, in Jewish and Islamic thought (Derrida 1992c: 100). With respect to these traditions, Derrida must perform the gesture of disavowal or *dénégation*,²⁰ speaking by unspeaking, which is appropriate to the subject at hand. Thus, in a second passage from this composition, Derrida interrupts his discussion of the relationship of avoidance that pertains to Heidegger and the apophysis of Dionysius the Areopagite and Meister Eckhart with the comment, “*To say nothing*, once again, of the mysticism or theologies in the Jewish, Islamic, or other traditions” (1992c: 124). To say nothing—not for the first time but *once again*—the saying of nonsaying must be reiterated because what is spoken in this speaking is unspoken.²¹

To appreciate the importance of this parenthetical musing, we must recall that in this lecture Derrida displayed that he was keenly aware of the geographical locale in which he gave his talk; indeed, he grappled with the philosophical intent of what it meant to be in Jerusalem. There is, Derrida reminds us, a certain impossibility of being in this place, an impossibility that he associates with the traditional formula uttered at the end of the Passover seder, “Next year in Jerusalem,” that is, Jerusalem, symbolically, is the place to which one must always be going, deferring of the pledge and postponing of the promise, indefinitely, an experiential feature of the structure of the messianic architectonic.²² Precisely in the place where one cannot be except by anticipating being there is it most suitable to speak of what cannot be spoken. Interestingly, Derrida referred to this lecture

as the most autobiographical speech I have ever risked. . . . It is necessary to surround with precautions the hypothesis of a self-presentation passing through a speech on the negative theology of others. But if one day I had to tell my story, nothing in this narrative would start to speak of the thing itself if I did not come up against this fact; for lack of capacity, competence, or self-authorization, I have never yet been able to speak of what

²⁰ For discussion of this Derridean theme, see Foshay 1992a; Taylor: 36–37.

²¹ Taylor: 53.

²² Consider the interpretation of Jerusalem in Derrida 1999a: 101–114.

my birth . . . should have made closest to me: the Jew, the Arab. (1992c: 135 n. 13)

Bracketing the important issues of cultural and linguistic identity that emerge from this revealing note, and especially the somewhat perplexing tag of ethnicity, “the Jew, the Arab,”²³ let me reiterate the main point for the purposes of this study: Derrida shies away from comports himself as someone who can discourse about Jewish mysticism even in the lecture on apophasis delivered in Jerusalem, a site that would have naturally facilitated a discussion of this matter in Jewish and/or Islamic mysticism.²⁴ This comment must give pause to all those involved in the effort to discern Derrida’s relationship to Jewish mysticism, not to mention Judaism more generally. One cannot simply ignore the fact that Derrida has not taken upon himself the responsibility of discussing this matter because he does not feel at ease and in control of the relevant material that would have to be deconstructed.²⁵ The more engaging question, then, is how the study of Derrida and the study of kabbalah can mutually illumine one another.

To assess this question properly, we must again raise the issue of the compatibility of Derrida’s enterprise and theories of interpretation that have been operative in various forms of Jewish textual practice, for I think

²³ The hybrid cultural identification is illumined by the following remark Derrida made about his youth in an interview from April 1989 conducted by Derek Attridge: “Racism was everywhere in Algeria at that time, it was running wild in all directions. Being Jewish and a victim of anti-semitism didn’t spare one the anti-Arab racism I felt everywhere around me, in manifest or latent form” (Derrida 1992a: 39). Perhaps the thread linking Jew and Arab in Derrida’s mind is the shared sense of being persecuted. See also Derrida’s musing on the memory of being blessed on Yom Kippur, the “Day of Atonement,” in Cixous and Derrida: “I can still see this father, but I could not see him, by definition, by situation, he blessed his two sons one day bigger than he, lifting with both arms his tallith stretched above the two heads. Bigger than he, and one bigger than the other, the sons are stifling a little under the solemn protection, under the roof of that temple so close, during the interminable prayer, in what was called the ‘great temple,’ an old mosque right in the middle of an Arab district, anciently judeo-arab, a mosque in the Spanish style since become a mosque again” (45). For an extended discussion of this destabilizing cultural marker of self-identity, see Gil Anidjar, “Introduction: ‘Once More, Once More:’ Derrida, the Arab, the Jew,” in Derrida 2002: 1–39.

²⁴ In this connection, it is of interest to recall the comment in Derrida: “Whatever the translations, analogies, transpositions, transferences, metaphors, never has any discourse expressly given itself this title (negative theology, apophatic method, *via negativa*) in the thoughts of Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist culture” (1995b: 63). It is possible to contest Derrida’s claim on historical and textual grounds, but what is important for the purpose of this analysis is his assumption that negative theology shows exclusive affinity with Christian philosophy.

²⁵ For a different interpretation of Derrida’s statement in “How to Avoid Speaking,” see Foshay 1992b: 84. According to Foshay, Derrida’s silence regarding apophasis in Jewish and Islamic thought “is an inherent function of the need to avoid speaking of essences, identities and ‘things in themselves.’ In other words, Derrida can allow himself to speak of the Platonic and Neoplatonic heritage of negative theology, but not of the Jewish or Islamic, which are closest to him and, as it were, identical with him. He cannot altogether avoid speaking of the analogy and isomorphism of apophaticism and deconstruction, but he can defer mere personal and ‘attitudinal’ questions of identity” (1992b: 84).

this is the appropriate context within which to place kabbalah. To approach the relationship of Derrida to Jewish mysticism without getting a handle on Derrida and Judaism would amount to what Alfred North Whitehead called the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness,” that is, mistaking the part for the whole. If there is an efficacious way to think about Derrida in terms of Jewish mysticism, then it will have to be approached from within the broader context of his relationship to the religious and intellectual culture of the Jews.

In her book published in 1982, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, Susan Handelman argued that Derrida’s deconstructive method could be viewed as a form of “Jewish heretic hermeneutics” (163). It is, more accurately, in Derrida’s notion of writing as *différance*, the dissemination of the word through the infinite play of signification occasioned by the rejection of a transcendental signifier, that Handelman finds a coalescence of the main themes of this hermeneutic, to wit, castration or mutilation of the phallus, which is linked to circumcision, rebellion, irrevocable loss, displacement, and breaking the covenant (165). On the basis of a passage in *Glas*, Handelman suggested that Derrida’s choice of writing, and by implication the notion of text, to oppose the logocentrism of western thought is related to the veiled Torah scroll that is unveiled from behind the curtain at a dramatic moment in the Jewish liturgical service (165–166). I note, parenthetically, that Wolosky independently cited the same text as proof that Derrida’s life experience as a Jew provided the “stance for a radical re-vision of Hellenic assumptions” (290–291). Subsequently, I shall return to the image of unveiling the veiled as it is revealed in kabbalistic hermeneutics, paying special attention to the convergence of the themes of writing, circumcision, and exposition of secrets. For the moment, what is worthy of note is that there is something compelling to the argument that the primacy accorded the written text over the spoken word, the affirmation of the grammatological as opposed to the logocentric, may have, at least in part, been informed by Derrida’s visceral familiarity with Jewish ritual experience.

The crucial question, however, is, Should the deconstructionist hermeneutic be compared theoretically to rabbinic claims regarding the polysemous nature of Torah as the originary script decoded in the displacements and contraversions of midrashic reading, a textual strategy greatly expanded and embellished in medieval kabbalah? Can we accept the further suggestion of Handelman, following Bloom, that Derrida’s notion of the trace, the “elusive originating-nonoriginating mark of meaning,” is similar to the kabbalistic conception of the divine name (described by Scholem) as the meaningless, primordial language, encoded in the text of Torah, which assumes meaning only through the mediation of multi-

valent interpretations (1982:205–206, 1987: 118–122)? There are, as we have seen, passages in Derrida that would corroborate this claim. We should bear in mind as well that Derrida himself makes explicit the connection between the Greek privileging of logos as spoken word and the Johannine notion of the word become flesh (Wolosky: 285–287). Of the many examples that illustrate the point, consider the following remark in *Of Grammatology*: “The difference between signified and signifier belongs in a profound and implicit way to the totality of the great epoch covered by the history of metaphysics, and in a more explicit and more systematically articulated way to the narrower epoch of Christian creationism and infinitism when these appropriate the resources of Greek conceptuality” (Derrida 1976: 13). In semiotic terms, the son is the phonic sign of the father, who would be identified as the transcendental signified. Conventional sign theory, with its privileging of the spoken word over the written text, derives from the ontological scheme of Greek metaphysics reinforced by the Christological doctrine of incarnation. Are we justified in assuming that the emphasis placed on writing as the primary act of God’s creativity and the consequent notion that being may be compared to a book, which derives from ancient Hebraic wisdom, provides an alternative to the ontotheology that has prevailed in Hellenistic culture?

That Judaism came to play a vital role in Derrida’s depiction of the deconstructionist process can be asserted with confidence. Perhaps this is enunciated most explicitly in his lengthy study “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas.” The ruminations of Levinas, Derrida tells the reader, “make us tremble,” for by attempting to think Judaism and Greek philosophy together, a subversive role is assigned to the former, particularly in terms of a challenge to the dominant ontology or metaphysics of presence that underlies the logocentric orientation.²⁶ “At the heart of the desert, in the growing wasteland, this thought, which fundamentally no longer seeks to be a thought of Being and phenomenality, makes us dream of an inconceivable process of dismantling and dispossession” (Derrida 1978: 82). The ethical relationship to the other as infinitely other is the one experience that is “capable of opening the space of transcendence and of liberating metaphysics. . . . It is opening itself, the opening of opening, that which can be enclosed within no category

²⁶ On the relationship of “Greek” and “Jewish” in the philosophy of Levinas, see the extensive discussion in Levy: 156–178. Levy deals specifically with Derrida’s perspective on this question on 170–171. See also the recent discussion of Derrida’s essay, with special focus on the hybrid terms *jewgreek* and *greekjew*, in Llewelyn: 143–155. For an alternative approach, see Bennington. In an attempt to go beyond the jewgreek identity, with its cultural roots respectively in Jerusalem and Athens, Bennington suggests that Egypt is symbolically the “place” of deconstruction, a surmise that is based primarily on Derrida’s own admitted fascination with Egyptian hieroglyphics.

or totality” (Derrida 1978: 83). In the end of the essay, Derrida raises several questions aimed at destabilizing the dichotomy between Hebraism and Hellenism implied in the citation by Matthew Arnold placed at the beginning of the essay, ending with words of James Joyce that affirm the coincidence of the presumed opposites:

Are we Jews? Are we Greeks? We live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek, which is perhaps the unity of what is called history. We live in and of difference, that is, in hypocrisy. . . . Are we Greeks? Are we Jews? But who, we? Are we (not a chronological, but a pre-logical question) first Jews or first Greeks? . . . And what is the legitimacy, what is the meaning of the copula in this proposition from perhaps the most Hegelian of modern novelists: “Jewgreek is greekjew. Extremes meet”? (Derrida 1978: 153)

We cannot say with certitude whether or not Derrida thinks of himself as the unique hybrid, the mongrel who is jewgreek by being greekjew. A position akin to this has been proffered by John Caputo in *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (1997). To be more precise, Caputo is of the opinion that although Derrida does not write in the name of a Jew, his work is nonetheless “driven by a Jewish passion.” His compositions constitute his own diaspora in which the “dispersion and dissemination of his psyche are the very substance of his Jewishness” (Caputo 1997: 230). Caputo has offered us a helpful opening on our path even though he does not concern himself with the specific question of Derrida’s relation to Jewish mysticism. For Derrida, Judaism functions as an interruption or disruption causing a breach in the edifice of western philosophy, the *différance*, the incessant not-saying of what it is that one is saying.

Here it is instructive to consider Derrida’s criticism of Heidegger toward the conclusion of “Faith and Knowledge”: “Ontotheology encrypts faith and destines it to the condition of a sort of Spanish Marrano who would have lost—in truth, dispersed, multiplied—everything up to and including the memory of his unique secret. Emblem of a still life: an opened pomegranate, one Passover evening, on a tray” (Derrida and Vattimo: 66). The pomegranate, we are told in the same context, denotes the “granulated, grainy, disseminated, aphoristic, discontinuous, juxtapositional, dogmatic, indicative or virtual, economic; in a word, more than ever telegraphic” (Derrida and Vattimo: 66) articulation of meaning. Surely it is not insignificant that the symbol that Derrida chooses for the deconstructionist method, which provides a way beyond the ontotheological obstruction of faith, is a Jewish ritual object linked to Passover, the festival that commemorates the past liberation and anticipates the future redemption. This passage lends support to Caputo’s suggestion that the nomadic play that is basic to deconstruction reflects the ontic condition of the Jew as other,

the uprooted, displaced wanderer who lives in the hope of a promise that, paradoxically, is fulfilled only to the extent that it is continually postponed. Derrida notes that the itinerant quality of the Jew is portrayed by the symbol of the tabernacle, the necessarily impermanent place wherein the divine glory is disclosed as the presence that cannot be iconically represented, the arcanum in and through which the infinite is envisioned as the invisible nothing that defies imaginary depiction:

The tabernacle gives its name and its place to the Jewish family dwelling. That establishes the Jewish nation. The Jewish nation settles in the tabernacle, adores therein the sign of God and his covenant. . . . Now the tabernacle . . . remains a signifier without signified. The Jewish hearth forms an empty house, certainly, sensible to the absence of all sensible form, the Jews have tried to produce an object that gave in some way rise, place, and figure to the infinite. But this place and this figure have a singular structure: the structure encloses its void within itself, shelters only its own proper interiorized desert, opens onto nothing, confines nothing, contains as its treasure only nothingness: a hole, an empty spacing, a death. . . . No center, no heart, an empty space, nothing. One undoes the bands, displaces the tissues, pulls off the veils, parts [*écarte*] the curtains: nothing but a black hole or a deep regard, without color, form, and life. . . . The Jewish *Geheimnis*, the hearth in which one looks for the center under a sensible cover [*enveloppe*]*—*the tent of the tabernacle, the stone of the temple, a robe that clothes the text of the covenant*—*is finally discovered as an empty room, is not uncovered, never ends being uncovered, as it has nothing to show. (Derrida 1986: 49–50)

In the above passage, there is much that is said about what cannot be spoken, the text of the covenant that is continually un/covered because there is nothing visible that demands to be re/covered. How do we apply this image of nothing at the center but empty space to a text or, more specifically, to the stone tablets upon which were inscribed the ten commandments? Is the “text of the covenant” not a concrete form that renders the image of “nothing to show” inappropriate? For Derrida, it appears, even these stones may be construed as “nothing but a black hole” inasmuch as the medium on which a text is written is the white space that is as critical to the determination of significance as the black letters of text.²⁷

²⁷ This is precisely how Derrida interprets the dictum of Levi Isaac of Berdichev concerning the messianic Torah composed of the white spaces in which the letters are invisible: “The blanks will never be anything but provisionally filled in, one surface or square always remaining empty, open to the play of permutations, blanks barely glimpsed as blanks, (almost) pure spacing, going on forever and not in the expectation of any Messianic fulfillment. It is a spacing that is merely attended. For there exists a whole interpretation of spacing, of textual generation and polysemy, of course, revolving around the Torah. Polysemy is the possibility of a ‘new Torah’ capable of arising out of the other (‘Torah will issue out of me’)” (1981a: 344–345).

Alternatively expressed, meaning is never fixed by authorial intent; on the contrary, the deconstructionist method is predicated on a presumably unbridgeable gap—the hole in the middle—between the intention of the writer and the interpretation posited by the reader. With regard to the hermeneutical question, the author cannot claim privileged status, for sense can only be articulated through multiple voices engaged in an endless play of dissemination:

Dissemination endlessly opens up a *snag* in writing that can no longer be mended, a spot where neither meaning, however plural, nor *any form of presence* can pin/pen down [*agrapher*] the trace. Dissemination treats—doctors—that *point* where the movement of signification would regularly come to *tie down* the play of the trace, thus producing (a) history. The security of each point arrested in the name of the law is hence blown up. It is—at least—at the risk of such a blowup that dissemination has been broached/breached. With a detour through/of writing one cannot get over. (Derrida 1981a: 26)

The notion of secrecy is employed by Derrida to characterize the polysemy of signification enacted in the *différance* wrought by dissemination. That is, by “secret” Derrida does not refer to either the unknowable transcendence (the *hyperousios* of negative theology) or to an irretrievable hidden truth (the *mysterium* of esoteric gnosis); the secret, in his mind, relates to the fact that meaning can never be determined with absolute certainty and thus we cannot speak of immutable content in isolation from the event of reading.²⁸ The inherent secretive nature of language is that there is always a surplus of signification to be determined through a multivocality of voices. Consider, for example, the following account of the “apophatic aspect” of the secret: “The apophatic is not here necessarily dependent on negative theology, even if it makes it possible, too. And what we are attempting to put to the test is the possibility, in truth the impossibility, for any testimony to guarantee itself by expressing itself in the following form and grammar: ‘Let us testify that . . .’ We testify to a secret that is without content, without a content separable from its performative experience, from its performative tracing” (Derrida 1995b: 24). The Jewish stricture against representing the deity visually within the inner sanctum of the tabernacle and temple is interpreted by Derrida as an allusion to the hermeneutical dynamic that partakes of the structure of secrecy: The text veiled behind the curtain can never cease being uncovered inasmuch as the meaning discovered in the text is what comes to light by being re/covered.

Above all else, the Jew as other functions symbolically as bearing the character of writer, for writing, *écriture*, is not a return to origin but a

²⁸ On the secret in Derrida’s deconstruction, see Caputo 1997: 101–112.

recurrent retracing of one's steps to the text that is the homeland where one has never been, a marking of absence, a delimiting of the limitless, the saying of something without saying it, inscription under erasure. It is for this reason that Derrida returns on a number of occasions in his compositions to circumcision, the primordial cut that traditionally binds the Jewish male to the covenantal community, the differentiating mark, the mark of difference, the inscription of singularity, the proper name that can be pronounced only once, in a moment that is unique, the present that is always to come for it has always already been, a presence that cannot be represented even as absence. For Derrida, the cut of circumcision signifies autobiographical self-representation,²⁹ for it is the ring of double affirmation, the circle of return wherein the same recurs because it is different. And it is exactly here that one finds, in my judgment, the element of Derrida's thinking that can be applied most fruitfully to kabbalistic symbolism, the nexus between circumcision, inscription, and obliteration, the re/marking of the mark occluded in its demarcation.

As I have suggested in a number of studies, the primary site of contemplative envisioning in kabbalistic praxis is the circumcised phallus, which must be veiled in its exposure (Wolfson 1987, 1994: 330–331, 342–343, 357–358). The link between circumcision and secrecy in the esoteric teaching can be viewed as an elaboration of the rabbinic emphasis on the need to conceal the *membrum virile*, an aspect of the etiquette of modesty (*tseñi'ut*) required of the Jewish male (Stern 1994: 229–231). In kabbalistic lore, the concealment of the penis on pietistic/moral grounds served as the ritual foundation for the symbolic interpretation of circumcision as embodying the hermeneutical play of secrecy, that which is hidden (*tseñi'uta'*) is divulged exclusively to those who are humble (*tseñu'in*), for they know the art of concealing the concealment in disclosing the disclosure (Wolfson 1999: 135–148). Circumcision, therefore, may be viewed as the sacrament through which the Jew enacts the role of dissimulation by cutting away the foreskin to inscribe the covenantal sign, *'ot berit*, the “letter of the covenant,” the “sign (or simulacrum) of castration” (Derrida 1986: 42),³⁰ a sacrificial marking that is imprinted by taking away, the presence re/presented through its own absence. The paradox is fully expressed in the repeated insistence on the part of kabbalists that it is forbidden to gaze on the phallus (or, more specifically, the corona) that is laid bare (Wolfson

²⁹ Smith: 41–42, 77–78, 82–83.

³⁰ Derrida 1986: 41 refers to circumcision as the “symbolic castration.” By contrast, see Derrida 1996: 42, where Derrida emphasizes the irreducibility of circumcision to castration in opposition to the Freudian view that circumcision is a symbolic substitute of the castration of the son by the primitive father. The change in Derrida's perspective has been noted by Caputo (1997: 234, 240, 259, 262, 306–307).

1994: 336–345). Inscripting the sign occasions erasure of the name that cannot be written. This claim rests on the assumption that what is revealed of the secret is unveiled in its concealment and what is concealed is hidden in its unveiling.

In a manner consonant with kabbalists, Derrida proposes that the literal cut of circumcision is the cutting of the letter in the flesh.³¹ The ritual thus assumes a figurative meaning without diminishing its concrete sense; indeed, somatic concreteness is transformed in a manner akin to what one finds in the Jewish mystical orientation. The nature of corporeality must be conceived semiotically as body is constituted by letters. To be even more specific, for the kabbalists, the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the basic stuff of reality, are all comprised in the four letters of the most sacred of divine names in the Jewish tradition, YHWH, also identified as the inner essence of Torah. In contrast to the christological doctrine of incarnation, which is predicated on the identification of a particular historical figure as the embodiment of God's word, the Jewish esoteric tradition is based on the notion of divine body as scriptural text, which is the name.

Needless to say, Derrida does not embrace the kabbalistic idea in all of its symbolic complexity, eschewing, as he does, any metaphysical, let alone theosophic, conception of transcendence. Nevertheless, he does affirm two of the main elements of the worldview of kabbalists. First, it is axiomatic for Derrida's deconstruction that the materiality of being is textual. Consider this formulation:

The nonquestion of which we are speaking is the unpenetrated certainty that Being is a Grammar; and that the world is in all its parts a cryptogram to be constituted or reconstituted through poetic inscription or deciphering; that the book is original, that everything *belongs to the book* before being and in order to come into the world; that any thing can be born only by *approaching* the book, can die only by *failing in sight* of the book; and that always the impassible shore of the book is *first*. (Derrida 1978: 76–77)

³¹ The nexus between circumcision and writing in Derrida's thought implicates him in a phallogocentrism that is characteristic of the kabbalistic sources as well. This is somewhat ironic for Derrida himself challenged the phallogocentric nature of the logocentrism of western metaphysics, insisting on the need to attend seriously to the problematic of sexual difference, which entails assigning to the woman a genuine role as the other rather than subsume her under the dominance of the masculine. The matter is cast as the difference between the phallogocentrism of hermeneutical anxiety and the feminine displacement of reading in Derrida 1995c: 96. See Cornell: 194–197; Spivak: 60–68. Relevant to this discussion is the parenthetical remark in Derrida 1992a: 58 that no text “completely escapes” the rubric of phallogocentrism. Although no mention is made in that context of circumcision, it seems reasonable to make this connection when pondering Derrida's utilization of circumcision as a rhetorical trope to characterize writing and reading.

To place the book at the beginning is not to lapse back into a logocentric positing of an origin or transcendental signified, for there is no book that is not composed by traces of another book, and so on in an endless chain of significations. The book is first, at the beginning, but the beginning, paradoxically, cannot begin and remain the beginning because to be the beginning it must have already begun.³² The beginning, then, must be conceived as a breaking-point, an interruption, interference, a rupture of the “discontinuous series of instants and *attractions*” (1998: 580). If, however, the book at the beginning, which is the beginning of the book, has no beginning, then writing the book has no end, and, consequently, meaning cannot be fixed in any resolute fashion. “To risk meaning nothing is to start to play, and first to enter into the play of *différance* which prevents any word, any concept, any major enunciation from coming to summarize and to govern from the theological presence of a center the movement and textual spacing of differences” (Derrida 1981b: 14). To commence with a book, therefore, is to mandate interpretation as the incipient evocation: “The necessity of commentary, like poetic necessity, is the very form of exiled speech. In the beginning is hermeneutics” (Derrida 1978: 67).³³

The second similarity to traditional kabbalah relates to the special role that Derrida ascribes to YHWH in illumining the language of secrecy and the secrecy of language. From the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel, Derrida adduces that this name simultaneously “imposes and forbids translation. . . . Translation then becomes necessary and impossible, like the effect of a struggle for the appropriation of the name, necessary and forbidden in the interval between two absolutely proper names” (Derrida

³² It is this logical conundrum that underlies Derrida’s notion of “iterability,” which presumes a convergence of sameness and difference such that there is genuine reiteration of the “wholly other,” *tout autre*, in every moment. The distinctiveness of each moment necessitates that what is experienced in the present is utterly new, but the present can be new only to the extent that it is old. Innovation is possible against the backdrop of replication. See, for example, Derrida’s remark in Derrida and Ferraris: “Every time I write something, I have the impression of making a beginning—but in fact that which is the same in texture is ceaselessly exposed to a singularity which is that of the other (another text, someone else, another word of the language). Everything appears anew: which means newness and repetition together. . . . In the actual writing, of course, I’m well aware of the fact that at bottom it all unfolds according to the same law that commands these always different things. . . . I can only hope that what I say about philosophy, literature, the event, the signature, the iterability (altering-altered repetition) is consistent with our encountering this ever renewed singularity” (47).

For a similar description of prayer in terms of the paradox of being concurrently old and new, see the comments of Derrida in Shapiro, Govrin, and Derrida: 65–67. Also relevant is the following comment of Derrida: “What I write resembles, by my account, a dotted outline of a book to be written, in what I call—at least for me—the ‘old new language,’ the most archaic and the newest, unheard of, and thereby at present unreadable. You know that the oldest synagogue in Prague is called the Old-New?” (Wood and Bernasconi: 73–74).

³³ On the symbolic nexus of exile and writing, which includes a brief discussion of Derrida, see Ofrat 2000: 160–164.

1985: 170). The Tetragrammaton, therefore, is designated the “translatable-untranslatable name” (Derrida 1985: 174), that is, on the one hand, translatable inasmuch as it is ineffable and hence cannot be voiced except through cognomens, yet, on the other, untranslatable insofar as it names the wholly other and absolute singularity³⁴ that cannot be named.³⁵ From the specific case of YHWH, “the proper name which is never proper,”³⁶ we can extrapolate about the concomitant necessity and impossibility of translating every proper name, a double bind that is indicative of language more generally.³⁷ YHWH paradigmatically exemplifies the role of *dénomination*—“at the same time to name and to unname”³⁸—implicit in every linguistic utterance, the unsaying that makes each saying (im)possible: “God’s name would then be the hyperbolic effect of that negativity or all negativity that is consistent in its discourse. God’s name would suit everything that may not be broached, approached, or designated, except in an indirect and negative manner. Every negative sentence would already be haunted by God or by the name of God, the distinction between God and God’s name opening up the very space of the enigma” (Derrida 1992c: 76).

If the reader may indulge me, I would like to cite the beginning of an essay I wrote in 1993, but which was not published until 1996. I refer to this passage because it underscores what I still consider to be the greatest affinity between Derrida’s grammatology and kabbalistic hermeneutics:

The following tradition is reported by the Hasidic master, R. Zadoq ha-Kohen of Lublin: *we-khakh qibbalti ki ha-‘olam kulo hu sefer she-‘asah ha-shem yitbarakh we-she-ha-torah hu perush she-‘asah we-hibber ‘al ‘oto ha-sefer*, “Thus I have received that the world in its entirety is a book that God, blessed be He, made, and the Torah is the commentary that He composed on that book.” . . . The Hasidic tradition articulated by R. Zadoq is rooted deeply in the Jewish idea that God’s creative act is essentially linguistic, in fact that divine creativity is an act of written composition. The first book that God writes is the world and the second the Torah. This statement implies, in a quintessentially Jewish manner, that God’s first book, the text of the cosmos, requires a commentary, Scripture, and that commentary, we can well imagine, engenders other commentaries that not God but human beings create in a seemingly endless effort to reveal the hidden depths concealed in the original traces of God’s writ-

³⁴ On the link among “alterity,” “singularity,” and an “essential and abyssal equivocality” that cannot be rendered in translation, see Derrida 1995a: 87–88.

³⁵ On the “double bind” that the name *YHWH* imposes on the recipient as something that necessarily must be translated but which it is impossible to translate, see Derrida 1988: 102–103, 1992d: 26.

³⁶ This formulation is used by Derrida in Marion 1999: 45.

³⁷ On the depiction of deconstruction in terms of the conditions of the translatability and untranslatability of language, see Caputo 1997: 53.

³⁸ Derrida’s language in Marion 1999: 44.

ing that make up the universe. R. Zadoq's comment, while perhaps not consciously intended in this manner, subverts any hermeneutical theory that posits a final truth, a foundation that ends all play of meaning. In perfectly good Derridean fashion we may say that the way back leads not to an original truth, but rather to an origin that is a text that needs to be interpreted by another text. In the beginning there is interpretation. The necessity of commentary thus constitutes the very texture of existence from the vantage point of the Jew. There is nothing that is not inscribed within the book and therefore open to interpretation, not even God's being. One is here reminded of the provocative observation of Jacques Derrida, "there is nothing outside of the text." All transcendence is reduced to textuality. (Wolfson 1996: 145)

The textualization of body is related by Derrida, as it is by numerous kabbalists over the centuries, to circumcision, for the latter is the act by means of which the flesh is engraved and the individual receives a proper name. Derrida provides a way to get beyond the "great war between Judaism and Christianity," as he put it in *Archive Fever*, that is, the debate regarding the literal versus the figurative interpretation of the ritual of circumcision, excision of flesh, on the one hand, and immersion in baptismal water, on the other. The sign of circumcision, like the phylacteries, which Derrida describes as "archives of skin or parchment covered with writing," is "right on the body . . . but with a being-right-on that this time does not exclude the detachment and the untying of the ligament, of the substance, and of the text simultaneously" (1996: 42). The text of the inscribed body for Derrida yields the body of the scripted text, and just as the former arises as a consequence of an ostensibly violent infringement upon the flesh, so the latter is written in the disrupting rupture of eruption. The Jewish rite is (hyper)literally preserved by Derrida, for the mark of circumcision is the primal cut of discernment that differentiates one from the other and renders the other inaccessible in its otherness, a mark that is "at once both endowed with and deprived of singularity" (1994a: 59). Circumcision thus functions as a figure of speech for the method of deconstruction because the latter is analogously understood as a cut, a tearing off and taking apart, a setting of boundaries traversed by rendering the inside outside and the outside inside.³⁹ In an extraordinary entry in *Circonfession*, Derrida relates the main themes of his writings, some of whose titles are specified by name, to the ancient Jewish rite of passage: "*Circumcision, that's all I have ever talked about, consider the discourse on the limit, margins, marks, marches, etc., the closure, the ring (al-*

³⁹ See Caputo 1997: 233.

liance and gift), the sacrifice, the writing of the body, the pharmakos excluded or cut off, the cutting/sewing of Glas, the blow and the sewing back up . . . yes but I have been, I am and I always will be me and not another, circumcised” (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 70–71).

The link between circumcision and writing is treated more fully by Derrida in his study “Shibboleth for Paul Celan,” published in 1986. The main thesis is summed up in the statement, “There must be circumcision, circumcision of the word, writing, and it must take place once, precisely, each time one time, the one time only” (1994a: 68). The choice of the Hebrew term *shibboleth* is based on the use of this sign in the testing of the Ephraimites by the men of Gilead in Judges 12:6. The indication that one was from Ephraim was his inability to pronounce *shibboleth*, saying instead “sibboleth.” The *shibboleth*, therefore, as Derrida expresses the matter in another essay, is a “solid barrier of a social division” (1992c: 93), for the way of speaking serves as an idiomatic mark to distinguish between those who belong and do not belong to a particular speech community. According to Derrida, therefore, *shibboleth* has a double edge for it cuts two ways, that is, the tear it makes in the fabric of being facilitates entry to those who belong by turning away those who are alien. Predictably, the double edge is related to circumcision, which is concomitantly a “mark of belonging and of exclusion” (Derrida 1994a: 67). By virtue of circumcision the Jew becomes other, the embodiment of difference, otherness, estrangement, homelessness, inscrutability. “The Jew is also the other, myself and the other; I am Jewish in saying: the Jew is the other who has no essence, who has nothing of his own or whose own essence is not to have one. Thus, at one and the same time, both the alleged universality of Jewish witnessing . . . and the incommunicable secret of the Judaic idiom, the singularity of ‘his name, his unpronounceable name’” (Derrida 1994a: 54). Derrida’s reflections seem to be rooted in the fact that it is customary to name the Jewish infant at the time of circumcision. I suggest this ritual lies behind his comment, “But does one ever circumcise without circumcising a word? a name? And how can one ever circumcise a name without doing something to the body? First of all to the body of the name which finds itself recalled by the wound to its condition as word, then as carnal mark, written, spaced, and inscribed in a network of other marks, at once both endowed with and deprived of singularity” (Derrida 1994a: 59).

The understanding of literal circumcision as a circumcision of the word allows Derrida to identify the Jew as poet. In support of this claim, Derrida cites the comment of Marina Tsvetayeva, “All poets are Jews,” which brings to mind the statement of Blake in “The Marriage of Heaven

and Hell” that the people of Israel “taught that the Poetic Genius . . . was the first principle and all the others merely derivative” (1982: 39).⁴⁰ It is in this sense that the poet/writer participates in the “enigma of circumcision,” which is described further as “an incision in the body of language,” the opening of the word to the other, the door that “opens history and the poem and philosophy and hermeneutics and religion. Of all that calls itself—of the name and the blessing of the name, of yes and of no, it sets turning the ring, to affirm or to annul” (Derrida 1994a: 68).

Here a note of caution is in order, for if it is Derrida’s opinion that all poets are Jews, it is not the case that all Jews are poets. In his essay on Jabès to which I have already referred, Derrida differentiates between the rabbi and the poet. Although both agree about the necessity of exegesis, they reflect two distinct interpretive stances, the rabbi representing heteronomous allegiance to law and the poet autonomous independence from law. “Between the fragments of the broken Tables,” Derrida writes, “the poem grows and the right to speech takes root” (1978: 67). Although both types are legitimate responses to the “original opening of interpretation,” it is the poetic that justifies the characterization of the writer as Jew. Poetic autonomy presupposes the shattering of the tablets of law, but this freedom is not absolute, for even the outlaw remains bound to law—if there were no law, how could one be out of the law and hence an outlaw? For the poet, the lawful breaching of law is intricately connected to language. “The poet, in the very experience of his freedom, finds himself both bound to language and delivered from it by a speech whose master, nonetheless, he himself is” (1978: 64–65).

In my judgment, this insight corresponds to what I have called the “hypernomian” tendency in kabbalistic literature, which can be expressed concisely as the insight that law is fulfilled most perfectly in its abrogation.⁴¹ In a gesticulation of mind even closer to Derrida, kabbalists have discerned that the lawful repudiation of law is intertwined with the presumption that in his utter otherness God is unrepresentable but still the measure of all that is representable, a measure that is meted in the ordinance prohibiting representation. From this peculiar Jewish-inspired exegesis, law, more generally, is delineated as the measure that puts things in place by circumscribing them in the limit that must be trespassed. In face of what cannot be represented, all representation of the other is trans-

⁴⁰ Although Derrida does not mention the comment of Blake, it is of interest to note that he does observe that “Blake’s *Jerusalem*, that great poem of circumcision, regularly associates these three turns of speech, these three revolutions: *circumcision*, *circumscription*, and *circumference*” (1994a: 63).

⁴¹ See Wolfson 2002a. A fuller version of this essay will appear in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond—Law of Limits and Limits of Law: Engendering a Kabbalistic Ethos* (forthcoming). See also Wolfson 2000: 36–37.

gressive, but without representation of the other there would be no law to follow.⁴² Transgression thus lies in the womb of law, for trespassing the law determines the boundaries of law.⁴³ Moreover, for kabbalists, as for Derrida, the issue of law and its overcoming is related to the problem of language and its transcendence.⁴⁴ Just as the path to overcome the law is by way of undergoing the law, the unsayable can be heeded merely by way of what is spoken, albeit spoken as the unspoken, a paradox that is ritually instantiated in the custom to vocalize the ineffable name by its circumlocution.

The transgressive element, and particularly the connection that Derrida makes between it and linguistic representation, is also helpful in ascertaining the nexus between secrecy and illicit sexual relations that figures prominently in the kabbalistic tradition and whose trace is discernible in Derrida's thinking. More specifically, Derrida asserts that transgression discloses an essential link between the gift and secrecy, a theme found in an ancient mythical fragment preserved in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, considered by scholars to be one of the oldest works of kabbalah. I have had the opportunity to examine this passage elsewhere, utilizing Derrida's reflections, so in this context I will only briefly recapitulate the main points.⁴⁵

In an effort to explain the first word of Torah, *be-re'shit*, "in the beginning," the bahiric text offers a parable about a king who gives his daughter as a gift in marriage to his son. What in the nature of this bestowal necessitates its being characterized as a giving of a gift? Indeed, according to rabbinic law, which is upheld in the *Bahir*, marriage is a contractual arrangement, and thus it would be superfluous to speak of a woman betrothed to a man as being offered as a gift. The clue is provided in the concluding remark of the king to the prince, "Do with her as you wish." To appreciate the intent of this comment, it would be useful to recall Derrida's reflection on the nature of the gift as that which opens the circle of economy, the circular exchange of goods, so as to defy reciprocity or

⁴² Derrida reiterates this point in a number of writings. For example, see Derrida 1987: 131, 1990: 137, 2000b: 81.

⁴³ Derrida writes: "A transgression should always know what it transgresses, which always makes the transgression impure, and compromised in advance with what it transgresses" (2002: 43).

⁴⁴ Particularly relevant is Derrida's observation that "apophatic discourse," like a "certain mysticism," "has always been suspected of atheism," a suspicion that seems at once "merited" and "insignificant." Derrida refers to the remark of Leibniz about Angelus Silesius from a letter to Paccius on 28 January 1695, cited by Heidegger, to the effect that mystical texts are full of difficult metaphors "inclining almost to Godlessness." Commenting on this, Derrida writes: "Inclining, but not going beyond incline or inclination, not even or almost (*beinahe zur Gottlosigkeit hinneigend*), and the oblique slope [*penchant*] of this *clinamen* does not seem separable from a certain boldness of language [*langue*], from a poetic or metaphoric tongue" (1995b: 36).

⁴⁵ Wolfson 1998: 156–163.

symmetry,⁴⁶ for “the *given* of the gift (*that which* one gives, *that which* is given, the gift as given thing or as act of donation) must not come back to the giving (let us not already say to the subject, to the donor). It must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure. . . . It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is the impossible” (Derrida 1995a: 7).⁴⁷

The bahiric parable can be profitably read through the lens of Derrida’s account of the gift and particularly its link to the temporization of language in the dynamic of bestowing and receiving, opening and closing. That the prince is given the princess as a gift by the king signifies that the act of giving is not a symmetrical relation: Nothing the son does can reciprocate the action of the father, for there is no exchange of commodities, no reciprocal giving and taking. Moreover, the son who receives the daughter as gift cannot donate this gift to another; the daughter belongs exclusively to the son to whom she has been given as a gift. Finally, in the absence of reciprocity, the recipient of the gift assumes complete control and mastery over that which is given; in the act of giving, the donor relinquishes all claims of ownership and possession with respect to the gift, a gesticulation that exceeds the circle of economy. In the bahiric passage, the excessive power of gifting is expressed as an entitlement with a distinctly sexual nuance—the prince is instructed by his father to do as he pleases with the princess. The symbolic import of the parable blatantly contradicts the normative strictures of biblical law, for the taboo of siblings mating (Lev. 18:9) is undermined by the relationship that is described between the son and the daughter of the king. The secret alluded to here, which later kabbalists relate to the mystery of illicit sexual relations (*sitrei ‘arayot*) mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud (Hagigah 11b), is that the sexual prohibitions necessary to preserve the fabric of human society can be, indeed must be, transgressed in a symbolic manner in the divine realm (Stern 1991: 222). In that sense, the gift of wisdom is truly the impossible, that which defies the limits of temporal possibility inscribed within the parameters of law. The only time of the gift, therefore, is the present, the paradoxical instant that is an effraction in the linear circularity of time (Derrida 1995a: 9).

But there is an additional element in Derrida’s analysis of the gift and secrecy that can be applied to kabbalistic hermeneutics. The gift is marked by

⁴⁶ It is on account of this feature of generosity, giving without any thought of return, that Cixous associates the realm of the gift with the feminine in contrast to the masculine, which is linked with the realm of the proper. See *Moi*: 110–113.

⁴⁷ On the analysis of gift giving in terms of sacred objects that are not exchangeable, see Godelier.

structural paradoxes, the stigmata of the impossibility. . . . So as not to take over the other, the overtaking by surprise of the pure gift should have the generosity to give nothing that surprises and appears *as* gift, *nothing that presents itself as present, nothing that is*; it should therefore be surprising enough and so thoroughly made up of a surprise that it is not even a question of getting over it, thus of a surprise surprising enough to let itself be forgotten without delay. . . . The secret of that about which one cannot speak, but which one can no longer silence. (Derrida 1992b: 147)

The paradox of the gift is that it is always “the gift of something that remains inaccessible, unpresentable, and as a consequence secret. . . . The gift is the secret itself, if the secret *itself* can be told. Secrecy is the last word of the gift which is the last word of the secret” (Derrida 1995a: 29–30). Just as the disclosure of the secret undermines its claim to being a secret, so the gifting of the gift is annulled in the giving of the gift. The “unconditional respect” of the secret, Derrida tells us, in an obvious challenge to Kantian epistemology, is that the “secret is not phenomenalizable. Neither phenomenal nor noumenal” (1995b: 25). The secret is not something that can be unveiled because it “remains inviolable even when one thinks one has revealed it.” The secret is “nonprovisional, heterogeneous to all manifestation. The secret is not a reserve of potential knowing, a potential manifestation. And the language of ab-negation . . . *necessitates* doing the impossible, *necessitates* going there where one cannot go” (1995b: 26). To be a secret the secret must persist as secret, mute and impassive, and thus one can speak of the secret ad infinitum without disrupting its secrecy. The ineffability of the secret, paradoxically, generates a potentially unlimited sequence of attempts to articulate the secret (1995b: 26–27).⁴⁸ The duplicity of the secret as the saying of what cannot be said, the hermeneutical condition of *différance*, is illustrated by the biblical narrative of the ‘*aqedah*, Abraham’s attempted sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:1–19). Commenting on Kierkegaard’s observation that Abraham both speaks and does not speak, Derrida writes that he “speaks in order not to say anything about the essential thing he must keep secret. Speaking in order not to say anything is always the best technique for keeping a secret” (1995a: 59). By speaking what cannot be spoken, the secret is preserved.

The secret for the kabbalists necessarily exemplifies this double bind as well: The secret can be a secret only if it is hidden, but the secret can be hidden only if it is revealed (Wolfson 1999, 2000: 21–38). Again, to quote Derrida, the secret is “the thing to be dissimulated, a thing that is neither shown nor said, signified perhaps but that cannot or must not first be delivered up to self-evidence” (1992d: 26). The secret is thus linked to

⁴⁸ On the impossibility of testifying to a secret, see Derrida 2000a: 30–31.

dénégation; that is, the secret of necessity is the negation that negates itself. In this doubling of the negative, the secret both is and is not what it is, a dissimulation that dissimulates in the concealment of disclosure. “There is a secret of denial and a denial of the secret. The secret as such, as *secret*, separates and already institutes negativity; it is a negation that denies itself. It de-negates itself. This denegation does not happen to it by accident; it is essential and originary” (1992d: 25).⁴⁹ The secret’s text is woven in and from the interweave of veiling and unveiling, dissimulation and exposure. Precisely with respect to overcoming this dichotomy by occupying a space between does bestowing the gift illumine the secret. The secret can be safeguarded only if it has been divulged and thus is no longer a secret, and, similarly, the gift can be given only if it is received and thus is no longer a gift. It follows that the secret remains untold in the telling, the gift withheld in the giving (Caputo 1997: 33).

The way of withholding-bestowal elicited from examining the secret and the gift illumines Derrida’s understanding of language as an encircling cut, a circum/cision, that tears the fabric to which one is bound, the opening of space that fosters the possibility of piecing together the peace of the whole that has been ruptured. In one passage, Derrida relates this process to the act of translation, “translation-proof, grace would perhaps come when the writing of the other absolves you, from time to time, from the infinite *double bind* and first of all, such is a gift’s condition, absolves itself, unbinds itself from the double bind” (1992d: 26).⁵⁰ To be unbound of the double bind, opening up to receive the gift, is elsewhere referred to by Derrida in the technical term from German occult literature, *Gelassenheit*, “serenity of abandonment,” “releasement,” letting-go to take hold, the “rarest secret” beyond all knowledge, even knowledge of the name, unheard when spoken.⁵¹

⁴⁹ On the “negativity of the secret” and the “secret of denegation,” see Derrida 1992d: 18.

⁵⁰ On the double bind of translation, see Derrida 1979: 76–79.

⁵¹ On *Gelassenheit* see Caputo 1978: 99–100, 118–127, 173–183. Derrida’s view, in my judgment, seems very close to the opinion regarding the divine name expressed by Marion: “The Name has no name in any language. No language says it or understands it. This is why the Jew never pronounces the Tetragrammaton, which he nevertheless reads. By orally substituting other titles for it, one indicates that the Name does not belong to our language but comes to it from elsewhere. The Name appears as a gift, where, in the same gesture, the unthinkable gives us a name as that in which it gives itself, but also as a gift that gives the unthinkable, which only withdraws in the distance of the gift. The name therefore delivers the unthinkable, as the unthinkable that *gives* itself; the same unthinkable also gives *itself*, and hence withdraws within the anterior distance that governs the gift of the Name. The Name delivers and steals away in one and the same movement” (2001: 142).

For a comparative analysis of Derrida and Marion, see Caputo 1999. The concomitant bestowing and withholding resonates with the dialectic of disclosure and concealment that marks the way of kabbalistic hermeneutics. See Wolfson 1999: 114–121, 2000: 27–34, 2002c: 110–115. Particularly germane is the comment in Derrida that the play of words in the expression *tout autre est tout autre* “seems to contain the very possibility of a secret that hides and reveals itself at the same time within a single sentence and, more than that, within a single language” (1995a: 87).

One can have doubts about it from the moment when the name not only is nothing, in any case is not the “thing” that it names, not the “nameable” or the renowned, but also risks to bind, to enslave or to engage the other, to link the called, to call him/her to respond even before any decision or any deliberation, even before any freedom. . . . According to a formula that haunts our tradition from Plotinus to Heidegger . . . and to Lacan . . . the gift of the name gives that which it does not have, that in which, prior to everything, may consist the essence, that is to say—beyond being—the nonessence, of the gift. (1995b: 84–85)⁵²

Through the gifting of what cannot be given, the performative act of calling God by the name that cannot be uttered, the spontaneous irruption of prayer, indeed the entreaty to pray, is made possible: “So, when this break, this interruption happens in the everyday life, on the exceptional moment of prayer, we are going back to the name, to the name of the name, a nameless name, or a placeless place, and so on and so forth. We don’t simply address someone, we pray to someone—God if you want, some unique one, to allow us to pray. . . . It’s praying after the prayer—*prier après la prière*—which is the prayer before the prayer, the prayer for the prayer.”⁵³

If we are to speak of the influence of Jewish mysticism on Derrida, it would be in the decidedly apophatic sense of unbinding the double bind to facilitate the liturgical utterance of the unutterable name, the name that demarcates the “essence” that is “beyond being,” *au-delà de l’être*, the “nonessence of the gift,” *l’inessence du don* (Derrida 1993b: 112). Yet, it is particularly with regard to this very gesture that the critical difference between traditional kabbalah and Derridean deconstruction becomes apparent: For the kabbalist, unlike Derrida, divine alterity does not preclude an ontological presumption regarding the superessentiality of God’s being. In the writings of kabbalists, therefore, the absence of God, his withdrawal from the spectrum of the visible, signifies God’s presence most fully, whereas, for Derrida, absence is a genuine absence and not merely an absence of what is present even if what is present is truly absent. If there can be any faith at all, it must be predicated on the likelihood that there is nothing in which to believe, the metaphysical aporia that serves as the a/theistic premise for a “nondogmatic doublet of dogma, a philosophical and metaphysical doublet, in any case a *thinking* that ‘repeats’ the possibility of religion without religion” (Derrida 1995a: 49). Prayer itself is only possible to the extent that it embraces this impossibility: “If we were sure that at the other end of the prayer God would show up, and that we produce the addressee, that wouldn’t be prayer. The possibility that God re-

⁵² It is of interest to note that this paragraph does not appear in the first version of the study, which was published originally in English translation (Derrida 1992e).

⁵³ These comments of Derrida are taken from Shapiro, Govrin, and Derrida: 61–63.

mains eternally absent, that there might be no addressee at the other end of my prayer is the condition of the prayer. . . . So, that's why I would go so far as to say there should be a moment of atheism in the prayer."⁵⁴

In traditional kabbalistic lore, the mystery of prayer likewise involves the invocation of the name that cannot be invoked, but such an invocation is based ultimately on the paradox of an absence that is present in its absence, a true nothing, one might say; in deconstruction, this dialectic is no mystery, for the mysterious necessitates an authentic lack, an absence that cannot be represented even as absence. To express the matter in another terminological register, the notion of an "arche-trace" is endorsed by both kabbalist and Derrida,⁵⁵ but with a critical difference: For the kabbalist the originary trace can be traced back ontologically to the infinite, the luminous darkness, exposed through its occlusion in the multiplicity of differentiated beings, a superabundance whose absence signifies the presence of a being so full that it must be empty. Derrida's critique of the notion of presence (*parousia*) in western metaphysics (including Heidegger's attempt to overcome it) applies, in my judgment, to classical kabbalah: "And yet, that which gives us to think beyond the closure cannot be simply absent. Absent, either it would give us nothing to think or it still would be a negative mode of presence" (1982: 65). For Derrida the originary trace is the heterological sign of excess that "must elude mastery" (65), the wholly other that resists reification, the mark that can in no way appear or be named, the supplementary stroke (*trait*) that retreats (*re-trait*) in the withdrawal (*retrait*) of its tracing.⁵⁶ "The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace" (1973: 156). The trace, which is "produced as its own erasure" and is thus "neither perceptible nor imperceptible" (1982: 65), is subject to an "indefinite pro-

⁵⁴ Shapiro, Govrin, and Derrida: 63.

⁵⁵ Derrida writes: "The concept of arche-trace . . . is in fact contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity. The trace is not only the disappearance of origin—within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a nonorigin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary nontrace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche-trace. Yet we know that that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace" (1976: 61).

⁵⁶ The play on the words *trait*, *re-trait*, and *retrait*, is basic to the analysis in Derrida 1993a. Of particular interest to this study is the following remark: "Is it by chance that in order to speak of the trait we are falling back upon the language of negative theology or of those discourses concerned with naming the withdrawal [*retrait*] of the invisible or hidden god? The withdrawal of the One whom one must not look in the face, or represent, or adore, that is, idolize under the traits or guise of the icon? The One whom it is even dangerous to name by one or the other of his proper names? The end of iconography" (Derrida 1993a: 54).

cess of supplementarity” (1976: 163) because it cannot be retraced to any origin that is not itself also a “trace of the trace,” the *différance* etched in a “mode of writing” that is from its inception “without presence and without absence” (1982: 66–67),⁵⁷ an “inscription prior to writing, a proto-writing without a present origin, without an *arche*” (1973: 146). From this vantage point all representation must be considered a “de-presentation” (1976: 203), a conclusion that conflicts with the kabbalistic tenet regarding the imaginal configuration of the formless in the form of the sefirotic emanations, a configuration that embraces the dialectic representation of the unrepresentable in the paradoxical vocalization of the ineffable.

Traditional kabbalists (in line with the apophaticism of Neoplatonic negative theology) do assume there is a reality beyond language, a super-essentiality that transcends the finite categories of reason and speech (and hence the validity of speaking about ontology), but this reality is accessible phenomenologically only through language. Insofar as kabbalists maintain that the *sefirot* are contained in the Tetragrammaton, the latter serves as the model to convey the confluence of the visual and the auditory, for just as the ineffable name is uttered in the epithet that preserves its ineffability so the invisible image is portrayed in the form that shelters its invisibility.⁵⁸ The trace, for kabbalists, likewise arises as an effacing of the trace, but in this effacing the faceless appears as the erasure of erasure and the conse-

⁵⁷ The full text is worthy of citation: “But at the same time, this erasure of the trace must have been traced in the metaphysical text. Presence, then, far from being, as is commonly thought, *what* the sign signifies, what a trace refers to, presence, then, is the trace of the trace, the trace of the erasure of the trace. Such is, for us, the text of metaphysics, and such is, for us, the language we speak. Only on this condition can metaphysics and our language signal in the direction of their own transgression. And this is why it is not contradictory to think *together* the *erased* and the *traced* of the trace. And also why there is no contradiction between the absolute erasure of the ‘early trace’ of difference and that which maintains it as trace, sheltered and visible in presence. . . . The trace of the trace which (is) difference above all could not appear or be named *as such*, that is, in its presence. It is the ‘as such’ which precisely, and as such, evades us forever. . . . Beyond Being and beings, this difference, ceaselessly differing and deferring (itself), would trace (itself) (by itself)—this *différance* would be the first or last trace if we still could speak, here, of origin or end. Such a *différance* would at once, again, give us to think a writing without presence and without absence, without history, without cause, without *archia*, without *telos*, a writing that absolutely upsets all dialectics, all theology, all teleology, all ontology. A writing exceeding everything that the history of metaphysics has comprehended in the form of the Aristotelian *gramme*, in its point, in its line, in its circle, in its time, and in its space” (Derrida 1982: 66–67).

This crucial articulation of Derrida’s notion of trace and *différance* emerges from an engaged reading of Heidegger’s reference to the “early trace” (*die frühe Spur*) of the difference between Being and beings that has been forgotten in the “oblivion of Being.” See also Derrida 1973: 155–158. The key passage interpreted by Derrida occurs in Heidegger: 50–51. For a comprehensive study of “difference” in Heidegger and Derrida, see Donkel, and for discussion of the Derridean trace against the background of Heidegger’s thinking, see Marrati-Guénoun: 101–204. On the notion of the trace and *arche*-writing, see also the nuanced discussion in Harvey: 153–181.

⁵⁸ This is not to deny that Derrida himself affirms the convergence of the ocular and verbal (see, for example, 1993a: 4), but in a manner that is quite distant from the kabbalistic understanding of synesthesia.

quent writing of the name. In marking this divergence between traditional kabbalah and Derridean deconstruction, we establish the terms necessary for a dialogical encounter between two disparate modes of discourse equally devoted to entrusting the gift of secrecy in the secret giving of the gift.

REFERENCES

- Bennington, Geoffrey 1992 "Mosaic Fragment: If Derrida Were an Egyptian. . . ." In *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, 97–119. Ed. by David Wood. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bennington, Geoffrey, and Jacques Derrida 1991 *Jacques Derrida*. Mars: Éditions du Seuil.
- 1993 *Jacques Derrida*. Trans. by Geoffrey Bennington. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Blake, William 1982 *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Rev. ed. Ed. by David V. Erdman. Commentary by Harold Bloom. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bloom, Harold 1975a *A Map of Misreading*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 1975b *Kabbalah and Criticism*. New York: Seabury Press.
- 1979 "The Breaking of Form." In *Deconstruction and Criticism*, 1–37. Ed. by Harold Bloom. New York: Seabury Press.
- Caputo, John D. 1978 *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- 1997 *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 1999 "Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in in Derrida and Marion." In *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, 185–222. Ed. by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Cixous, Hélène, and Jacques Derrida 2001 *Veils*. Trans. by Geoffrey Bennington. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cornell, Drucilla 1997 "Where Love Begins: Sexual Difference and the Limit of the Masculine Symbolic." In *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, 161–206. Ed. by Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin. New York: Routledge.

-
- Derrida, Jacques
- 1973 *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's "Theory of Signs."* Trans. by David B. Allison. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- 1976 *Of Grammatology.* Trans. by Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- 1978 *Writing and Difference.* Trans. by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1979 "Living On: Border Lines." In *Deconstruction and Criticism*, 75–176. Ed. by Harold Bloom. New York: Seabury Press.
- 1981a *Dissemination.* Trans. by Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1981b *Positions.* Trans. by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1982 *Margins of Philosophy.* Trans. by Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1984 *Signéponge/Signsponge.* Trans. by Richard Rand. New York: Columbia University Press.
- 1985 "Des Tours de Babel." Trans. by Joseph F. Graham. In *Difference in Translation*, 165–207. Ed. by Joseph F. Graham. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- 1986 *Glas.* Trans. by John P. Leavey Jr. and Richard Rand. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- 1987 "Devant La Loi." Trans. by Avital Ronell. In *Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance: Centenary Readings*, 128–149. Ed. by Alan Udoff. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 1988 *The Ear of the Other: Otiobiography, Transference.* Ed. by Christie McDonald. Trans. by Peggy Kamuf. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- 1990 "Sending: On Representation." In *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, 107–138. Ed. by G. L. Ormiston and A. D. Schrift. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 1992a *Acts of Literature.* Ed. by Derek Attridge. London: Routledge.
- 1992b *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money.* Trans. by Peggy Kamuf. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- 1992c "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials." In *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 73–142. Ed. by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 1992d "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy." In *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 25–71. Ed. by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 1992e "Post-Scriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices." Trans. by John Leavey Jr. In *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 283–323. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 1993a *Memories of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*. Trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1993b *Sauf le nom*. Paris: Galilée.
- 1994a "Shibboleth for Paul Celan." In *Word Traces: Readings of Paul Celan*, 3–72. Ed. by Aris Fioretos. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- 1994b *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. by Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge.
- 1995a *The Gift of Death*. Trans. by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1995b *On the Name*. Ed. by Thomas Dutoit. Trans. by David Wood, John P. Leavey Jr., and Ian McLeod. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 1995c *Points . . . Interviews, 1974–1994*. Ed. by Elisabeth Weber. Trans. by Peggy Kamuf et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 1996 *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Trans. by Eric Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 1997a ". . . and Pomegranates." Trans. by Samuel Weber. In *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*, 326–344. Ed. by Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 1997b *Politics of Friendship*. Trans. by George Collins. London: Verso.
- 1998 "Point de folie—Maintenant l'architecture." Trans. by K. Linker. In *Architecture Theory since 1968*, 566–581. Ed. by K. Michael Hays. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- 1999a *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Trans. by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 1999b *Monolingualism of the Other or The Prosthesis of Origin*. Trans. by Patrick Mensah. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 2000a *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*. Trans. by Elizabeth Rottenberg. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 2000b *Of Hospitality: Ann Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Trans. by Rachel Bowlby. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 2002 *Acts of Religion*. Ed. by Gil Anidjar. New York: Routledge.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Maurizio Ferraris
2001 *A Taste for the Secret*. Ed. by Giacomo Donis and David Webb. Trans. by Giacomo Donis. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Derrida, Jacques, and Gianni Vattimo
1998 *Religion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Devries, Hent
2000 "The Theology of Sign and the Sign of Theology: The Apophatics of Deconstruction." In *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, 166–194. Ed. by Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens ten Kate. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Donkel, Douglas L.
1992 *The Understanding of Difference in Heidegger and Derrida*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Foshay, Toby
1992a "Introduction: Denegation and Resentment." In *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 1–24. Ed. by Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 1992b "Resentment and Apophasis: The Trace of the Other in Levinas, Derrida and Gans." In *Shadow of Spirit: Post-modernism and Religion*, 81–92. Ed. by Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick. London: Routledge.
- Gibbs, Robert
1997 "Lines, Circles, Points: Messianic Epistemology in Cohen, Rosenzweig and Benjamin." In *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, 363–382. Ed. by Peter Schäfer and Mark R. Cohen. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

- Godelier, Maurice 1999 *The Enigma of the Gift*. Trans. by Nora Scott. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Handelman, Susan 1982 *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 1987 "Jacques Derrida and the Heretic Hermeneutic." In *Displacement: Derrida and After*, 98–129. Ed. by Mark Krupnick. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Harvey, Irene E. 1986 *Derrida and the Economy of Différance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin 1975 *Early Greek Thinking*. Trans. by David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Idel, Moshe 1986 "Infinities of Torah in Kabbalah." In *Midrash and Literature*, 141–157. Ed. by Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- 1995 "PaRDeS: Some Reflections on Kabbalistic Hermeneutics." In *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, 249–268. Ed. by John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Kafka, Franz 1971 *Parables and Paradoxes*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Kilcher, Andreas 1998 *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als Ästhetisches Paradigma: Die Konstruktion einer Ästhetischen Kabbala seit der Frühen Neuzeit*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler.
- Klemm, David E. 1992 "Open Secrets: Derrida and Negative Theology." In *Negation and Theology*, 8–24. Ed. by Robert P. Scharlemann. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.
- Levy, Ze'ev 1997 *Otherness and Responsibility: A Study of Emmanuel Levinas' Philosophy*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.
- Llewelyn, John 2001 *Appositions of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Marion, Jean-Luc 1999 "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology.'" In *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, 20–53. Ed. by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

-
- 2001 *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Trans. by Thomas A. Carlson. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Marrati-Guénoun, Paola
1998 *La genèse et la trace: Derrida lecteur de Husserl et Heidegger*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Moi, Toril
1985 *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Mole, Gary D.
1997 *Lévinas, Blanchot, Jabès: Figures of Estrangement*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Ofrat, Gideon
2000 *In Praise of Exile*. Jerusalem: Karta.
- 2001 *The Jewish Derrida*. Trans. by Peretz Kidron. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Scholem, Gershom
1969 *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. Trans. by Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken Books.
- Shapiro, David,
Michal Govrin,
and Jacques Derrida
2001 *Body of Prayer*. New York: Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.
- Smith, Robert
1995 *Derrida and Autobiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri
Chakravorty
2001 "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman." In *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida*, 43–71. Ed. by Nancy J. Holland. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Srajek, Martin C.
1997 *In the Margins of Deconstruction: Jewish Conceptions of Ethics in Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Stern, David
1991 *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Stern, Sacha
1994 *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Taylor, Mark C.
1993 *Notes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wallace, Mark I.
2002 "God beyond God: Derrida's Theological Self-Portraiture." In *The Unknown, Remembered Gate: Religious Experience and Hermeneutical Reflection in the Study of Religion*, 99–118. Ed. by Jeffrey J. Kripal and Elliot R. Wolfson. New York: Seven Bridges Press.

- Wolfson, Elliot R. 1987 "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol." *History of Religions* 27: 189–215.
- 1994 *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1996 "From Sealed Book to Open Text: Time, Memory, and Narrativity in Kabbalistic Hermeneutics." In *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, 145–178. Ed. by Steven Kepnes. New York: New York University Press.
- 1998 "Hebraic and Hellenic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*." *Poetics Today* 19: 147–176.
- 1999 "Occultation of the Feminine and the Body of Secrecy in Medieval Kabbalah." In *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, 113–154. Ed. by Elliot R. Wolfson. New York: Seven Bridges Press.
- 2000 *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, Theurgy*. Los Angeles: Cherub Press.
- 2002a "Beyond Good and Evil: Hypernomianism, Transmorality, and Kabbalistic Ethics." In *Crossing Boundaries: Essays on the Ethical Status of Mysticism*, 103–156. Ed. by Jeffrey J. Kripal and G. William Barnard. New York: Seven Bridges Press.
- 2002b "The Cut That Binds: Time, Memory, and the Ascetic Impulse." In *God's Voice from the Void: Old and New Studies in Bratslav Hasidism*, 103–154. Ed. by Shaul Magid. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 2002c "Divine Suffering and the Hermeneutics of Reading: Philosophical Reflections on Lurianic Mythology." In *Suffering Religion*, 101–162. Ed. by Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson. New York: Routledge.
- Wolosky, Shira 1982 "Derrida, Jabès, Levinas: Sign-Theory as Ethical Discourse." *Prooftexts* 2: 283–302.
- Wood, David, and Robert Bernasconi, eds. 1988 *Derrida and Différance*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Wright, T. R. 2000 "Midrash and Intertextuality: Ancient Rabbinic Exegesis and Postmodern Reading of the Bible." In *Divine Aporia: Postmodern Conversations about the Other*, 97–119. Ed. by John C. Hawley. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press.