

BIFURCATING THE ANDROGYNE AND ENGENDERING SIN: A ZOHARIC READING OF GEN 1–3

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Too early for the rainbow,
too early for the dove.
These are the final days:
this is the darkness, this is the flood.
And there is no man or woman
who can be touched,
but you who come between them,
you will be judged.
(Leonard Cohen, “The Gypsy Wife”)¹

The first three chapters of Genesis are overflowing with themes that have had a decisive impact on the formation of major theological and anthropological conceptions that have shaped Judaism and Christianity through the centuries. The kabbalistic tradition is no exception. In this essay, I will offer a modest reading that focuses on the construction of gender typologies that emerge from the narrative accounts of the creation of man and woman, the nature of sin, and the implicit sense of rectification, which may be elicited from Sefer Hazohar, the main compendium of Jewish mystical lore that began to circulate in fragmentary form in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, most likely in the regions of Catalonia and Castile and received a relatively stable literary form in the sixteenth century when

1. I have followed the version in Leonard Cohen’s *Stranger Music* (1994, 302). The recorded version on the album *Recent Songs*, released in 1979, has some slight variations, including the title (“The Gypsy’s Wife”) and the critical last lines “And there is no man or woman who can’t be touched/ But you who come between them will be judged.” The lyrics are available at <http://www.leonardcohen.com/us/music/recent-songs/gypsys-wife>.

the manuscripts were prepared for the first printings in Mantua and Cremona (1558–1560).²

IMAGINAL BODY: BETWEEN LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE

Since the ensuing analysis will center principally on the matter of gender and since this cannot be understood in isolation from the larger question pertaining to the nature of embodiment, I will initiate this study with a brief observation about the nature of divine corporeality that pervaded the theosophical speculations of the kabbalists active in the time and place of the first stages of the literary and historical manifestation of the zoharic phenomenon. Despite the wide diversity of opinions expressed in kabbalistic sources, it is fair to say that the overwhelming hermeneutical principle was articulated succinctly by Moses ben Nahman, the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist, exegete, and talmudic commentator: Scripture, he wrote, speaks about what is below and alludes to what is above (Wolfson 1989, 110–12). As the dictum of Nahmanides demonstrates, the archaic doctrine concerning the correspondence of the upper and lower realms is applied to the twofold sense of the scriptural text, the exoteric associated with the historical and the esoteric with the symbolic. Just as the figurative meaning cannot be separated from the literal, indeed the latter is ascertained by peering through the guise of the former rather than by discarding it (Wolfson 2007, 56–110, esp. 73–74), so the supernal realm of divine potencies cannot be comprehended except through the mirror of the terrestrial realm.

Reversing the typical approach to anthropomorphism articulated by medieval philosophical exegetes, the kabbalists maintained that the spiritual entities can be described in human terms, for the tangibility of the human body is determined by the divine body to which it corresponds. Biblical anthropomorphisms, accordingly, are not to be explained simply as a concession to the limitations of human reason—“the Torah speaks in human language,” according to the talmudic maxim appropriated by the philosophers to formulate the principle of accommodation; on the contrary, the anthropomorphic expressions inform us about the comport-

2. For a review of the textual problems surrounding the zoharic anthology, see Abrams 2010, 17–117, 224–428. Abrams offers a thorough review of the relevant scholarly literature.

ment of divine bodiliness, which illumines, in turn, the corporeal nature of the world and that of the human being.

Kabbalistically speaking, the notion that the limbs of the physical body signify the limbs of the spiritual body entails the supposition that the reality of both is constituted by the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. One of the more lucid formulations of the point was offered by Joseph Gikatilla, a Spanish kabbalist active in the second half of the thirteenth century, in the introduction to one of his major compositions, *Sha'arei Orah*, an expansive commentary on the ten *sefirot*, the ten luminous emanations of the divine, a passage that had a significant impact on subsequent kabbalists³ and has also commanded the attention of a number of scholars.⁴ Gikatilla begins by noting categorically that there is no similarity between divine and human with regard to either the internal essence (*etsem*) or the external form (*tavnit*), which leads him to conclude that the limbs of the human body are “made in the image of signs” (*bedimyon simanim*) that allude to the “hidden, supernal matters that the mind cannot know except in the manner of signification” (*kedimyon zikkaron*), just as the words “Reuben the son of Jacob” serve as a sign that points to the reality that is the person so named. The experiential dimension is underscored by Gikatilla’s further observation that God creates the “hidden and revealed limbs” in the human body “in the image of a sign of the account of the chariot [*bedimyon siman lema'aseh merkavah*], and if a person merits to purify a limb of his limbs, that limb will be in the image of a throne for that inner, supernal matter that is called by that name” (*Sha'arei Orah* 1:49–50).

The reference to the account of the chariot is an allusion to the supernal chariot, that is, the *sefirotic* pleroma, as opposed to the angelic realm envisioned by the prophet Ezekiel, a standard distinction found in many kabbalistic sources. To say that the corporeal limbs are signs alluding to this chariot is indicative of the ontological homology between human and divine. The technical term *siman*, on this score, functions performatively as a mental icon that is similar to the material icon in Byzantine culture;⁵

3. Recanati, *Perush al Hatorah*, 37b–c; idem, *Perush Hatefillot* (MS Vatican ebr. 310, fols. 6b–7a); Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 20:2; Toledot Adam, sec. 128 in Horowitz, *Shenei Luhot Haberit*. See reference to Ibn Gabbai cited below (n. 12), and compare Mottolese 2004, 204, 334.

4. Huss 1996, Wolfson 2002 (316–17). For an extensive discussion of the sign and symbol in Gikatilla’s linguistic theory, see Morlok 2011 (209–75, esp. 247–66).

5. My discussion here is indebted to Pentcheva 2006, but in previous work I have

that is to say, the limbs are not merely passive surfaces upon which the *sefirotic* potencies are imprinted, but they are themselves textured surfaces by which the human agent—embodied ideally in the body politic of Israel—is conjoined to and participates in the hidden divine reality. The physical image, therefore, is the means of access to the transcendence that exceeds the very physicality of that image. The sign, like the icon, is an amalgamation of presence and absence, insofar as it makes the invisible visible within the confines of the imagination and thereby enacts the presence of what must remain absent in order to be present.

The conclusion to be drawn from Gikatilla's passage is opposite from the view advanced by exponents of a more rationalist religious philosophy, epitomized by Moses Maimonides: ascription of a body to God is not merely a rhetorical device to enunciate the inherent metaphoricity of theological language; it is rather a mode of discourse that calls into question our naturalistic and commonsensical assumptions about human and cosmic corporeality. While no kabbalist presumed that the depictions of the divine body should be construed literally as affirming that God is a fleshly being, it is also clear that no kabbalist could accept the philosophical orientation that would interpret these expressions merely as allegorical, thereby denying the ontic reality of the entity to which the expressions refer. The following statement by Charles Mopsik concerning the perspective of Abraham ben David of Posquières on anthropomorphism can be applied more broadly to other kabbalists: "Rabad, like Maimonides, does not attribute a bodily form to the supreme Being. However, biblical or rabbinic texts which appear to attribute a corporeal form to God need to be accounted for without relying on metaphor which simply neutralizes the literal meaning of the writings" (2005, 79–80).⁶

One can detect in these words an echo of Gershom Scholem's many observations on the nature of the symbol in kabbalistic literature. To cite one relevant remark from his essay, "Shi'ur Komah: The Mystical Shape of the Godhead," a study that traces the evolution of the anthropomorphic

independently referred to the role of the image as a mental icon in similar terms. See Wolfson 1994 (63–65, 106, 130, 167, 199–200 [in n. 43, I suggested the resemblance between the German Pietistic worship of mental icons and an approach found in a number of Greek Orthodox theologians], 201 n. 48, 275, 394–95); idem 2005 (34, 39, 122–23).

6. See also the pertinent comments of Morlok 2011, 270–71.

representations of the divine in Jewish esotericism, medieval theology was dictated by philosophers, who

sought to push the biblical concept of monotheism to its utmost extreme, and even outdid the Bible itself in removing any vestiges therein of mythical or anthropomorphic parlance.... In the newly evolving Kabbalah, by contrast, we find the opposite tendency. Here, too, the spiritualization of the idea of God is an accepted fact, but ... the ancient images reemerged, albeit now with symbolic character. Unlike the philosophers, the Kabbalists were not ashamed of these images; on the contrary, they saw in them the repositories of divine mysteries. (1991, 38)

Elsewhere Scholem expresses this point by distinguishing between the prevalence of allegory on the part of philosophers and that of symbol on the part of kabbalists.⁷ Admittedly, this distinction is too simplistic, and there are less oppositional ways to render the nature of the relationship of metaphor and symbol that can be applied more judiciously to kabbalistic texts.⁸ However, with respect to the issue I discuss here, the textual evidence validates a clear-cut contrast of the philosophical and the kabbalistic approaches: kabbalists accepted the dogma of divine incorporeality but resisted interpreting anthropomorphisms as metaphorical.

An interesting example of the kabbalistic rejection of the hyperallegorization of the philosophers is found in the following comment in Menahem Recanati's *Perush Hatefillot*:

According to the ancient and holy wisdom, everything receives the efflux from what precedes it and overflows to what is beneath it, from the First One, blessed be He, until it reaches us. Not as the reckoning of the philosophers, those of a deficient matter, who deny everything except what is comprehended by their reasoning, which is like an illusion [*ahizat einayim*]. But know in truth that with respect to everything that is in the lower world there is a matter above whence it emanates. And even though we know that there is no composition [*harkavah*] from the four elements in the angels of God, blessed be he, and they are completely intellect, they are enclothed in images [*temunot*] in accordance with the

7. The contrast between the philosophical allegory and mystical symbol is repeated in many of Scholem's writings, of which I will here mention a few examples: 1956, 26-28; 1965, 51-52, 93-94. See Schweid 1985, 43-44, 126-27; Idel 2002, 280-89.

8. See, for instance, Haskell 2005, 68-119 and 2008, 335-62.

act that they must perform, whether merciful or judgmental. (*Perush Hatefillot*, 38a [1581])⁹

The focal point of Recanati's comments is the angels, but we can justly assume that his words can be transferred to the *sefirotic* potencies. Indeed, as he insists in the same treatise, the relationship of the Infinite—referred to both as *Ein Sof* and as the Cause of Causes (*illat haillot, sibbat hasibbot*)—to the *sefirot* can be compared to the relationship of the soul to the body (*Perush Hatefillot*, MS Vatican ebr. 310, fols. 3a, 4a.). This analogy is not to be interpreted just as a metaphor; rather it conveys the same sense of somatic presence implied in the depiction of the angels garbed in images that reflect either the attribute of mercy or the attribute of judgment. Although Recanati is known for viewing the *sefirot* as instruments (*kelim*) and not as the essence (*atsmut*) of the Infinite, this should not lead one to think that he considered the attributes extrinsic to God.¹⁰ On the contrary, as he plainly states, the *sefirot* are garments (*levushim, malbushim*) that emanate from the essence and thus they are not ontically separate from it, a claim that he legitimates on the basis of the rabbinic pronouncement that the shell is an integral part of the snail's body (*Perush Hatefillot*, MS Vatican ebr. 310, fols. 4a–b). In my scholarship, I have employed the locution *imaginal body*, borrowed from the work of Henry Corbin on Islamic esotericism, in order to convey this sense of embodiment that is not material flesh but which is nevertheless a concrete phenomenon and not merely a figure of speech (Wolfson 1994, 108, and 2005, 38–39, 41–42, 119, 122, 246, 248–49).

I will illustrate the kabbalistic position further by referring to Meir Ibn Gabbai's criticism of Maimonides's explanation of biblical anthropomorphisms as a concession to the inability of the masses to comprehend the existence of an incorporeal being. For Ibn Gabbai, "these matters are from the class of the mysteries of the Torah, which cannot be apprehended through the way of deduction or logical syllogism, but rather through the tradition that has been received from the prophets to Moses, peace be upon him, from Sinai." Ibn Gabbai goes on to explain—based in part

9. I have also consulted the version in MS Vatican ebr. 310, fols. 40b–41a.

10. For a discussion of Recanati's "instrumentalist theosophy" and his attempt to combine the Maimonidean rejection of positive attribution with the kabbalistic notion of the powers of an emanated divinity, see Idel 2011, 119–21. For a more extended discussion of Recanati's view of the *sefirot* as instruments, see Idel 1998, 184–91.

on the aforementioned passage of Gikatilla—that “the lower microanthropos [*haadam haqatan hatahton*] is made and arrayed in the image of the supernal macroanthropos [*haadam hagadol haelyon*], which comprises all the potencies contained in the great name [YHWH] that is depicted figuratively as the human seated upon the throne” (*Avodat Haqodesh* 3:65). These potencies, which are “interior, subtle, and spiritual,” are designated by the parts of the body even though they do not resemble the physical body either in substance or structure. The kabbalist, so to speak, wishes to burn the proverbial candle on both ends. On the one hand, there is a categorical denial of any resemblance between the human and the divine bodies, and yet, on the other hand, there is an insistence that ritual behavior on the part of Jews is endowed with theurgical significance based on the homologous relation between the two, an idea encapsulated in the motto “limb strengthens limb” (*ever mahaziq ever*)¹¹: through observance of the law the limb of the human body fortifies the corresponding limb in the divine body, which is the Torah.¹²

To understand this avowal of ostensibly contradictory positions, we must bear in mind that the imaginal body in kabbalistic tradition is related to the much older belief¹³ that the initial enfleshment of Adam was that of the glorious or luminous body, which was changed, as a consequence of the sin of eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, into the mortal body made of corruptible skin,¹⁴ identified in some sources (e.g., Pirque R. El.

11. Concerning this phrase, apparently first used in kabbalistic literature in the end of the thirteenth century by Joseph of Hamadan and the anonymous author of *Sefer Hayihud*, see Idel 1988, 185, and the references to other scholars cited on 367 n. 81; idem, 2002, 73 and 2005b, 138–39. See also Wolfson 1988, 231; Mopsik 1993, 217–18; Felix 2005, 95–98.

12. A cogent enunciation of this much older idea in kabbalistic theurgy, based in part on the language of Gikatilla, is found in Ibn Gabbai, *Avodat Haqodesh*, 3:65. On the isomorphic relation of the Torah and the human body, see Idel 2002, 71–74.

13. Goshen-Gottstein 1994, esp. 178–83, and see the rejoinder by Aaron 1997.

14. The idea is often expressed in kabbalistic sources on the basis of the comment in Gen. Rab. 20:12 that in the Torah of R. Meir the second word in the expression *kotnot or* (Gen 3:21) was written with an *alef* instead of an *ayin*, thereby changing the meaning from “garments of skin” to “garments of light.” Concerning this motif, see Goshen-Gottstein 1994, 179–80; Kugel 1999, 132–34. Kabbalists interpreted this as an expression of the idea that the original body of Adam and Eve was a glorious and incorruptible body. See Zohar Hadash 78c (Midrash Ruth); Sefer Hazohar 1:36b; 2:229b [hereafter cited as Zohar]; Recanati, *Perush al Hatorah*, 15a; Vital, *Sefer Haliqqutim*, 28a.

46a) as the skin cast off by the serpent. The eschatological future is marked by the shedding of the garments of skin and the donning of the garments of light.¹⁵ For some kabbalists, it was possible for the corporeal body to be transfigured proleptically in the present through ascetic practices into the ethereal or angelic body,¹⁶ which they also viewed as the textual or linguistic body, a conception based on the widely held belief—attested in older streams of Jewish mysticism and magic—that the name of an entity is its essence or literally its body (*guf*). This perspective, which has run its course through the history of Jewish esotericism, presupposes an intrinsic connection between language and being, not simply in the mimetic sense that the former mirrors the latter but rather in the mythopoeic sense that words—both spoken and written—configure the nature of reality.

After decades of study, I have not discovered any kabbalist who would not assent to the view that what exists in the world, examined subphenomenally, are the manifold permutations of the twenty-two Hebrew letters, themselves enfolded in the Tetragrammaton, identified as the mystical essence of the Torah (Wolfson 2005, 197–202).¹⁷ YHWH is thus the name through which the nameless is declaimed. There is no tension in the kabbalistic teaching between the view that ultimate reality is ineffable and the postulate that the nature of being is constituted by the Hebrew language. Utilizing the Heideggerian trope of ontological difference, we can describe *Ein Sof*—the infinite essence whose essence, paradoxically, is to lack any essence—as the withdrawal of being that occasions the manifestation of the myriad of beings that come to light in the concatenation of the multiple worlds. The attribute of substance, which entails both the positive demarcation of presence and the negative denotation of absence, does not apply to *Ein Sof*, the groundless ground beyond being and nonbeing, the “negation of all negation” (Scholem 1991, 38)¹⁸ as Scholem put it in one study, reflecting, it seems, the technical term applied by Meister Eckhart to the one beyond all distinction.¹⁹ The apophatic tendency to submerge

15. Bachrach, *Sefer Emeq Hamelekh*, 41c. See *ibid.*, 45c, where the matter is connected to the description of the radiance of the skin of the face of Moses in Exod 34:29, 35. Concerning this theme in rabbinic texts, see Rubin and Kosman 1997.

16. For a discussion of the motif of the astral or angelic body, which is linked to the divine image, see Scholem 1991, 251–73.

17. See also the reference to other scholars cited on 422 n. 251.

18. For the original German, see Scholem 1995, 31: “der Negation aller Negationen.”

19. Eckhart uses both the Latin *negatio negationis* and the Middle High German

all forms of sentient imaging in the unknowable formlessness cannot be severed from the kataphatic insistence on the possibility of apprehending that formlessness through those very forms that collectively inhere in the name that is the Torah, the linguistic measure of carnality in the divine, human, and cosmic planes (Wolfson 2005, 118–19).

Divine embodiment, accordingly, sheds light on the complex notion of body as the sign of the signified that is itself the signifier of that for which there is no correlative signification, the mystery of the plenitudinal lack—the fullness of the infinite emptiness—that is beyond symbolization. The anthropomorphic images, when viewed through the lens of this signifying network, portend that the semiotic nature of the body is such that the imaginary is real, since there is no reality apart from what is imagined to be real. The thread that binds the imaginal and the real as the antipodal forces circumscribed within this circularity is the metaphysical conjecture that the constituent element of matter is the letter.²⁰ This is the mystical import of the kabbalistic appropriation of the archaic belief that the human body is a microcosm of the macroanthropos (see Altmann, 1969, 19–28). The nature of that anthropos is specularized through the prism of sexual difference, a central doctrine that impacted both the theosophic understanding of the *sefirotic* emanations promulgated by the kabbalists and their understanding of the texture of the ecstatic experience of the divine.

versagen des versagennes. Many scholars have written about this Eckhartian expression and traced its sources. See, for example, Kelley 1977, 106–13; McGinn 1981, 7–8 and 2001, 84, 94, 231–32 nn. 141–42; Mojsisch, 2001, 95–97; Charles-Saget 1998, 312; Hollywood 1995, 130–31; Tobin 1986, 74–78; Dobie 2010, 138–49.

20. My thinking here is in accord with the one embraced by Mottolese 2004, 328–31. After referring positively to my Corbinian approach regarding the *mundus imaginalis*, the author adds that the emphasis on the analogical in kabbalistic symbolism has its “roots” in the “linguistic ontology” of the kabbalists, that is, “the idea that reality is basically language.... A semiotic net stands, therefore, behind both the corporeal and incorporeal layers of reality; names represent the essence of all entities, from the human to the supernal ones. In the formulas employed by Gikatilla—‘analogy of signification’ [*dimyon simanim*] and ‘analogy of memorization’ [*dimyon zikkaron*]*—the term dimyon goes beyond any figurative or docetic orientation. These formulas allude to the fact that a linguistic-ontological relation ... is given between signifier and signified, and that it links in-depth the human and the divine realms defined by the same names.*” It appears that Mottolese has not grasped that this is precisely my own position concerning the status of the imaginal realm.

MASCULINE ANDROGYNE: FROM MAN WOMAN BORN

As is well-known, the accounts of the creation of man and woman in the first two chapters of Genesis—stemming respectively from the Priestly and the Yahwist strata—offer seemingly disparate perspectives on gender construction. The first account relates that God created Adam as male and female concurrently, which has been interpreted through the centuries as an affirmation of the androgynous status of the primordial human being. By contrast, the second chapter recounts that man was created first and then woman was created from his side or rib (*tsela*), an ontological dependency instantiated linguistically in the fact that woman is called *ishshah*, the feminine form derived from the masculine *ish*.²¹ With good reason some contemporary feminist readers have argued that the first account has greater egalitarian potential than the second. For the medieval Jewish exegete, however, this strategy was not viable given the presumption regarding the underlying unity of the biblical text. The kabbalists were no exception to the rule, and thus, in spite of their attending to the feminine dimension of the divine, the attribute of judgment, which complements the masculine attribute of mercy, they interpreted the description of woman being fashioned from man in the second account as a midrashic explication of the androgynous nature of primal Adam implied in the first account.

Due to limitations of space, I will restrict myself in this study to interpretations of the biblical text culled from the zoharic compilation, although it should be understood that a more exhaustive examination of this material requires an exposition of other kabbalistic sources prior to and/or contemporary with the beginning of the circulation of parts of the Zohar in the last decades of the thirteenth and the first decades of the fourteenth century.

Gender Binary

Let me begin my analysis with the citation of a critical passage that has been invoked by several scholars in support of the contention that the medieval kabbalists, as opposed to the encratic tendency of other forms of mystical piety, including especially in the history of Christianity, celebrated

21. For a summary of the Priestly and the Yahwistic accounts in the first two chapters of Genesis, see Noort 2000.

heterosexuality as the means to bring about the rectification of the schism within the divine, which corresponds to the exilic state of the Jewish people in the world:

R. Simeon said: Supernal mysteries were revealed in these two verses [Gen 5:1-2]. "Male and female he created them," to teach about the supernal glory, the mystery of faith, for out of this mystery Adam was created.... "Male and female he created them." From here [we learn that] any image in which there is not found male and female is not a supernal image as is appropriate, and this has been established in the mystery of our Mishnah. Come and see: in any place where male and female are not found as one, the blessed holy One does not place his dwelling there, and blessings are not out found except in a place where male and female are found [b. Yebam. 62b], as it is written: "He blessed them and called them Adam in the day he created them." It is not written: "He blessed him and called his name Adam," for even the name Adam is not invoked except when male and female are one. (Zohar 1:55b)

The divine image (*tselem elohim*) with which the human being was created is interpreted in light of the gender binary, an interpretation that accords not only with the literal sense of the scriptural text but one that was hinted at in at least two rabbinic pericopae that surely influenced the kabbalists: the first, attributed to R. Jeremiah ben Eleazar, maintained that God created Adam as an androgyne (אנדרוגינס), and the second, attributed to R. Samuel ben Nahman, maintained that God created Adam two-faced (דיפרוסופון); whatever the differences between the two explanations, they both proffer a somatic and specifically gendered understanding of the image (Gen. Rab. 8:1).²² The polarity of masculine and feminine in the pleroma of the divine emanations is alluded to in the statement ascribed to Simeon ben Yohai, the master of the imaginary fraternity, that the verses from Gen 5, which basically reiterate the Priestly account of Gen 1, instruct us about the "supernal glory" and the "mystery of faith." Just as the earthly Adam was fashioned in the image that is male and female, so the image above of which the human image is but an image (Zohar 3:10b). Moreover, it is incumbent on each Jewish male to be conjoined to a female, so that the

22. See Aaron 1995, esp. 8-10. On the somatic understanding of the divine image in rabbinic literature, see the studies of Goshen-Gottstein and Aaron cited above in n. 13, as well as the references in Wolfson 1994, 23 n. 57, and Lorberbaum 2004, 83-104.

image below will be complete. If a man is not paired with a woman, there is no appropriate vessel to receive the blessings from the supernal image.

On the face of it the text might support the view that kabbalists operated with a theory that accords equal value to both genders, since heterosexual union is affirmed as necessary to merit the divine effluence; indeed, the very name “Adam” is invoked only when masculine and feminine are united. But to adopt such a position fails to take into account the dynamics of gender construction underlying the kabbalistic symbolism. Androgyny, and the nature of the heterosexual union implied thereby, cannot be grasped by simply repeating the literal words espoused in the primary sources and listing each reference to the female who complements the male.²³ Even in the aforementioned passage, if one is attuned to the subtle nuances of the gender politics, as it were, one can detect the androcentrism at play: the male must couple with the female to complete his own image by having the space—sometimes demarcated on the basis of rabbinic precedent as the house—in which to extend and overflow, characteristics that are troped as decidedly masculine in the kabbalistic axiology. By so doing, he becomes himself a container to receive the divine efflux issuing from the dwelling of the Shekhinah, and consequently, the female above is masculinized and the male below feminized.²⁴

The key to comprehending the symbol of the androgyne in the kabbalistic material is to discern the manner in which the scriptural narratives

23. This is the case with the presentation of the kabbalistic discussions of the motif of the androgyne in Idel 2005a and 2005c, 94–103. The conceptual framing of Idel’s analysis of gender and kabbalah is, in great measure, polemical in nature, inasmuch as it is an attempt to refute my perspective either explicitly or implicitly—indeed, Idel often attacks my views without mentioning my name, a rather questionable scholarly practice. It is impossible to engage here in a detailed refutation of Idel’s relentless criticisms, but I will say that they are all based on a fundamental inability to understand the feminist appraisal of androcentrism and phallocentrism, two analytic categories that have informed my work. To engage my analyses properly, it is not sufficient either to list sources where the feminine is mentioned or even to delineate places where a seemingly more active role is assigned to the woman (see, for instance, the appendix in Idel 2005c, 247–50, which deals with some texts that allocate a theurgical role to women in the act of coitus; see Wolfson 2005, 63, where I have already alluded to such a possibility, a discussion ignored by Idel). The piling up of texts does not challenge the androcentric and phallocentric aspects of the tradition I have uncovered through the use of various interpretative strategies.

24. For more on the feminization of the masculine, see Wolfson 2005, 329–32.

are read. As I have documented in detail elsewhere, the position adopted in the first chapter of Genesis that Adam was created male and female was read by kabbalists through the prism of the description of woman being created out of man in the second chapter of Genesis.²⁵ Consider this section from a homily on the verse, “The Lord is my strength and might” (Exod 15:2), which begins with R. Hiyya’s exposition of “You formed me from behind and in front; you lay your hand upon me” (Ps 139:5):

R. Isaac said: Adam was created two-faced [*du partsufin*] as it has been established. “He took one of his sides” [*wa-yiqah ahat mi-tsal’otaw*] [Gen 2:21]—the blessed holy One split him and two were produced, one from the east and one from the west, as it is written “You formed me from behind and in front” [Ps 139:5]. “From behind” [*ahor*] is the west and “in front” [*qedem*] is the east. R. Hiyya said: What did the blessed holy One do? He adorned that female, perfecting her beauty above everything, and brought her to Adam, as it is written “And the Lord God fashioned the side that he had taken from the man into a woman” [Gen 2:22].²⁶ Come and see: What is written above? “He took one of his sides.” What is “one”? As it is said, “Only one is my dove, my perfect one, the only one of her mother” [Song 6:9]. *Mi-tsal’otaw*—“from his sides,” as it is said “And for the [other] side of the Tabernacle [*uletsela hamishkan*] [Exod 26:20]. (Zohar 2:55a)

Weaving together threads from various rabbinic sources, the author of the zoharic text affirms that the construction of woman from man according to Gen 2 should be understood as the severing of the original androgyne depicted in Gen 1. The sawing apart of the androgyne is what brought about the gender polarity, the masculine symbolized as the front or the east and the feminine as the back or the west. The fashioning of the side conveys that God adorned and beautified the female, ostensibly to make her an object worthy of the male gaze, a theme that

25. See my extended discussions of the symbol of the androgyne in Wolfson 2005, 67–77, 142–89.

26. Compare the interpretation of the verse “And the Lord God fashioned the side that he had taken from the man into a woman” (Gen 2:22) transmitted in the name of R. Simeon ben Yohai in Gen. Rab. 18:1: “He adorned her like a bride and brought her to him. There are places where plaiting [*qeli’ata*] is called building [*binyata*].” And see the explanation of the same verse attributed to Simeon ben Menasia in b. Ber. 61a: “This teaches that the blessed holy One plaited Eve’s hair and brought her to Adam, for in the seacoast towns plaiting is called building.”

bespeaks an androcentric viewpoint. The process below is paralleled by what happened above, and thus the “one” side symbolically alludes to the Shekhinah (based on the images from Song of Songs), who becomes an independent potency when she is separated from *Tiferet*.

Androgyny: Two Autonomous or One Sovereign Gender?

But what is the status of the feminine and the masculine in the state of androgyny? Does this reflect an equivalence of two autonomous genders, or is there one sovereign gender in which the distinction is not yet operative? The following passage can help to clarify the matter:

R. Simeon began to expound, “You carefree women, attend, hear my words!” [Isa 32:9]. How much must a man [*bar nash*] contemplate the glory of his master, so that he will be found to be a perfect creature before the blessed holy One. When the blessed holy One created man, he created him perfect, as it says “God made man straight” [Eccl 7:29]. “Man” [*et haadam*]: male and female. And the female was contained in the male [*wenuqva itkelilat bidekhura*], and thus it is written “straight” [*yashar*]. (Zohar 3:18b–19a)

Significantly, the containment of the female in the male is applied here not to the union of the two sexes after they have been separated, but to the androgynous state. The perfection of Adam—his straightness or rectitude—consists, therefore, of an androcentric subjugation of the woman. This is confirmed in another zoharic homily:

Come and see: Adam and Eve were created side by side [*da vesitra deda*]. Why were they not created face to face [*anpin beanpin*]? Because, as it is written, “for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth” [Gen 2:5], and the pairing [*ziwwuga*] was not found in its arrayment [*tiqquneih*] as is fitting. When the ones below were arrayed, and they turned face to face, then it was found above.... When it was established below, so it was established above. And because until now it was not arrayed above, they were not created face to face. The verse proves it, as it is written “for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth,” and hence “there was no man,” for he was not in his arrayment. When Eve was perfected, Adam was perfected, and prior to that he was not perfected. And the secret is that up to here there is no [letter] *samekh* in the portion [of the Torah] ... and the *samekh* is a helper [*ezer*]. And this is the helper above, for it turned above face to face, male and female, one supported [*iste-*

makh] by the other, certainly [as it is written] “supported for all eternity, wrought of truth and equity” [Ps 111:8]. “Supported” [*semukhim*]*—*male and female, for they are supported as one... From here on there is [the occurrence of the letter] *samekh*. What is it? “He closed up [*wayisgor*] the flesh at that spot” [Gen 2:21]. She was in his side, and the one was in the side of the other. The blessed holy One certainly uprooted them and transplanted them in another place, and they turned face to face for [the sake of] perdurance [*weithadderu anpin beanpin leqiyyuma*]. (Zohar 1:35a–b)

Following the earlier opinion transmitted in the name of R. Samuel ben Nahman (Gen. Rab. 8:1), the zoharic author understands the androgynous state as one in which female and male were attached on the side and then separated by God so that they could confront one another face to face, a posture that suggests the intimacy of sexual union, which is required for the sake of procreation and the elongation of what Mopsik aptly called the body of engenderment (1989).

Male and female: the female cleaved to his side until a great sleep fell upon him and he slumbered. And he was lying on the site of Temple below, and the blessed holy One split him, and he arrayed her as a bride is arrayed,²⁷ and ushered her in, as it is written “He took one of his sides and closed up the flesh at that spot” [Gen 2:21]. “He took one”—precisely! (Zohar 1:34b)

The theme is reiterated in another zoharic passage:

It is written “You formed me from behind and in front; you lay your hand upon me” [Ps 139:5]. This verse has been established, but come and see: When the blessed holy One created Adam, they were created male and female. And the two of them were bound together, the female in the back and the male in the front, until the blessed holy One split them apart. He arrayed her and brought her before Adam so that [they could] look [at each other] face to face. When they looked face to face, love increased in the world and they gave birth to offspring in the world, which did not happen previously, as we have established. (Zohar 2:231a)

27. See above, n. 26.

The arrayment or rectification (*tiqqun*) of Adam is dependent on Eve, because without Eve being separated from Adam there could not be the possibility of coitus and the reproductive extension of the chain of existence. Hence, it is correct to say that Adam was not perfected until Eve was perfected. The original androgyne—the male that comprises the face of the male in the front and the face of the female in the back—is imperfect until it yields a division of the sexes. Nevertheless, heterosexual bonding facilitates the restoration of the female to the male whence she was taken, a hyperliteral reading of the verse “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).²⁸ The “one flesh” (*basar ehad*), as the contextual sense intimates, signifies the reconstitution of the state before the woman was severed from the man, the state that I surmise displays a uniform “gender” as opposed to the dual “sex” that ensues from the split of the androgyne. With this split there emerges the patriarchal hierarchy. The deferential rank accorded the female is made explicit in the following zoharic passage:

Come and see: when a woman is conjoined to her husband, she is called by the name of her husband, man [*ish*] and woman [*ishshah*], righteous one [*ṣaddiq*] and righteousness [*ṣedeq*].... “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh”—everything to draw her in love to be conjoined to her. (Zohar 1:49a–b)

If one reads the last sentence out of context, it can be upheld as evidence for the romantic celebration of sexual equality. However, if one reads in context, then it is evident that the goal of sexual desire from the male’s point of view is to restore the part of him that was amputated. This is the meaning of the comment that when the woman is conjoined to her husband, she is called by his name. It does not say that, reciprocally, the husband is called by her name. Although it is reasonable to presume that sexual union alters

28. For discussion of various kabbalistic commentaries on this verse, see Mopsik 2005, 115–27. While I respect Mopsik’s textual mastery and the civil tone of his rhetoric, his analysis of the sources does not demonstrate a sensitivity to the feminist understanding of gender dynamics. For instance, he does not even take note of how the “theme of the fundamental unity of the human being, or more precisely the unity of man who regains his original bodily unity by uniting with his wife,” which serves as “a model for the destiny of the soul” (119), might be problematic from a woman’s standpoint.

the male as much as the female, the passage gives voice to the belief that coitus ontologically, and not just functionally, is a masculinization of the female—they will be one flesh (Wolfson 1995, 92–98 and 2005, 147–49).

The effort to discredit the androcentric import of the kabbalistic symbolism by reiterating comments about the female body misses the point. Nor is it sufficient to cite passages like the one I have translated above, which clearly presume that the perfection of the human being turns on the coupling of the masculine and the feminine. That the male-female dimorphism is a prevalent motif in zoharic literature is incontestable, but the issue is how it is to be interpreted, what framework is most suitable to explain the construction of gender identity. To affirm this binary on behalf of the kabbalists is an obvious platitude that proves nothing about the values assigned respectively to femininity and masculinity in the overall semiotic register that informed their worldview.²⁹

Similarly, the appeal to a feminine erotics in zoharic homilies is not sufficient to undermine the androcentric vantage point (see Hellner-Eshed 2009, 169–70). That women yearn erotically for men and men reciprocally for women goes without saying; from that standpoint heterosexuality is understood dynamically as a mutual commingling of opposites: the female can become male and the male female, a process that I have referred to as the crossing of gender boundaries. However, this crossing is not ambivalent in the kabbalistic symbolism; there is fluidity, but there is no ambiguity: the female that overflows is masculinized, and the male that delimits is feminized (Wolfson 1995, 110–12; 2005, 94–95).

Masculine Androgyny

The deep structure undergirding the kabbalistic construction of gender—and this includes the possible subversions of that structure—is that of a masculine androgyny. Thus, while the pairing of male and female

29. This is the methodological flaw in the criticism of my views mounted by Abrams 2004, 3–7, and in his more recent discussion of sexual coupling, arousal, and the motif of the androgyne in Abrams 2011, 23–30. Abrams has incorporated my work (without citing me directly) in the statement, “In Kabbalah there is one form of being and it is masculine,” but he goes on to argue that “there are masculine and feminine forms of arousal” (26). I never denied that this is the case, but I have tried to show that both forms of arousal are an expression of phalломorphism. A similar misrepresentation of my work is found in Gamlieli 2006, 61–64, 248–52.

undoubtedly impacts both—in the language of one zoharic passage describing the relationship of *Yesod* and *Malkhut*, “two gradations that are one, encompassing male and female” (*terein dargin deinun had kelala dekhav wenuqva*; Zohar 2:70a)—kabbalistic texts repeatedly emphasize that the result of the union is an amelioration of judgment by mercy, which translates in gender terms as a taming of woman by man (Wolfson 1995, 80–85; 2005, 169–70). I am not unaware of the principle that every attribute is contained in and interacts with its opposite, and hence we can speak of the containment of the left in the right or of the containment of the right in the left. Notwithstanding the validity of this tenet, there is a qualitative difference: the conjunction of the feminine left and the masculine right brings about a fundamental alteration of the former and not of the latter, judgment is ameliorated by mercy and not mercy by judgment (Wolfson 1995, 200 n. 18).

For all the criticism of my position, not one person has cited a kabbalistic text that describes the consequence of heterosexual intercourse as mercy becoming judgmental. This imbalance ratifies the suitability of the term “male androgyné” to describe the zoharic orientation, which is inspired, as I noted above, by reading the second account of Adam’s creation as an exposition of the first. The kabbalistic exegesis, in my opinion, is based on presuming one gender (the male that is both male and female) with two sexuated manifestations (the female constructed from the male). The partition of the androgyné gives rise to two sexes, which establishes the very heterogeneity that is effaced in the reinstallation of the originary state. It behooves me to note that even when kabbalists emphasize that in the androgynous Adam male and female were “equal in power” and “one in actuality,”³⁰ this does not necessarily measure up to the criterion of egalitarianism amenable to our contemporary sensibility; the equality and oneness may denote a unifying gender without sexual differentiation. Alternatively expressed, the androgynous nature of Adam—human and divine—is one in which there is neither male nor female as discrete constellations but only the male that comprises male and female. The equality of power and oneness of actuality defuse a sense of genuine difference (Wolfson 2005, 56–59).

One of the most striking articulations of the point is the zoharic adaptation of the aggadic motif of the diminution of the moon attributed to

30. See the text of Isaac of Acre cited and analyzed in Wolfson 2005, 61–62.

Simeon ben Pazzi (b. Hul. 60b). Noting the discrepancy in the reference to the sun and the moon first as “two great lights” and then respectively as the “greater light” and the “lesser light” (Gen 1:16), the rabbinic sage reportedly taught that the initial intention was that the luminosity of the sun and the moon would be equal, but the moon complained to God, “Can two kings make use of one crown?” As punishment she was instructed to diminish herself. Kabbalists considered this talmudic legend to be one of the profound mysteries of the tradition.

For my purposes I wish to focus only on one aspect that emerges from the zoharic revision of this theme. Prior to the lessening of the lunar light, there was no difference in stature between the sun and the moon, even though day and night were still discriminated. After the moon decreased her size, her only illumination was the light reflected from the sun, a commonplace idea in medieval astronomy. The symbolic import of the legend instructs us about the feminine potency of *Malkhut* in relation to the masculine potency of *Tiferet*: once the former separates from the latter, she is inferior and submissive (Zohar 1:20a; 2:219b; Tiqqunei Zohar, sec. 36, 78a).³¹ It is noteworthy that in one zoharic context, the insinuation that the moon was originally the same stature of the sun is questioned. The ascription of the word “great” to the moon denotes that when the moon is united with the sun, literally “stands with the sun in one mystery,” she is called “great” on account of him (Zohar Hadash, 70d–71a [Shir Hashirim]), a reading that accentuates the androcentricism. Be that as it may, based on the theory that everything below is parallel to what is above, this can be applied as well to the lower anthropos. In the original androgynous state, there was no gender differentiation; after the division into male and female, the latter is relegated to a compliant position vis-à-vis the former.

To offer another example in a somewhat less negative register: in a zoharic homily on Gen 2:22, it is emphasized that just as in the divine realm the feminine potency, the Oral Torah, is derived from the masculine, the Written Torah, so in the human realm woman is constructed from man. And just as above the Oral Torah must be united with and contained in the Written Torah, so below the goal is for the woman to be conjoined to the man whence she receives her sustenance (Zohar 1:48b). In a typical androcentric reversal, the power of nourishment and the bestowal of

31. See also Zohar 1:181a, where the blemish of the moon is linked directly to the “side of the evil serpent,” that is, the demonic force. See, however, Zohar 2:144b, where this explanation is questioned.

life are apportioned to the male rather than to the female. The respective values assigned to each gender are brought into clearer focus in another zoharic text, interpreting the verse “The Lord God formed man” [*wayyitser YHWH elohim et haadam*] (Gen 2:7):

Here everything was perfected in the right and in the left. We have thus established [the import of the words] “The Lord God formed”—the good inclination and the evil inclination. Why? The good inclination for himself, the evil inclination to be aroused for his female, and it is aroused always from the left side. The mystery of the matter that we learn from here is that the north is aroused always vis-à-vis the female and it is bound to her, and thus she is called *ishshah*. (Zohar 1:49a)³²

The zoharic exegesis is based on the earlier rabbinic interpretation of the orthographic doubling of the letter *yod* in the word *wayyitser* as signifying the creation of the two impulses (Gen. Rab. 14:4).³³ What is crucial in the kabbalistic exposition is the theosophic and gender overlay of the rabbinic taxonomy. First, the two psychic inclinations emanate from the two potencies in the divine realm, which are symbolized by the names of God—together they constitute the “complete name” (*shem male*)—YHWH corresponds to the masculine and Elohim to the feminine. Second, the evil impulse is correlated with the female and the good impulse with the male. Since Adam was created androgynous, he comprised both impulses. The good impulse on the right side is his natural deportment; the evil impulse on the left side is the female aspect, which is labeled as the means by which the male is sexually aroused toward the female. Rather than representing the adulation of the female, as some scholars of the kabbalah have naively insisted, this is another facet of the androcentric—and here I would add phallogomorphic—pigeonholing: the woman is responsible for stimulating the man’s erotic drive.

32. I have translated the version of this passage as it appears in *Sefer ha-Zohar* (Cremona: Vincenzo Conti, 1559–1560), Bere’shit, 137.

33. The bibliography on the rabbinic notion of the two inclinations is vast. For a relatively recent study that provides an innovative approach and addresses much of the previous scholarship, see Rosen-Zvi 2008. The passage from Genesis Rabbah is discussed on 533–34. See also Rosen-Zvi 2011, 65–96, esp. 72–73.

TRANSGRESSION AND THE DEMONIZATION OF THE FEMININE

In the biblical narrative, immediately after the creation of woman from man, the serpent enters the scene and serves as the causal agency to occasion the act of disobedience. Consider the zoharic treatment of this narratological shift:

“Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” [Gen 2:24]. Everything was to draw her in love and to cleave to her. When all of these matters were aroused what is written? “And the serpent was the shrewdest [of all the wild beasts]” [Gen 3:1]. The evil impulse was aroused to seize her, in order to be bound to her in carnal desire, and arousing in her other matters in which the evil impulse delights. And as a consequence, what is written? “When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate” [Gen 3:6]—she received it voluntarily, “and also gave some to her husband who was with her.” For now she was aroused in desire toward him, to bestow passion and love on him. This matter shows human beings how the act corresponds to what is above. Rabbi Eleazar said: If so, how can we establish that above the evil impulse seizes the female? He [R. Simeon bar Yoḥai] replied: We have already conferred about the good impulse and the evil impulse above and below. The good impulse is from the right and the evil impulse is from the left, and the left above seizes the female to be bound to her as one in her body, as it says “His left hand was under my head” [Song 2:6]. (Zohar 1:49b)

Again we see that the split of the male androgyne into male and female results in the need for heterosexual union. Copulation between a man and his spouse repairs that split by restoring the one flesh that is simultaneously male and female and therefore neither male nor female in any recognizable sexualized sense. The state of liminality between the fissure of exile and the unity of redemption is precarious, affording the possibility for the demonic to intrude into the space of the feminine and forge an illicit cohabitation. This is precisely the zoharic explanation of the scriptural tale: the serpent is the demonic force, which attaches itself primarily to the woman, since she is aligned with the evil impulse in contrast to the man, who is aligned with the good impulse. What is particularly noteworthy is that the carnal desire of the feminine is problematized, a theme that is well attested in the patriarchal stereotype of the wanton woman. I do not say that this is the only view of feminine sexuality in the zoharic compilation.

There are plenty of passages that relate to women's eroticism as an integral part of the *hieros gamos* above and the sacralization of sexuality below.

As I have already noted, the erotic arousal is always instigated from the left side of judgment, which rendered psychologically endows the woman's capacity to contain with the power to stimulate the man's potency to overflow it. In this respect the feminine attribute of judgment is hardly passive; to contain or to delimit is an energetic force that is vital for the creative ebb and flow of being. But one cannot ignore the leitmotif of the passage explaining the sin in the garden of Eden. Right after Scripture announces the need for man to cleave to his wife to be one flesh, the woman is allured by and cohabits with the serpent, an illicit union that leads to the sin of eating from the tree of knowledge. What is ostensibly an act of fusion morphs into a divisive gesture that induces further division by activating the duality of good and evil and bringing death to humankind (Zohar 2:144b).

The disobedience of Adam and Eve serves as a prototype that sheds light on the nature of sin in general. Needless to say, this is a vast topic that cannot be easily simplified, but one can elicit from many zoharic passages, not to mention other kabbalistic sources, that transgression is understood concurrently as the cause and the effect of the severance of the male and the female, the sixth and tenth emanations, leading especially to the reification of the latter as an object of veneration. The division of the sexes is detrimental for both male and female, and often we encounter in zoharic homilies the admonition that every Jewish man must be paired with a woman to strengthen the faith and to ensure that the blessings of the divine presence will not depart from him (Zohar 1:49b, 50a, 228b). In spite of this emphasis, the separation of the female from the male is treated in a far more deleterious way than the separation of the male from the female; indeed, it is portrayed as heresy or idolatry—linked to many of the major acts of impertinence recorded in the biblical narrative, including the erection of the tower of Babel and the worshipping of the golden calf—and referred to metaphorically as the cutting of the shoots or the plucking of the fruit of the tree (Wolfson 2005, 374, 505 n. 200).

As we have seen, the primordial insurrection was set into motion by the collusion of the demonic serpent and Eve, which is perfectly logical given that the feminine is located on the left side of judgment whence the demonic emanates. An even more pernicious expression of this alliance is found in the zoharic reworking of the rabbinic motif (b. Shabb. 145b–146a; Pirque R. El. 21, 48a) regarding the insemination of the serpent's filth

into Eve, which resulted in the birth of Cain (Zohar 1:54a; 2:231a),³⁴ or in the more attenuated version, Cain and Abel were both born from Adam, but the former inherited the slime of the serpent that had entered into Eve (Zohar 1:54a). Some kabbalists even went as far as connecting the sin of Eve with the fable about the moon's impudence, which I discussed above.³⁵ I have not found this in zoharic material, but the intent of that explanation is consistent with the view disseminated therein: transgression comes about through the woman usurping power for herself and seeking to control man. The punishment, accordingly, was the allocation of man's dominance over the woman.

NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE:
REDEMPTION AND OVERCOMING GENDER DIMORPHISM

In the concluding section, I would like to consider Mopsik's more extensive analysis of different kabbalistic interpretations of Gen 1:26-27 (2005, 75-114), which on the face of it challenges my notion of the male androgyne.³⁶ Mopsik distinguishes two exegetical approaches, one that views the account of the creation of woman from man in Gen 2 as an explication of the account of Adam being created simultaneously as male and female in Gen 1 and the second that views the account of Gen 2 as a sequel to Gen 1. According to the second possibility, championed especially by Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), the primordial bisexual man is separated into two halves,

34. See also Zohar 1:37a, where Cain is said to have been born from the filth of Samael with which Eve was inseminated.

35. See the references above, n. 31.

36. For an explicit criticism of my explanatory model, see Mopsik 2005, 27. Mopsik's rejection of my position is part of a long study on the "masculine woman," which is predicated on the idea that each gender is contained in and expressed through the other. I obviously accept this to be the case, and I have written on the phenomenon, but this does not disprove my claims, and none of the sources that Mopsik cites refute my perspective, since they all deal with the dynamic of gender after the division into male and female. The question for me is whether the standpoint from which the gender dimorphism is to be evaluated is truly egalitarian, as Mopsik claims, or another facet of the androcentricism, as I have claimed. See my comments in Wolfson 2005, 447-48 n. 122. At the end of that note, I cite a number of feminist studies that have disclosed the androcentric underpinnings of the image of the androgyne as a privileging of male subjectivity. This is the hermeneutical lens through which I have read the kabbalistic sources, and it can be easily applied to the texts cited and analyzed by Mopsik.

whereas according to the first possibility, articulated most forcefully by Abraham ben David of Posquières (Rabad), the second story provides the ultimate meaning of the first such that androgyny implies that the female was originally part of the male (2005, 94–95). Mopsik admits that according to the Rabad, and other figures who follow his path, the creation narratives provide a textual rationale for the woman being subservient to man.³⁷ However, he qualifies this view by noting that only in the anthropological sphere such an imbalance prevails; by contrast, on the theosophical plane, that is, in the world of divine unity, gender divergence exists without the subordination of the feminine judgment to the masculine mercy; on the contrary, the interplay between attributes presumes that each is contained in the other (2005, 86–87).³⁸

I am not convinced of the viability of Mopsik's position, since it rests on the distinction between two ways of reading the scriptural narratives that is in my mind questionable. Medieval exegetes presumed the unity of the biblical text, and thus viewing the second story as the sequel of the first would perforce be understood as a form of amplification rather than modification. To maintain that the rib or side of the man whence the woman was fashioned was, in fact, the removed "feminine side" of the primordial man so that the sides could face each other does not minimize, let alone eradicate, the androcentric subordination of the feminine. According to Mopsik, some kabbalists, including the zoharic authorship, followed in the footsteps of Rashi, leading them to conclude that the

concept of a higher level with its dual and egalitarian structure thus could override the strictly patriarchal portrayal, although there was, however, a caveat: this equality could only be achieved on the human and societal levels at the end of time. Prior to this, male dominance corresponds to a necessity on the divine level, in which the Attribute of Judgment, which is feminine, must be subjected to the Attribute of Mercy, which is masculine. (2005, 96)

Mopsik supports his argument by citing a lengthy passage from the *Otsar Hakavod*, a commentary on the talmudic aggadot written in the second half of the thirteenth century by the Castilian kabbalist, Todros

37. See my own analysis in Wolfson 2005, 167–68.

38. On the intertwining of genders, see Mopsik 2005, 33–35, and compare Wolfson 2005, 60.

ben Joseph Abulafia, in which he asserts that the tradition (transmitted in the name of R. Jeremiah ben Eleazar) that Adam was created two-faced (*du partsufim*) (Gen. Rab. 8:1; b. 'Erub. 18a), anchored exegetically in the verse (Ps 139:5) that God formed man with a front (*qedem*) and a back (*ahor*), alludes to the mystery of the male and female potencies in the sefirotic pleroma, *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*. R. Jeremiah's adage is followed in the talmudic context by two interpretations—attributed to Rab and Samuel—of the verse that God formed woman from the side or rib of man (Gen 2:22), which ostensibly contradicts the notion that Adam was created bisexual. According to one interpretation, the side or rib refers to the face and according to the other, to the tail. Abulafia reads the rabbinic disputation as an attempt to undermine the second view. The construction of woman from man, accordingly, means that the feminine was separated from the masculine so that they could face one another in a sexual embrace. Mopsik draws the following conclusion from his detailed textual analysis: "By eliminating the presumption that woman was formed after man, secondarily to him and deriving from him, our author implies a duality on the level of the divine essence" (2005, 112).

The bipolarity of the human, which reflects the androgyny in the divine, thus implies the "recognition of an equality and a relationship of non-subservience between man and woman." Yet, as Mopsik is quick to point out, it is obvious that the kabbalists "did not want to overturn the existing social order" (2005, 113). Indeed, apart from the challenge to this order in the seventeenth-century Sabbatian movement,³⁹ he acknowledges

39. Mopsik refers to the evidence adduced by Scholem 1973 (403) that a sign of the messianic transformation could be seen in the attempts of Sabbatai Tsevi to change the status of women by including them in ritual deeds from which they were traditionally excluded, such as his allegedly calling women to the synagogue lectern in order to recite the blessings that precede and follow the public reading of the Torah. On the role of women in the Sabbatian movement, see also Goldish 2004, 46-47, 100, 106-7, 111; Halperin 2007, 39, 41, 76, 172; and the copious documentation provided by Rapoport-Albert 2011, 15-156. I accept that Sabbatai Tsevi sought to subvert the nomian framework of rabbinic authority by breaking down distinctions between men and women both in terms of ritual practice and study of esoteric texts, especially the Zohar. However, I would still maintain that the "egalitarian agenda" did not prevent the prevalence of the traditional phallic symbolism on the part of the leading theologians of the movement. See Wolfson 1998, and my brief comment in 2005, 62. If I am correct, then we have an interesting discrepancy between the elitist and popular segments of the movement, a matter that demands further research.

that kabbalists have not only not implemented changes in the social realm to reflect the implications of the gender equality, they also have advanced “complicated formulations to support a certain form of domination of male over female, starting from the reflections on the position of *Malkhut* with its male partner *Tiferet*.” Mopsik goes on to say that the

inequality, rooted in the divine world, is considered to be temporary, and destined to disappear in the eschatological future.... It is clear that this inequality, although minimal, between the masculine and feminine attributes of Divinity, serves to justify the social and religious inequality between man and woman.... But because this inequality is not considered to be permanent, a breakthrough or anticipation of this future equality was also envisaged. (2005, 114)

How was it envisaged? According to Mopsik, while the kabbalists could not translate their “radically heterogeneous concepts” into a social reality, the harmony attained in the intimate sexual relations with their wives—difference without division—prefigured the reestablishment of the original truth to be realized in the messianic era (*ibid*).

The question that needs to be pondered is if the logic of the kabbalistic myth of redemption entails the equalization of gender, as proposed by Mopsik, or a restoration of the female to the male, as I have argued in many of my writings. I give credit to Mopsik for having the integrity to note that the egalitarianism in the divine would have to be implemented in a parallel fashion in Jewish liturgical communities. The example he offers from the Sabbatian movement is telling: the effort to rectify the gender inequality by acts, such as calling women to the Torah, in some measure reinforces the very hierarchical structure that is being subverted. While clearly breaking with the rabbinic norm of his day, the alleged act of Sabbatai Tsevi should be called hypernomian rather than antinomian, since the intent is not to abrogate the law but to fulfill it by extending beyond its limits.⁴⁰ Translated symbolically, the female becomes equal to the male when she rises from the status of one who receives to assume the posture of one who bestows, an idea that can be found in the depiction of the end-time in other kabbalistic and Hasidic sources (see Wolfson 1995, 120–21; 2009, 205–6). A bona fide overcoming of the patriarchal hierarchy, how-

40. For the use of the hypernomian to depict the Sabbatian phenomenon, see Wolfson 2006, 277–84.

ever, would require the apophatic erasure of difference to the point that the dyad of giving and receiving is transcended. It is not sufficient for the (feminine) receiver to become the (masculine) giver, as impressive as this may seem; the ideal unity would be one in which there is no more giver or receiver, only the giving that is receiving and the receiving that is giving.

Those who focus on the heterosexual pairing as the sign of redemption are, in my judgment, articulating what is appropriate for the first stage, which is the mending of the rupture of the male and the female. Beyond that stage, however, there is a second stage, one in which the division within the divine is surmounted in the place where opposites are indistinguishable. The eschatological overcoming is predicated, therefore, on the elevation of the feminine and her return to the masculine, a metamorphosis that is depicted figuratively as the diadem ascending to the head of the divine anthropos or in the biblical image of the woman of valor being the crown of her husband (Prov 12:4). To be sure, this dynamic is a transposition of gender—the female encircling the male (Jer 31:21)⁴¹—but it remains inscribed within the phallogocentrism, inasmuch as the female is redeemed by becoming male.⁴² For there to be a true transvaluation and surpassing of patriarchy, the presumption of there being both male and female would have to give way to the discernment that there is neither male nor female, not because the female has been reintegrated into the male but because, to paraphrase the language of Derrida, we are beyond the binary opposition feminine/masculine (Derrida and McDonald 1982, 76).

The emphasis on heterosexual unity, which was the focus of Mopsik's work and that of many other kabbalah scholars, fails to take note of an even higher unity on the *scala contemplativa* that may be extracted from the sources. Ultimate redemption would consist of attaining the state of consciousness—or perhaps metaconsciousness—that entails incorporation of all differentiation in the indifferent oneness that is ascribed to *Ein Sof* or to *Keter*, the divine nothingness marked by the paradoxical coincidence of opposites such that night is day, left is right, white is black, Jew is non-Jew, male is female, and so on. Within the collapse of difference, which is characteristic of this indifference, there is no longer any mean-

41. See my discussion of these themes in Wolfson 2009, 200–23, esp. 201.

42. In this regard, there is an obvious affinity between the traditional kabbalistic system and what is expressed in some ancient gnostic texts. For a more elaborate analysis, see Wolfson 2005, 25–55.

ingful distinction between antinomies and hence no ontological basis to preserve the alterity of the feminine vis-à-vis the masculine or that of the masculine vis-à-vis the feminine. To enter this “matrixial borderspace,” the “im-pure zone of *neither day nor night, of both light and darkness*” (Ettinger 2006, 109), what is required is not only an apophysis of gender, a resignification of the phallic law of desire, but an apophysis of the apophysis, a venturing beyond to the precipice, the chasm of the excluded middle, where opposites are identical in the opposition of their identity.⁴³

While it is not at all clear to me that such an ideal can be implemented sociologically without dispelling the very path that leads to it, this may very well be the most daring implication of the messianic potential of the kabbalah: man and woman would be truly equal in the indifference of infinity where there is neither male nor female. Egalitarianism is not secured by the affirmation of dual sexuality, as Mopsik argued, but by the overcoming of the phallogocentric system of signification that invariably engenders the potential for otherness as feminine. The delineation of the female as the site of alterity problematizes the hegemony of the masculine, and thus essentializing the feminine as the inessential, the essence that defies essentialization, has been a necessary step along the way of critical thinking. The apophysis of apophysis, however, demands taking the next step toward an unadulterated alterity, which would preclude not only the reduction of the other to the same but the reduction of the same to the other. This can take root within that borderspace where there is no other, because there is nothing but the other that in the absence of the same is not marked as the presence of an other. In taking that step, perhaps we commence to trespass the sign of both patriarchy and matriarchy.

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43. See the nuanced discussion in Keller 2008.

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