Suffering Eros and Textual Incarnation: A Kristevan Reading of Kabbalistic Poetics

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WORD / FLESH: METAPHORICAL VEILING AND THE EROS OF EMBODIMENT

I commence with a passage from Julia Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater" that will serve as the inspiration as we set out on our way:

> FLASH—instant of time or of dream without time; inordinately swollen atoms of a bond, a vision, a shiver, a yet formless, unnamable embryo. Epiphanies. Photos of what is not yet visible and that language necessarily skims over from afar, allusively. Words that are always too distant, too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in unimaginable spaces. Writing them down is an ordeal of discourse, like love. What is loving, for a woman, the same thing as writing. Laugh. Impossible. Flash on the unnamable, weavings of abstractions to be torn. Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible.[1]

The intertwining of language, eros, being, and time that may be elicited from Kristeva's words complements a cluster of motifs that I recovered in my excavation of the textual landscape of kabbalistic

hermeneutics and poetic imagination.[2] Utilizing a number of philosophical and theoretical perspectives, but most notably Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ontology, I characterized the erotic play in traditional kabbalah in incarnational terms that, in a manner surprisingly similar to Kristeva, revolves about the encircling of flesh and word, the opening where word is embodied as flesh and flesh embodied as word.[3] The body, on this score, is configured as textual, the text serving as the link that loops flesh and word in a bond that nonetheless preserves their difference.[4] For traditional kabbalists this form of semiotic embodiment signifies, more specifically, that the body of the text is inscripted on the text of the body, which in its most precise sense is constricted to the circumcised Jewish male,[5] a body that is composed of limbs corresponding to the twenty-two ciphers of Torah, the Hebrew consonants contained in the root word, the Tetragram, which may be described as the name of the nameless, the image of the imageless—a necessary corollary to the belief in the triune identity of God, Torah, and Israel, widely affirmed by kabbalists through the generations.[6] From the kabbalistic perspective we can say as well that language—the ordeal of discourse that is love—weaves its veil of words, metaphors of the invisible, to reveal the veil of the veiling.

The metaphoricity of language is captured distinctively in the net of amorous figures of speech, verbal images that conceal as much as they reveal in the incandescent shadow of eros, the tension between desire and denial, binaries that are not resolved in dialectical resolution—the Hegelian sublation (*Aufheben*)—but which persist in the identity of indifference. The role assigned to metaphor may be better appreciated if we attend to the philological root *meta-pherein*, "to put one thing in place of another," "to transport." Thus, as Aristotle long ago noted, the principal function of metaphor is to transfer meaning from one word to another (*Poetics* 1457b 9–10), a transference that presupposes a gap that is continuously crossed though never collapsed, an opening that allows disparate entities to meet without any resolution of their difference. Rendered metaphorically, then, the metaphor is the bridge that spans the breach between literal and figurative, the rift between reality and appearance, the chasm between truth and fiction, the verbal leap that propels one

across the space of an irreducible opposition. As Charles P. Bigger has recently put it, "Metaphors disclose identities over differing ontic realms . . . My use of 'between' . . . signifies the gap [Greek *chaos*] between the margins of supplements beyond the gap between being and becoming within which creatures come to be, a cosmological theme and, phenomenologically, the open or clearing in which they appear. . . . The being and becoming gap and its crossing is the domicile of metaphor. Like *Eros*, also a creature of the between, it is concerned to bring together in a new creation what otherwise might seem estranged. . . . Creative metaphor is a crossing, not a transporting."[7]

Metaphor, on this score, may be thought of as a form of *diastemic discourse*, that is, a mode of language that materializes in the fissure that connects by keeping apart.[8] The understanding of metaphor as the bridging rather than the effacing of difference reflects a distinctively Heideggerian turn beyond the dichotomy that Nietzsche presumed in his understanding of metaphor as dissimulation,[9] a covering of truth by the illusory mask of image.[10] Even more germane to this aspect of kabbalistic hermeneutics is the insight of Derrida that metaphor entails a withdrawal (*re-trait*) of "truth as non-truth," a withdrawal that "is no more proper or literal than figurative," "neither thing, nor being, nor meaning," as it "withdraws itself both from the Being of being as such and from language, without being or being said elsewhere; it *incises* ontological difference itself."[11] What is implied in this *re-trait*, this withdrawal of truth as non-truth? How can we juxtapose truth and non-truth in this manner such that the truth withdrawn as non-truth remains the truth that is withdrawn? For truth to be withdrawn as non-truth it must persist as the truth of non-truth, which can only be as the non-truth of truth, but a truth that is true as non-truth can be neither literally nor figuratively so. Alternatively expressed, it can be literal only as figurative and figurative only as literal, literally figurative, figuratively literal.[12] The metaphor, accordingly, signifies that which is neither being nor without being, the incision of ontological difference, the cut between, writing the supplementary trace, withdrawal of withdrawal.

To elucidate the matter, especially as it relates to the intertwining of the metaphoric and erotic, I invoke the mythical teaching preserved by

Plato in the *Symposium*,[13] attributed to Diotima, the priestess of Mantineia, though voiced through the persona of Socrates,[14] to depict the "idealized object" of a desexualized "sublime eros," a "transcendental sensuality" or a "sensual metaphysics,"[15] the ideal known in Western culture as "Platonic" love.[16] Eros is cast as the male offspring of the copulation of Poros and Penia, resource and need, rendered more abstractly, as form and matter, the fullness of being and the privation of nonbeing.[17] As the son that issues from the pairing of these opposites, the fate of Eros is "to be always needy . . . barefoot and homeless," discarding whatever he gains, partaking equally of his "mother's poverty" and his "father's resourcefulness . . . at once desirous and full of wisdom . . . neither mortal nor immortal," a lifelong "seeker after truth" positioned "midway between ignorance and wisdom."[18] Through philosophic exegesis of the myth, Plato gave expression to what he considered a basic feature of being human in the world, an ideal embodied in the philosopher, the lover of wisdom: Unlike gods who possess wisdom and hence have no need to desire it (a philosophic truism represented mythopoeically by the fact that Penia had not been invited to the banquet of the gods), humans desire wisdom precisely because they lack it. Yet within this lack is possession, for if there were no lack to possess, there would be no possession of lack, and, consequently, no love of which to speak.[19] Erotic energy, it would seem, issues from the space between satisfaction and want, the space that partakes of both at once, wanting satisfaction in the want of satisfaction, a space we occupy by being uprooted from the space we occupy, a form of possession predicated on possessing naught but the possession of being possessed.[20]

The point was well captured by Luce Irigaray in her exegesis of Diotima's views transmitted by Socrates in the Platonic dialogue:

> For, if love possessed all that he desired, he would desire no more. He must lack, therefore, in order to desire still. But, if love had nothing at all to do with beautiful and good things, he could not desire them either. Thus, he is an *intermediary* in a very specific sense. . . . He is neither mortal nor immortal: he is between the one and the other. Which qualifies him as demonic. Love is a *demon*—his

> function is to transmit to the gods what comes from men and to men what comes from the gods.[21]

Eros, therefore, assumes the veneer of the demonic intermediary, the liaison through which one grasps "the existence or instance of what is held between, what permits the passage between ignorance and knowledge," a passage that has no terminus as it can never attain stasis. "Everything is always in movement, in becoming. . . . Never completed, always evolving."[22]

In slightly different but allied terms, Kristeva offered the following reading of the myth of the begetting of Eros, which she relates, more specifically, to her Heideggerian-inspired characterization of Poros as the "supreme path" that "knows neither device nor mediation":

> Path of want, a want on the way, want blazing a trail for itself. But also a path wanting in devices, a path without essence. Through such an alliance of want and path, could Eros be the place where dialectic takes shape but also opens up to a daimon that overwhelms it? Love as a path that leads nowhere . . . unless it be no immediate sight, scattered totality. We shall thus love what we do not have; the object (of love) is the lacking object.[23]

To suffer eros one must succumb to the restlessness of craving that resists the lure of gratification, to walk the path of want that can want no path if the path it wants wants no path, to love what can be present only in the absence of what is absent in presence.

FLESH / WORD: POETIC INCARNATION AND THE EMBODIMENT OF EROS

It goes without saying that, in my judgment, philosophical assertions of this sort have to be tested and refined by philological investigations apposite to different cultural contexts. In this study, I turn my gaze again on aspects of the erotic imaginary that may be elicited from medieval kabbalistic literature, taking my initial cue, as I often do, from *Sefer ha-Zohar*, the "Book of Splendor,"[24] an anthology of mystical lore that began to

assume redactional form in Castile in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.[25] I shall also cite later sources that make explicit or expand upon themes implicit in passages from the *Zohar*, a strategy of reading indicative of my belief that it is legitimate to speak of a zoharic kabbalah, an edifice of mystical teaching and practice constructed over the course of many centuries by an ever-growing community of readers who study, interpret, and reinscribe the text. Let me note in passing that the current trend to view the *Zohar* as made up of multiple compositional layers and redactional accretions does not preclude the soundness of positing a system of thought unique to this literary entity; on the contrary, as I have argued elsewhere, innovation and repetition are not to be set in diametric opposition. Iteration of structure is what facilitates originality and change.[26]

It should be noted that the intricate ideas that may be extracted from the different literary strata of the *Zohar*, and other kabbalistic texts influenced thereby, rest heavily on ideas expressed in earlier rabbinic sources. Especially pertinent are ideas about the Song of Songs, the scriptural book that has served more than any other as the textual prism through which images of sacred eros have been projected. Perhaps the most familiar of rabbinic views, and surely the one that was most influential, is that the text should be read as an allegorical depiction of God's (hetero)erotic relationship to Israel, the stronger partner engendered as male and the weaker as female. In the course of time this way of reading would claim for itself a privileged status as it provided a good rationale to explain the canonical status of the text, though it must be underscored that this is by no means the only perspective attested in rabbinic sources.

In a previous study, I proposed that a feature of rabbinic allegory, which had a significant impact on medieval kabbalists, relates to the assumption that the Song is equivalent to Torah in its entirety.[27] I suggested further that this point underlies the oft-cited remark attributed to Aqiva that all of Scripture is holy, but the Song is the holy of holies: Just as the sanctity of the latter outweighs the sanctity of every other place, so the Song is the most hallowed of books, indeed, it embodies the holiness of the canon at large since its metaphorical nature—its literal sense is construed as figurative, and the figurative as literal—reveals something basic concerning the very possibility of speaking about divine revelation. It

should come as no surprise, therefore, that some rabbis surmised that the initial recitation of the poem occurred at Sinai, precisely at the moment and in the place where the divine glory was manifest—or, in the formulation that I prefer, the glory was incarnate in imaginal form—and the Torah was bequeathed to the people of Israel. The link between narration of the Song and this event intimates that revelation—the be/coming of the word, which is the utterance of the name—is itself erotically charged, the eros of language unveiled in the veil of the language of eros. This can be explained exoterically in terms of the description of the Sinaitic theophany as the conjoining of God and the Jewish nation in holy matrimony, a portrayal quite prevalent in rabbinic literature through the ages,[28] but it also embraces the more esoteric contention that Torah as the divine word displays the parabolic nature of which I spoke above. Within the contours of a religious sensibility that renders the scriptural aniconism in decidedly apophatic terms, how else could one make sense of the notion of God's revelation? The unapparent cannot appear and remain unapparent but through the appearance of its nonappearance; the appearance of its nonappearance, however, necessarily entails the nonappearance of its appearance. Insofar as Scripture is interpreted as the written record of divine speech, it represents the nonrepresentable in verbal icons that showcase what cannot be shown. Theological language exhibits, in Kristeva's locution, the paradox of "metaphorical proliferation," which is "present at the foundations of amorous discourse."[29] The Song embodies this form of discourse in a unique way, the panoply of poetic tropes that disclose truth in the concealment of image through the concealment of truth in the disclosure of image.

From the equation of Torah and the Song we can extrapolate a key assumption that informed the rabbinic conception of the poetic. Just as in the particular case of the Song the contextual meaning is discerned as allegorical, the hermeneutical pattern of Scripture in general is related to the poetic structure of metaphor, the *mashal* in Hebrew, which presumes the dual structure of two layers of signification, the double-sign, outer and inner. Semiotically, it is possible to distinguish these two levels, but semantically they cannot be separated, for the face of the secret (*sod*) is hidden beneath and therefore only accessible through the veil of the literal (*peshaṭ*).[30] In a number of studies, I have discussed this duplicity

of secrecy, the convergence of exoteric and esoteric, which yields the inescapable paradox that every revelation is concealment and every concealment revelation,[31] a paradox that renders language in its literalness metaphorical, every saying an unsaying, a saying otherwise.[32]

In this context, I will cite a passage from Abraham Joshua Heschel that complements the hermeneutical standpoint I have assumed in my own thinking.[33] Commenting on the Talmudic dictum that one who is blind in one eye is exempt from the biblically ordained pilgrimage to Jerusalem incumbent on all Israelite males during the three festivals (Exod. 23:17, 34:23) since the fulfillment of the injunction is dependent on the twin possibility of seeing and being seen,[34] Heschel writes:

> Jewish thought is nourished from two sources, and it follows two parallel paths: the path of vision and the path of reason. With respect to those things that are given to objective measurement, reason is primary. With respect to things of the heart, vision is primary. . . . A great principle was enunciated concerning religious faith: "'Observe' and 'Remember' were said in a single utterance."[35] Observe the plain meaning, but remember the esoteric meaning. Just as we are obligated to observe, so are we required to remember. The Torah cannot be fulfilled unless one safeguards the plain meaning of the text and also remembers the revelation at Sinai. Torah can only be acquired in two ways: with reason's lens and the heart's lens. One who is blind in one eye is exempt from the pilgrimage.[36]

In a manner reminiscent of the Hasidic masters to whom he was greatly indebted, Heschel interprets the halakhic ruling as an expression of a hermeneutical truth that was the foundation of the tradition he absorbed, transformed, and transmitted. There are two aspects of Torah, exoteric (*peshaṭ*) and esoteric (*sod*), and both must be affirmed, an idea that is linked exegetically to another rabbinic teaching concerning the simultaneous utterance of the two words associated with the Sabbath command in the Decalogue, *shamor*, "observe" (Exod. 20:7) and *zakhor*, "remember" (Deut. 5:11): The former corresponds to the external and the latter to the internal.[37] What is particularly important about this motif is the implicit kabbalistic interpretation of the rabbinic idea that the two

words were uttered in one breath, at one time, something that is not humanly possible. Esoterically rendered, the simultaneous utterance conveys the joining of female and male, shadow and light, the evident and latent layers of meaning.[38] If one sees only with a single eye, one does not possess the bifocal vision that makes it possible to envision the twofold nature of mystery, the seeing of the visibly invisible from and within the invisibly visible, and thus such a person is exempt from making the journey to the Jerusalem Temple. Ever an astute interpreter of kabbalistic and Hasidic teachings, Heschel draws the obvious inference regarding the inseparability of the two levels of meaning; what is hidden can be seen only through the garment, the symbolic through the literal, the invisible through the visible,[39] two hermeneutical propositions connected to the nature of the parable (*mashal*) that many kabbalists in the thirteenth century, and beyond, have appropriated from Maimonides:[40]

> The visionary knows that truth is expressed only in fragments and is revealed only through the lens of metaphors and parables. Is it really possible to see what is concealed without a veil? Or to peek past our bounds without metaphors? What is revealed and what is concealed coexist in admixture, and what is revealed is nothing more than a shroud that the Holy and Blessed One has placed upon that which is concealed.[41]

The Song enunciates this wisdom more than any other biblical book as it is marked by a convergence of the literal and figurative, the iteration of the same that is different in virtue of being the same,[42] and thus it can be branded the paradigm of paradigms, that is, the book that, paradigmatically, demonstrates the paradigmatic nature of paradigm, the duplicity intrinsic to the play of metaphor. If we join the chorus of thinkers who have speculated on the metaphoricity of language as such, then we can speak of the Song as a dialogue that is just as much about language as it is about eros—indeed, the two are indistinguishable inasmuch as the erotic object of the Song is language and the subject of that language is eros. The representation of the Song along these lines is particularly relevant in the realm of theological discourse: To speak of a God that is

unspeakable, an apparently endless proposition, is to utilize poetic images, figurative tropes that correlate the ostensibly divergent through the prism of symbolic likeness.[43] The overlapping of *peshaṭ* and *mashal*—surface enfolded in surface, wheel turning within wheel—points to a larger claim regarding the poiesis of Torah, which, in turn, expresses and is expressed by the erotic desire peering through the lattices of the Song.

At this juncture it is prudent to return to the image of the bridge. Common sense dictates that without distance there is no need for a bridge. The bridge, accordingly, brings together what it keeps apart and keeps apart what it brings together. In the semiotic function of comparing things dissimilar, and thereby relating what is not natively related, metaphor is transportive, "a way to reproduce the perpetual connections made within a living and creative reality," a "continuous chain of circles" that "serves to guide the surface of signs toward depth."[44] From the standpoint of what I have termed poetic incarnation, that is, the belief that the body in its most abstract tangibility is the letter,[45] the metaphor is a bridge sited between presence and absence, the interlude where difference is laid bare in the guise of indifference. Eros partakes of the middle ground, presencing absence by way of absencing presence—the former depicted as male and the latter as female[46]—and in this respect it participates in the structural dynamic of metaphoricalness, "the economy that modifies language when subject and object of the utterance act muddle their borders," a process that can be translated psychoanalytically into the "complex process of identification," which involves narcissism and idealization.[47]

The Song, accordingly, may be designated profitably as the *metaphor of metaphors*, the textual embodiment of an embodied textuality, a showing marked by the paradox of the open secret, the concealment disclosed as concealed. Kristeva seems to have an excellent purchase on this dimension of the Song's importance in Judaism and the larger contribution it has made to amorous literature more generally: "It is true that the presence of the loved one is fleeting, it is eventually no more than an expectation. . . . Nevertheless, and through the very flight that is assumed by both protagonists—lovers who do not merge but are in love with the other's absence—no uncertainty affects the *existence* of the one who is loved and loves."[48] In another passage, Kristeva audaciously claims that

when compared to erotic literature in the West and in the East the portrayal of love in the Song is distinctive, utterly new.[49] This may be something of an exaggeration, but her observation that this literary exposé of eros is predicated on the pining for (hetero)sexual fulfillment, on the one hand, and the impossibility of its being fully realized, on the other, is unassailable. Her own words are far more eloquent than my paraphrase: "The amorous dialogue is tension and jouissance, repetition and infinity; not as communication but as *incantation*."[50] With remarkably keen insight, Kristeva notes that the allegorical interpretation of the Song promoted by the rabbis only enhanced the tension of love for the other:

> Supreme authority, be it royal or divine, can be loved as flesh while remaining essentially inaccessible; the intensity of love comes precisely from that combination of received jouissance and taboo, from a basic separation that nevertheless unites—that is what love issued from the Bible signifies for us, most particularly in its later form as celebrated in the Song of Songs. Indeed, as soon as the evocation of the amorous experience begins we step into a world of undecidable meaning—the world of *allegories*. . . . The sensitive and the significant, the body and the name, are thus not only placed on the same level but fused in the same logic of undecidable infinitization, semantic polyvalence brewed by the state of love—seat of imagination, source of allegory.[51]

The Song typifies the nature of allegory insofar as the desire of which it speaks separates and unifies—indeed, separates that which it unifies and unifies that which it separates—and it is precisely in this coincidence of opposites that one encounters what Kristeva referred to as the "logic of undecidable infinitization," the "semantic polyvalence" characteristic of the erotic experience of jouissance. Alternatively rendered, the jubilation of eros is equivalent to the semantic process of desemanticization, a curbing of desire in language through the language of desire, an excess of meaning delimited in the "fragmentation of syntax by rhythm."[52] The proximity of Kristeva's thought and insights that may be gleaned from traditional kabbalah is brought into even sharper relief when she expounds the figurative comparison of the Song to a body: "Because of its

corporeal and sexual thematics . . . indissolubly linked with the dominant theme of absence, yearning to merge, and idealization of the lovers, sensuality in the Song leads directly to the problematics of incarnation."[53] Given the separation inescapably implied by the topos of erotic flight, it follows that the incarnation of love will be both sensual and ideal—indeed, the more ideal, the more sensual, the more abstract, the more concrete, a state of "pure joy" wherein reality is imagined and the imagined is real, "where life is indistinguishable from an impression of truth."[54] Kristeva draws the obvious inference: "The allegorical rabbinic interpretation that sees God himself in the loved one actually favors the 'incarnational' potentiality of the Song of Songs: how can it indeed be avoided, if I love God, if the loved one is beyond Solomon's body, God himself? As intersection of corporeal passion and idealization, love is indisputably the privileged experience for the blossoming of metaphor (abstract for concrete, concrete for abstract) as well as incarnation (the spirit becoming flesh, the word-flesh)."[55]

It is apposite to cite one more passage from Kristeva that proffers a revision of the Platonic notion of eros,[56] a revision, moreover, that will prove useful in the effort to thematize insights about suffering eros culled from kabbalistic sources:

> Metaphoricalness consequently appears to me as the utterance not only of a being as One and acting, but rather, or even on the contrary, as the indication of uncertainty concerning the reference. *Being like* is not only *being* and *nonbeing*, it is also a longing for unbeing in order to assert as only possible "being," not an ontology, that is, something outside of discourse, but the constraint of discourse itself. The "like" of metaphorical conveyance both assumes and upsets that constraint, and to the extent that it probabilizes the identity of signs, it questions the very probability of the reference. Being?—*Unbeing*.[57]

The sensual quality of metaphor and the concomitant metaphorical quality of sensuality are rooted not in an ontology of presence but in what may be called a meontology of absence, the realm of the semiotic,

the poetic-maternal linguistic practice that disrupts the hegemonic universality of symbolic-paternal discourse.[58] "Being-like," the watchword of figurative representation, is not reducible to the standard metaphysical binary but it is related to the third term excluded by the principle of the excluded middle, "unbeing," which is neither being nor nonbeing, but the prospect of being that always entails the possibility of nonbeing. This third term, moreover, does not imply, as champions of Neoplatonic apophaticism would have argued, an entity beyond discourse, but rather the inescapable constraint of discourse, the limit of possibility that delimits the impossible, the saying of what cannot be said except in and through the unsaying of what is said.

AS A SEAL UPON THE HEART / EXILE OF DESIRE

I begin the analysis of the kabbalistic material with the following zoharic passage:

> R. Eleazar and R. Abba were held over in a cave in Lod, which they entered on account of the strength of the sun as they were going on the way. R. Abba said: Let this cave be encircled by words of Torah. R. Eleazar began to expound and said: "Let me be as a seal upon your heart, like the seal upon your arm. [For love is as strong as death, passion as mighty as Sheol.] Its darts are darts of fire, a blazing flame" (Song 8:6). We have studied this verse, but one night I was standing before [my] father, and I heard a word from him, that there is no perfection, will, or desire of the Community of Israel for the blessed holy One except through the souls of the righteous, as they arouse the spring of water of the lower beings in relation to the upper beings. In that moment there is the perfection of will and desire in one conjunction to produce offspring. Come and see: After they cleave one to the other, and she receives the will, she says "Let me be as a seal upon your heart." Why "as a seal"? It is the way of the seal that when it cleaves to a place, even after it is removed from there, a trace remains in that place that is not removable, for every trace and every image of it remains there. Thus the Community of Israel said: I have been conjoined to you, and even though I am removed from you and I have gone into exile, "Let me be as a

> seal upon your heart," so that my image in its entirety will remain in you like that seal that leaves its whole image in that place to which it was conjoined.[59]

The teaching of R. Simeon ben Yoḥai that is transmitted by R. Eleazar—in several places in zoharic literature these two figures together with R. Abba constitute the three pillars upon which the entire fraternity rests, corresponding to the left, right, and center columns of the sefirotic edifice[60]—is framed as an interpretation of the verse "Let me be as a seal upon your heart" (Song 8:6). In line with a prevailing symbolic explication of the Song adopted by kabbalists beginning in the thirteenth century as a dialogue between the feminine and masculine potencies of the divine,[61] transforming the text thereby into a "nuptial hymn of the Godhead,"[62] the particular verse is applied to *Shekhinah* (designated as *kenesset yisra'el*, the "Community of Israel," one of the rabbinic names for the collectivity of the Jewish people)[63] addressing her male consort *Tif'eret*. R. Simeon's exposition discloses something fundamental about desire as it pertains primarily to the sefirotic realm, but, consistent with kabbalistic doctrine, what is spoken about the divine reflects and is reflected in the sphere of human interaction; the contemporary analytic categories "theosophical" and "psychological"—often utilized by scholars to delineate discrete typological approaches—are two sides of one coin, two ways of viewing the selfsame phenomenon.

The first point that is made in an effort to clarify the nature of desire is that righteous men serve as the conduit between *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah*, a central idea in zoharic kabbalah that is expressed variously in other passages including the image of the orgasmic fluids, that is, the righteous stimulate the female waters (*mayyin nuqvin*) of *Shekhinah* (occasionally the righteous are even identified as the very stuff that constitutes the substance of the female waters) that ascend and in turn arouse the male waters (*mayyin dukhrin*) to overflow and to produce offspring.[64] But the crucial idea promulgated by this passage is the second point as it relates to the interface of presence and absence at play in the drama of eros. According to the zoharic exegesis, the critical verse from the Song is uttered at the interval/space (temporal and spatial coordinates in the realm of the imaginal are not so easily distinguished) subsequent to the

unification of male and female.[65] *Shekhinah* addresses *Tif'eret*, requesting that she should be as a seal upon his heart. Philological attunement is here in order: The verse does not say "Let me be a seal upon your heart" (*simeni ḥotam al libbekha*) but rather "Let me be *as* a seal upon your heart" (*simeni kha-ḥotam al libbekha*)—"as a seal," a turn of phrase that expresses the metaphorical comportment, as it were, the comparison and linking together of entities ostensibly incomparable and disparate. Rather than viewing the qualifying phrase as a caveat that diminishes the force of the symbolic utterance, as Scholem in one place suggested,[66] I would argue that the qualifier enhances the significance of the symbol immeasurably by underscoring that the figure of speech bridges the gap between imaginary and real, and thereby juxtaposes that which is incongruent.

How fitting it seems that to depict the metaphorical nature of eros the biblical author enlists an elocution that denotes the erotic nature of metaphor, to be positioned as a seal upon the heart. But what is the feature of the seal that makes it worthy of this semiotic marking? The answer is given in the zoharic text itself: "It is the way of the seal that when it cleaves to a place, even after it is removed from there, a trace remains in that place that is not removable." The distinctiveness of the seal, therefore, must be thought from the vantage point of the trace it leaves behind, the mark it imprints on the place to which it has been affixed. Hence, the feminine voice implores her male consort to preserve the memory of their conjunction as a seal upon his heart—the seal tattooed on the heart, a sign that signifies the presence of what is absent by demarcating the absence of what is present.[67] Metaphor, analogously, is the mode of language that bespeaks the presence of absence manifestly concealed in the absence of presence.

This commingling, which sheds light on the metaphoric condition, is illumined further by the claim that the verse "Let me be as a seal upon your heart" is uttered by *Shekhinah* in exile,[68] a motif appropriated by kabbalists from rabbinic sources to articulate the ontic state of rupture, the separation of feminine and masculine potencies in the Godhead, respectively the attributes of judgment and mercy, the capacity to receive and the impulse to overflow.[69] Erotically speaking, exile is the intermediate state, the midpoint that makes possible the transmutation of one attribute into the other, the space of desire enrapt by the appetite that

arises from and is sustained within the interval (a term that is meant to convey both temporal and spatial meaning along the lines of Bakhtin's chronotope[70]) situated between satisfaction and want. From the kabbalistic standpoint the mending (*tiqqun*) of the blemish (*pegam*) consists of the re/pairing of the heterosexual union that has been torn asunder.[71] For the male to incorporate the female as a seal upon the heart is a crucial metaphorical way of discoursing about this rectification. To plumb these depths, however, we must go deeper into understanding the nature of the seal inscripted on the surface of the heart.

RE/TRACING THE TRACE: DESIRE OF EXILE

The intricate nexus of the erotic and exilic is drawn overtly in the interpretation of Song 8:6 in a passage from *Tiqqunei Zohar*, a later stratum of zoharic literature, presumably composed by an anonymous Spanish kabbalist sometime in the fourteenth century: "It is not written 'Let me be a seal' [*simeni ḥotam*] but 'as a seal' [*kha-ḥotam*]. *Shekhinah* said: Master of the worlds, 'Let me be as a seal,' as that imprint of your seal [*reshimu de-ḥotama dilakh*], for even though the seal remains in your hands, your imprint is in the document, and from that imprint the upper and lower beings tremble."[72] The *ḥotam*, the imprint that is left behind, is compared to an inscription in a document, a figurative turn that highlights the connection of the image of the seal to the gesture of writing. From the juxtaposition we may deduce a larger conceptual point: Writing and erasure are not binary opposites, for what has been written is a remnant of what has been erased and what has been erased a vestige of what has been written. Exile, accordingly, may be depicted as the scripting of the trace, a presence that is absent in the absence of its presence as the absence that is present in the presence of its absence.

The point is made poignantly in the part of the passage that immediately precedes the aforementioned portion:

> The "image of man" [*demut adam*] (Ezek. 1:26), surely this refers to *Shekhinah*, which is "his image" [*diyoqneih*], concerning whom it says "behold the likeness of the Lord" [*temunat yhwh yabiṭ*] (Num. 12:8), and it[73] is from the side of the garment [*mi-siṭra di-levusha*]

> whereas from the side of the body [*mi-siṭra de-gufa*] it is the unification of the central pillar [*yiḥuda de-ammuda de-emṣa'ita*], which[74] is the seal from the side of the body [*ḥotama mi-siṭra de-gufa*], and since he is the seal, *Shekhinah* says to YHWH, which is from within, "Let me be as a seal on your heart," for even though you departed from me in exile, your seal will remain with me and it will never depart from me.[75]

Significantly, the feminine, the visual pole, is cast as the image of the anthropos, that is, the image through which the invisible is visualized,[76] and thus it is aligned with the "side of the garment" in contrast to the masculine, which is aligned with the "side of the body." I have explored these symbolic complexes at length elsewhere, but what is necessary to emphasize in this context is that the motif of the garment conveys the idea that the feminine simultaneously reveals and conceals the male, or better, the phallic potency within, the seal from the side of the body, the potency to which is assigned the ineffable name, YHWH, the secret of the covenant, also identified as the mystical body of Torah. From an engendered perspective it is worthy to note the somewhat unexpected shift at the conclusion of the passage: The verse "Let me be as a seal on your heart" is addressed by *Shekhinah* to the male to indicate that the breach created by exile, indeed exile is by nature this breach, will not be absolute since the seal of the male remains imprinted on the female. The contextual meaning of the text, however, suggests that the request of the female is to be borne as a seal impressed on the heart of the male and not to bear the seal of the male impressed on her own body. To lay hold of the spot where this reversal is itself reversed, so that to speak of the female desiring to have the seal of the male imprinted on her own heart is symbolically equivalent to the female desiring to have her seal imprinted on the heart of the male, is to think the metaphoric nature of the erotic in light of the erotic nature of the metaphoric.

The matter is clarified in the continuation of the homily, where alternative ways of reading the verse are proposed. For our purposes I will mention only one other interpretation as it provides a way to account for the aforementioned turnaround. The interpretation I have in mind purports that the verse is spoken by the soul (*nishmata*) in relation to

its supernal image in the sefirotic pleroma. According to the pneumatic explication, the scriptural petition relates to the dialogue between the soul, the "trace of the seal" (*reshimu de-ḥotam*) below, and its inscription (*gelifu*) imprinted above, an idea that is supported by the aggadic theme of the icon (*diyoqna*) of Jacob engraved upon the throne.[77] The reference to this older motif affords the anonymous kabbalist (and all subsequent readers of his text) an opportunity to embrace the image of the ladder in Jacob's dream-vision, an image that is interpreted (again on the basis of older sources) in a liturgical manner. The casting of the verse from the Song in terms of worship provides the link that connects the theosophic and pneumatic explanations:

> "Let me be as a seal"—this is the Prayer [*ṣelota*] in which is engraved and inscribed the Life of the Worlds [*ḥai almin*] in the eighteen blessings of the prayer, and this is the trace of the seal in the text [*reshimu de-ḥotama be-fitqa*], which is the Torah, the inscription of the letters of the seal [*gelifu de-atwwan de-ḥotama*], the Righteous, Life of the Worlds [*ṣaddiq ḥai olmin*]. . . . "Let me be as a seal"—this is the soul [*nishmata*], which is engraved upon the throne. When it is aroused below in prayer, the throne is aroused above.[78]

The two forms of reading are intricately connected, for just as the soul below is a trace of the image that is engraved above, so *Shekhinah* is a trace of the seal, which is the phallic potency of *Yesod*, designated by the technical expression "Righteous, Life of the Worlds." *Shekhinah* is inscripted by the force of *Yesod*, which consists of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and she thus assumes the title "prayer" (*ṣelota*), a clear reference to the *amidah*, the standing prayer of eighteen benedictions—the Hebrew notation for the number eighteen consists of the letters *yod* (10) and *ḥeit* (8), which are the consonants of the word *ḥai* in the expression *ḥai olmin*. Without engaging all of the details of the zoharic text, we can draw the main point for our purposes: The entreaty to be placed as a seal upon the heart reflects the desire of the feminine to receive the seminal efflux from the divine phallus. To quote from the continuation of the passage from *Tiqqunei Zohar*:

> Another matter: "Let me be as a seal upon your heart." This verse is said with respect to *Shekhinah* who is in exile. It does not say "a seal" [*ḥotam*] but "as a seal" [*kha-ḥotam*], like that seal of the signet [*ḥotam de-gushppanqa*], which is the seal of truth [*ḥotam emet*], and through it [we recite liturgically] "let us be sealed for life" [*ḥotmenu le-ḥayyim*]. And what is that seal in which there is life? This is the Tree of Life whence issue children, livelihood, and sustenance.[79]

The seal corresponds to the Tree of Life, the phallic potency or *Yesod*, which is described as the source whence issue forth children, livelihood, and sustenance, a description based on a Talmudic delineation of the items that are dependent on fortune (*mazzal*) as opposed to merit (*zekhut*).[80] The expression "let us be sealed for life," *ḥotmenu le-ḥayyim*, which is derived from the liturgical formula for the closing service (*ne'ilah*) on Yom Kippur when the fate of each Jew according to rabbinic tradition is thought to be sealed in the book of life, *ḥotmenu be-sefer ha-ḥayyim*,[81] is explained as well in terms of this symbolic association: the Jewish worshiper entreats God to be sealed by the seal of life, which is also the seal of truth.[82] What is crucial for this analysis is the exegetical attribution of the key verse from the Song to *Shekhinah* when she is in exile. In the state of banishment, the female calls out to the male, a yearning for union that is expressed in the wish to be fastened as a seal upon the heart of her lover so that she will not be forgotten even in times of separation. In this craving is the ontic condition that may be rendered poetically as the desire of exile, a desire that arises from the trace left behind, the mark of the seal that is the exile of desire. In another passage from *Tiqqunei Zohar*, the matter is extended to the people of Israel, as their geographical banishment below is a correlate to the separation of *Shekhinah* from *Tif'eret* above:

> And the secret of the matter "Each of them had a human face, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right" (Ezek. 1:10), each creature had four faces, and these are the four letters of the holy name, YHWH, which shines within them. The king over all these creatures is the human [*adam*], which is *yw''d h''a wa''w h''a*, for they are numerically equal. The "image of a human" (Ezek 1:5)—this is

> the holy *Shekhinah*, for she is his image [*diyoqneih*], and she is his seal [*ḥotam dileih*], and concerning this it says "Let me be as a seal upon your heart." Thus *Shekhinah* said, "Even though you ascend above, your image [*diyoqnakh*] will never be removed from me just like that seal [*ḥotam*] in the place to which the trace of the master of the seal [*reshimu de-ma'rei ḥotama*] is conjoined, the image of the seal [*diyoqna de-ḥotama*], does not depart from it so that it is known through it." Accordingly, *Shekhinah* in exile said, "Let me be as a seal upon your heart. . . ." Israel says, "Master of the world, even though I am in exile far from you, 'Let me be as a seal upon your heart,' your image [*diyoqnakh*], which is your seal [*ḥotam dilakh*], which is your *Shekhinah*, should not depart from us. On account of this you will remember us in exile, and the seal [*ḥotama*] of the holy One, blessed be he, is surely the *Shekhinah*."[83]

The critical verse "Let me be as a seal upon your heart," according to the zoharic reading, is uttered by both *Shekhinah* and the Jewish people, a doubling that is to be expected as in the symbolic world of medieval kabbalistic theosophy *Shekhinah* is the divine attribute that corresponds to the community of Israel, and hence what applies to the one applies to the other. Notwithstanding the ontological reciprocity, there is an interesting shift in gender valence connected to the images of the trace and the seal as they apply to each of these referents.

Shekhinah is identified as the figure of the human assumed by the four creatures who bore the throne. Following a careful rendering of the scriptural account of Ezekiel's chariot vision, the anonymous author of the passage from *Tiqqunei Zohar* presumes that each of the four creatures had four faces, but that the composite form of each was that of a human. The point is supported by the numerological equivalence of the word *adam* and the four letters of the Tetragrammaton written out in full as *yw"d h"a wa"w h"a*, that is, both expressions have the sum of forty-five. Read kabbalistically, the human figure is identified as *Shekhinah*, the last of the *sefirot*, which is the anthropomorphic image through and by which the supernal aspect of the divine is revealed. This is the intent of her identification as the image (*diyoqan*) and/or seal (*ḥotam*) of the male potency. Based on these symbolic identifications the scriptural entreaty ascribed to *Shekhinah*, "Let me be as a seal upon you heart," is interpreted

as the request of the female to bear the imprint of the male in the time they are separated just as the seal leaves an impression on the material surface to which it has been affixed after it has been removed. In the exact language of the text: *Shekhinah* says to the male potency of which she is the image/seal, "Even though you ascend above, your image will never be removed from me." Given the prevailing assumptions about heterosexual behavior in the time that this stratum of zoharic literature was composed, this interpretation makes sense empirically, but it is not justified textually as it is the female who says to the male "Let me be as a seal upon your heart." The inversion, however, betokens the gender transformation that can be explained by the fact that the imprinting of the masculine seal on the female is on a par with the feminine image being imprinted as a seal on the heart of the male. Alternatively expressed, as the form of the seal's imprint—the "trace of the seal" (*reshimu de-ḥotama*)[84]—takes shape on the material surface, there is a reversal of image such that right and left, inside and outside, are transposed.[85] The change of position is made clear in the exegetical application of the verse to Israel, that is, the collectivity of Jews, who are symbolically feminized, address the masculine attribute of God in emulation of *Shekhinah*, but in their case the wish to be secured as a seal upon the heart is interpreted as their appeal for the divine presence to accompany them in exile, a kabbalistic reworking of an interpretation attested in other medieval commentators on this verse.[86]

The gender implications of this image are rendered even more complex when we take into account on the basis of numerous passages from *Tiqqunei Zohar* as well as other kabbalistic sources that the word *ḥotam* is a symbolic circumlocution for the phallus or the attribute in the divine that is imaged in phallic terms. To cite one illustration of this symbolic association:

> "Let me be as a seal" (Song 8:6), this is the sign of the covenant of circumcision . . . for it is the mark of the holy name [*reshimu di-shema qaddisha*], in the manner [of the verse] 'Who among us can go up to the heavens' [*mi ya'aleh lanu ha-shamaimah*] (Deut 30:12), the first letters spell *milah* and the final letters *yhwh*.[87] He who guards this mark [*reshimu*] it is as if he guards the holy name, and he who

> lies with respect to this mark it is as if he lies with respect to the holy name. . . . The letters of [the word] *mezuzot* are verily *zaz mawet*, and thus concerning the one who protects the covenant of circumcision, which is his seal [*ḥotama dileih*], death is removed from him [*zaz mawet minneih*] . . . and the one who lies with respect to the covenant of circumcision lies with respect to the seal of the king [*ḥotama de-malka*], which is inscribed with Shaddai on the outside and YHWH on the inside.[88]

With this understanding of the notion of the seal we can revisit the zoharic delineation of exile in the image of the remnant left behind by the imprint of the signet of truth. Just as the trace is marked by the confluence of presence and absence—the presence of what is absent is discerned in and through the absence of what is present—so exile is demarcated by the erotic longing of the female for the male and reciprocally of the male for the female, a longing that issues from the commingling of want and provision, a commingling in the middle ground where being and nonbeing persevere in the (in)difference of their (non)identity.

The intent of the above citation from *Tiqqunei Zohar* is rendered more transparent in the following remark of the sixteenth-century kabbalist, Moses Cordovero:

> *Yesod* is called the "unblemished ox" [*shor tam*] and with regard to his name *Malkhut* is called "unblemished" [*tam*].[89] Indeed, [the word] "unblemished" [*tam*] alludes to their supernal existence . . . and when she is united with *Tif'eret* above, then her existence is named with regard to him in the secret of "Let me be as a seal," and he is called *emet* on account of her name, and since he is like a seal that inverts the reality that remains in it [the letters *mem* and *tau* from the word *emet*] are inverted to *tam* [which is made up of *tau* and *mem*] in the secret of the permutation and the sealing.[90]

It goes without saying that the implications of the zoharic exegesis of Song 8:6 are drawn explicitly by many other kabbalists. In deference to space, however, I will limit myself to one passage from Ḥayyim Vital in which he expounds the notion of the trace (*reshimu*) in terms of the

mytho-theosophic speculation that evolved from the teachings of Isaac Luria. To date, most scholars have turned their attention to this notion as it relates to the residue that remains after the primordial withdrawal (*ṣimṣum*) of the light of Ein Sof to create a space (*ḥalal*) within itself devoid of itself, a paradox that is explained according to the more exoteric explanation as a clearing of space so that there may be the emanation of being other than the Infinite, or according to the more esoteric explanation as the beginnings of the process of catharsis of the unbalanced forces of judgment from the divine economy.[91] By contrast, I am focusing on another aspect related to the trace, one that contributes more specifically to our thinking of the dynamic between eros and metaphor, though, to be sure, the different issues are textually and conceptually interrelated. Given the importance of this passage as an articulation of the nexus of the trace, eros and exile, I shall cite an extensive portion of the text:

> Now we must explain the matter of this impression [*inyan ha-reshimu ha-zeh*] that withdraws at night, and through it we will explicate as well the verse "Let me be as a seal upon your heart," which is explained in *Sefer ha-Zohar* and in the *Tiqqunim* in relation to the arm phylacteries.[92] Know that there is a distinction between *Ze'eir Anpin* and *Nuqba*, for the trace of *Ze'eir Anpin* withdraws and ascends to the top of his head, but the trace of the consciousness [*reshimu de-moḥin*] of *Nuqba* stays within *Ze'eir Anpin*, verily within his chest wherein the heart of *Ze'eir Anpin* is found, and from there the illumination goes out to *Nuqba*. . . . It follows according to this that *Nuqba* does not dissipate as much as he does, and this is the matter of the verse "Let me be as a seal etc." This is the language of the request of the female in relation to him that he should set her as a seal, that is, the consciousness [*moḥin*] that enters into the head of *Ze'eir Anpin* is the essential consciousness [*moḥin iqqariyyim*] for the aspects of consciousness itself enter into him. . . . But consciousness of the head of *Nuqba* is called the seal [*ḥotam*] alone, for they are only the illumination of the seal that is affixed in her from the consciousness of the head of *Ze'eir Anpin*, which is the essential consciousness, as was mentioned. It is known that in the day there is

> drawing near [*qeruv*] of *Ze'eir Anpin* and his *Nuqba*, for they have the aspect of consciousness within them. But during the night when the consciousness entirely disappears, and even the trace disappears, then is the time of separation [*perud*] of *Ze'eir Anpin* from his *Nuqba*, for the aspect that bound them was the [states of] consciousness that came forth from and were bestowed by him upon her, and now with their disappearance there is separation between them. And then she asks him "Let me be as a seal etc.," that is, "even though now your illumination is removed from me . . . act in such a way that you place this seal and my trace on your heart, and it will remain there in the place of the chest . . . and they will not disappear entirely to the place whence they came forth as is the case with your [states of] consciousness that disappeared entirely. By contrast, they remain on your heart, as was mentioned, and the reason for this is on account of the abundance of love [*rov ha-ahavah*] that I have for you, and this is [the import of] what is written 'love is as strong as death' (Song 8:6). I cannot be separated from you entirely and hence by my trace remaining on your heart the illumination can proceed to me from there, which could not transpire if it disappeared further above.[93]

Beneath the layers of the intricate Lurianic symbolism expounded in the above passage one can discern continuity with the zoharic teaching regarding the gender dynamic that is linked to the notion of the trace or, in its scriptural idiom, the seal upon the heart. I will limit my comments to two points most salient to the theme of this essay. The first thing to note is that, according to Vital's exposition, Song 8:6 is addressed by *Nuqba* to *Ze'eir Anpin*, technical terms that denote the last two of the five configurations (*parṣufim*) within the Godhead, the other three consisting of *Arikh Anpin*, *Abba*, and *Imma*. It is beyond the scope of this essay to enter into a lengthy discussion of the notion of the *parṣufim* in Lurianic kabbalah, which are based on the *Idrot* sections of zoharic literature and especially the *Idra Zuṭa*.[94] Suffice it here to say that the five configurations correspond to five of the ten emanations, which encompass the entire sefirotic edifice: *Arikh Anpin* corresponds to *Keter*, *Abba* to *Ḥokhmah*, *Imma* to *Binah*, *Ze'eir Anpin* to *Tif'eret*, and *Nuqba di-Ze'eir* to *Malkhut*. For our

purposes what is most important to note is that *Nuqba* and *Ze'eir* personify respectively the daughter and son, which complement *Imma* and *Abba*, the mother and father.

The second point worthy of note is that Vital makes explicit an underlying assumption that has informed the kabbalistic conception of eros from its inception: The erotic is commensurate with the noetic.[95] Hence, consciousness, which is designated by the technical term *moḥin*,[96] is portrayed as the medium that draws together *Nuqba* and *Ze'eir*. More specifically, in the day, when consciousness is in them, they are contiguous, but in the night, when there is no consciousness, they are separated. It is thus in the nocturnal state, which is emblematic of exile, that the feminine says to the masculine "Let me be as a seal upon your heart," an utterance that is reflective of the desire to have her trace imprinted on the chest of the male whence she receives the efflux of consciousness. The twofold bind attested in the verse—the female desiring to be incorporated in the male so that the male may be incorporated in the female—is indicative of the gender metamorphosis that characterizes both the metaphoric conception of eros and the erotic conception of metaphor that may be elicited from kabbalistic sources. The bent circularity is embodied, as it were, in the words "Let me be *as* a seal upon your heart," the verse that dissembles the dissemblance and thereby displays the inexorable fold of metaphoric gesticulation, to couple the incomparable in the bond of comparability. To be enfolded within that fold is to suffer the eros of textual incarnation, the concomitant desire to inscript and to be inscripted, indeed to inscript by being inscripted, to be, in the language of the thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist Isaac Ibn Sahula in his commentary on the critical verse from the Song, "the seal that is sealed within the seal" (*ḥotam be-tokh ḥotam ḥatumah*).[97] The mystery of the dual sealing is imparted as well in the supplication that is assigned in one zoharic passage to the female persona of the people of Israel addressing the male deity, "Let it be [your] will that our icon be engraved on your heart just as your icon is engraved on our hearts."[98] The eros of metaphor ensues from the metaphor of eros occasioned by the bearing of this double seal.

of indetermination are incontestably favorable to the freeing of the nuptial held in reserve within the erotic."

70. Ibid., 270.
71. Ibid., 271 and 274–75.
72. Ibid., 274. Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 97, also speaks of "an impossibility set up as amatory law." She understands religion here as "the celebration of the secret of reproduction, the secret of pleasure, of life and death" within, over and against the limits of law and language.
73. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 96.
74. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992), 932–33.

SUFFERING EROS AND TEXTUAL INCARNATION: A KRISTEVAN READING OF KABBALISTIC POETICS | ELLIOT R. WOLFSON

To Virginia, for suffering eros in the eros of suffering.

1. Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 234–35.
2. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).
3. Ibid., 191–97. On the meeting of word and flesh in Kristeva, see Diane Jonte-Pace, "Situating Kristeva Differently: Psychoanalytic Readings of Woman and Religion," in *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva: Religion, Women, and Psychoanalysis*, ed. David R. Crownfield (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 7–12.
4. My analysis accords in significant ways with the feminist reading of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body and the phenomenology of the flesh offered by Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 86–111. For a nuanced description of the body as an inscriptive surface, a conception that may be usefully applied to kabbalistic sources, see ibid., 138–59. See also Henri Maldiney, "Flesh and Verb in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty," in *Chasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 51–76. On the textual nature of the semiotic process of signifying the feminine body in the thought of Kristeva, see Shari Benstock, *Textualizing the Feminine: On the Limits of Genre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 23–46.
5. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics in Kabbalistic Anthropology," *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 129–55, reprinted in *"Turn It Again": Jewish*

Medieval Studies and Literary Theory, ed. Shelia Delany (Asheville, N.C.: Pegasus Press, 2004), 119–44.

6. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 245, and 539 note 370, for citation of other scholarly discussions of this motif to which one may now add Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005), 133–44. A moving theological reflection on this kabbalistic motif, which I neglected to mention in previous publications, is offered by Abraham Joshua Heschel, "God, Torah, and Israel," trans. Byron Sherwin, in Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, ed. Susannah Heschel (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1996), 191–205. I was reminded of Heschel's essay by Idel's reference to it in *Enchanted Chains*, 141 note 92.
7. Charles P. Bigger, *Between Chora and the Good: Metaphor's Metaphysical Neighborhood* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 64–65; for further elaboration on metaphor and the space of the between, see 77–82. For an innovative characterization of the openness of metaphorical discourse as a temporal mode of inquiry that gives one access to truth, see Carl G. Vaught, *Metaphor, Analogy, and the Place of Places: Where Religion and Philosophy Meet* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004), 137–9, 167–70.
8. My formulation is indebted to Scot Douglass, "A Critical Analysis of Gregory's Philosophy of Language: The Linguistic Reconstitution of Metadiastemic Intrusions," in *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes: An English Version with Commentary and Supporting Studies*, ed. Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 447–65, esp. 449–51.
9. The point is expressed most poignantly in the short composition "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" included in Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 144–46: "We believe we speak of trees, colours, snow, and flowers, we have knowledge of the things themselves, and yet we possess only metaphors of things which in no way correspond to the original entities. . . . What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration, and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and binding; truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins." See also ibid., 43: "For the genuine poet metaphor

is no rhetorical figure, but an image which takes the place of something else, something he can really see before him as a substitute for a concept. To the poet, a character is not a whole composed of selected single features, but an insistently alive person whom he sees before his very eyes, and distinguished from a painter's vision of the same thing only by the fact that the poet sees the figure continuing to live and act over a period of time."

10. See Jane Love, "Appetite and Violability: Questioning a Platonic Metaphor," in *Crises in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Arleen B. Dallery, Charles E. Scott, with P. Holley Roberts (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 184–85: "In a different context, Heidegger speaks of the between as that which, reaching from the earth to the sky, is measured out for the dwelling of man. Perhaps the function of metaphor can be thought of in the same way, as a spanning of the 'between' that rests within the poles of, or the movement from, literal to metaphorical. For Heidegger, the possibility of measuring lies with the disclosure of the unknown, insofar as it remains unknown and against which man's familiarity shines forth. Something similar happens within a metaphor, although reversed: as meaning is carried across the span, the meaning itself, like man in his measuring, shines forth. But what shines forth is what is known; the familiarity of meaning is what allows the metaphor, and the discretion of metaphor protects this familiarity. And yet behind this shining forth stands, obscured, the between itself, which is unknown as long as the metaphor goes unquestioned. Once questioned, however, metaphor reveals an innocent literalism at its core. Difference is always assumed in the metaphorical leap, difference that the leap proposes to bridge."
11. Jacques Derrida, "The Retrait of Metaphor," in *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 128.
12. On the collapse of the distinction between the literal and figurative in Derrida's thinking about the inherent metaphoricity of language, see John Llewelyn, *Derrida on the Threshold of Sense* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 74–80; Marian Hobson, *Jacques Derrida: Opening Lines* (London: Routledge, 1998), 207–11; Christian Howells, *Derrida: Deconstruction from Phenomenology to Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 60–64; Giuseppe Stellardi, *Heidegger and Derrida on Philosophy and Metaphor* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2000), 67–126. For discussion of other contemporary views on metaphor that resonate with this perspective, see C. A. Van Peursen, "Metaphor and Reality," *Man and World* 25 (1992): 165–80, esp. 169–71.

13. On Plato's attitude toward myth, see Luc Brisson, *Plato the Myth Maker*, ed. Gerard Naddaf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), and *How Philosophers Saved Myths: Allegorical Interpretation and Classical Mythology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 15–28.
14. For a brief summary of this aspect of Plato's dialogue, and references to other critical assessments, see Rhoda H. Kotzin, "Ancient Greek Philosophy," in *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Iris Marion Young (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), 17–18. See also the important observation of James M. Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence: Plato's Erotic Dialogues* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 317, that Diotima describes herself as a *daimonios anēr*, a "daimonic male," which indicates, consequently, that she is a "spiritual androgyne," the masculine aspect of her soul related to her activism and the feminine aspect to her receptivity. Rhodes concludes, moreover, that her androgyny "mirrors that of her alter ego, Socrates, who is both himself and Diotima."
15. I appropriate this expression to describe the Platonic perspective from Love, "Appetite and Violability," 185.
16. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 71–72.
17. *Symposium,* 203b–c. I am indebted to the analysis of the Platonic text in Julius Evola, *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex* (Rochester, N.Y.: Inner Traditions, 1983), 57–58. For a more recent analysis along similar lines, see Rhodes, *Eros, Wisdom, and Silence*, 313–63.
18. *Symposium*, 203c–e. I have availed myself of the English translation of Michael Joyce in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 555–56.
19. Compare the depiction of the phenomenon of the caress in Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 89: "The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This 'not knowing,' this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come [*à venir*]. The caress is the anticipation of this pure future [*avenir*], without content. It is made up of this increase of hunger, of ever richer promises, opening new perspectives onto the ungraspable. It feeds on countless hungers." See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 257–58.

20. I am here influenced by the characterization of the mystic in William Everson, *Earth Poetry: Selected Essays and Interviews, 1950–1977*, ed. Lee Bartlett (Berkeley: Oyez, 1980), 18, as "insatiable, because the food that feeds him incites him in his hunger. Hunger is his need and his need is unstanchable. Reason may balk, but imagination knows no end. Never exhausting the modes of its obsession, because love is inexhaustible, like the lover who never possessed his beloved in all the possessable ways, he relinquishes possession in order to be trapped, in order to be possessed."
21. Luce Irigaray, "Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato's Symposium, Diotima's Speech," in *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*, ed. Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 66. The essay is reprinted in *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, ed. Nancy Tuana (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 181–95, followed by the analysis of Andrea Nye, "Irigaray and Diotima at Plato's Symposium," 197–215.
22. Irigaray, "Sorcerer Love," 65.
23. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 73.
24. There are a number of important studies dealing with the historical, literary, and thematic issues pertaining to the *Zohar*. Here I will mention only a handful: Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1956), 156–204; Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1–126; Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 85–138; Boaz Huss, "*Sefer ha-Zohar* as a Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives of the Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1998): 257–307; Boaz Huss, "The Appearance of *Sefer ha-Zohar*," *Tarbiz* 70 (2001): 507–42 (Hebrew); Charles Mopsik, "Le corpus Zoharique ses titres et ses amplifications," in *La Formation des Canons Scripturaires*, ed. Michel Tardieu (Paris: Cerf, 1993), 75–105; Charles Mopsik, "Moïse de León, le Sheqel ha-Qodesh et la rédaction du Zohar: Une réponse à Yehuda Liebes," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 3 (1998): 117–218; Daniel Abrams, "Critical and Post-Critical Textual Scholarship of Jewish Mystical Literature: Notes on the History and Development of Modern Editing Techniques," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 1 (1996): 17–71, esp. 61–64; Daniel Abrams, "The *Zohar* as a Book: On the Assumptions and Expectations of the Kabbalists and Modern Scholarship," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 12 (2004): 201–32; Ronit

Meroz, "Zoharic Narratives and their Adaptations," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 3 (2000): 3–63; Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of Kabbalah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–33. For a lucid, albeit prosaic, introduction, see Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). For a more elaborate account of my own view, though surely not sufficient, see Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 47–48.

25. My most sustained analysis of the contours of the erotic experience in zoharic kabbalah can be found in *Language, Eros, Being*. Also noteworthy are the studies by Yehuda Liebes, "Zohar and Eros," *Alpayyim* 9 (1994): 67–115; Liebes, "Eros and Anti-Eros on the Jordan," in *Life as a Midrash: Perspectives in Jewish Psychology*, ed. Shahar Arzy et al. (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Ahranot, 2004), 152–67, esp. 160–65 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, "Eros in der Kabbala: Zwischen gegenwärtiger physischer Realität und idealen metaphysischen Konstrukten," in *Kulturen der Eros*, ed. Detlev Clemens and Tilo Schabert (Munich: Fink, 2001), 59–102; Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Charles Mopsik, *Sex of the Soul: The Vicissitudes of Sexual Difference in Kabbalah*, ed. Daniel Abrams (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005).
26. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 47–48, 92–94. My discussion there already anticipates the criticism leveled against me by Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 129.
27. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 335–36.
28. See Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Medieval Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 3–9.
29. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 99.
30. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 222–33.
31. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy and Theurgy* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000), 14–38; Wolfson, "Divine Suffering and the Hermeneutics of Reading: Philosophical Reflections on Lurianic Mythology," in *Suffering Religion*, ed. Robert Gibbs and Elliot R. Wolfson (London: Routledge, 2002), 107–17; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 7–10, 17–21, 25–27, 134–35, 160, 195–96, 220–24.
32. See note 12.
33. The resonance should come as no surprise, since Heschel was indebted to similar intellectual currents that have informed my work, to wit, kabbalistic esotericism and hermeneutical phenomenology.
34. Babylonian Talmud, Ḥagigah 2a, 4b.
35. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. Hayyim S. Horovitz and Israel A. Rabin (Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1970), Baḥodesh, sec. 7, 229; *Sifre on Deuteronomy*,

ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1969), sec. 233, 265–66; Palestinian Talmud, Nedarim 3:2, 37d; Babylonian Talmud, Rosh ha-Shanah 27a, Shavuʿot 20b.

36. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah as Refracted through the Generations*, ed. and trans. with commentary by Gordon Tucker and Leonard Levin (New York: Continuum, 2005), 708.
37. Heschel is here following older kabbalistic and Hasidic sources according to which *zakhor* and *shamor* refer respectively to the male and female potencies of the divine. See Tishby, *Wisdom*, 1221–23; Elliot K. Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 107–8. The two levels of meaning, moreover, are engendered, the internal or mystical corresponding to the male and the external or literal to the female. On the correlation of the revealed with the feminine and the concealed with the masculine, see, for instance, *Zohar* 1:64b. For different articulations of the point, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Occultation of the Feminine and the Body of Secrecy in Medieval Kabbalah," in *Rending the Veil: Concealment and Secrecy in the History of Religions*, ed. Elliot R. Wolfson (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 1999), 143–45; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, 32–33; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 132–33.
38. *Zohar Ḥadash*, ed. Reuven Margaliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), 120a (*Tiqqunim*).
39. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: Peshat and Sod in Zoharic Hermeneutics," in *The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought and History*, ed. Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 155–203; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 224–25.
40. See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah," in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204): His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts*, ed. Görge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2004), 212–21.
41. Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, 710. It is not the right context to delve more deeply into Heschel's thought, but suffice it to state that the appropriation of the kabbalistic hermeneutic mentioned briefly here has relevance to the critical question regarding Heschel's own understanding of the symbolic nature of religious language, a point that, in my judgment, has not been adequately assessed by scholars who have written on the subject, partially misled by the critique of symbolism offered by Heschel himself. Perhaps one day I shall return to investigate this matter more thoroughly.

42. My thinking here betrays the intricate interplay of consciousness, body, and language in the thought of Merleau-Ponty. The bibliography on Merleau-Ponty is enormous so I will mention here only one readable but sophisticated account that is greatly indebted to—indeed, can even be read as a summary account of—Merleau-Ponty's reflections on these matters: Remy C. Kwant, *Phenomenology of Language* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965).
43. For a contemporary theological exposition along these lines, see Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), and *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
44. Julia Kristeva, *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 213.
45. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 190–260. Consider the following remarks in Brian Cosgrove, "Murray Krieger: Ekphrasis as Spatial Form, Ekphrasis as Mimesis," in *Text Into Image: Image Into Text*, ed. Jeff Morrison and Florian Krobb (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 30–31: "Modernism, indeed, is at its most ambitiously mimetic when it adopts, far too readily, an incarnationism which is *au fond* derivative from a theological source. The paradoxical reconciliation of the temporal sequence of language with the stasis or permanence of literary form . . . is both persistently and uncritically dependent 'upon the two-in-one paradox of the primal Christian metaphor' . . . the hypostatic union of the two natures, human and divine, in Christ. Such a dependence becomes fully explicit in T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, where time 'incarnates' the timeless, and the poetic word aspires to emulate the Word or Logos. In this poetics of presence, we find what is arguably the most ambitiously mimetic of all poetic undertakings: the attempt to create a language which, even as it moves in time, reveals the timeless, or an 'ultimate' reality—just as, analogously, the historical Jesus reveals the eternal Godhead." In the kabbalistic worldview, the focal point of the incarnation is different from the Christological doctrine, but the portrayal of the poetic nature of language as the temporal disclosure of the timeless bears an interesting comparison to the Jewish mystical teaching. Compare also the title of the introduction in *Dark God of Eros: A William Everson Reader*, ed. Albert Gelpi (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2003), xv–xxxvii: "Under the Sign of Woman: The Poetics of Incarnation." Everson's own words in *Earth Poetry*, 17, resonate in a remarkable way with kabbalistic poetics according to my understanding: "In the essential speechlessness that mysticism is, poetry

finds its voice. Like prayer, it moves forever beyond itself to its own extinction. . . . This is a feature it shares with physical love. The phallus knocking at the womb, like the tongue stuttering in the throat, achieves at climax that expenditure which is its failure, the quintessence of success. I think more than any other form of art, poetry is mysticism's flesh."

46. Jonte-Pace, "Situating Kristeva," 12–22.
47. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 268.
48. Ibid., 89 (emphasis in original).
49. Ibid., 60: "Never would Eastern eroticism, even when celebrated in the most erotic Hindu or Bangali poems, equal the joyful, quivering passion of the Song of Songs. For in the East, a body joys, lays out the pleasure of its organs, swells to infinite proportions in the bursting of its pleasure, quietly dependent upon the nourishing mother. But those are pleasures whose expanse is in itself differentiated, joys devolving upon a cosmos-speech, which set themselves aflame in their elements. While love for the other, and even more so for the other sex, came to us for the first time through king Solomon and the Shulammite—a precocious yet fragile triumph of heterosexuality, tinged with impossibility."
50. Ibid., 93. Compare Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, corrected edition (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 280: "Articulation is the dangerous supplement of fictive instantaneity and of the good speech: of full pleasure [*jouissance*]. . . . The present is always the present of a pleasure; and pleasure is always a receiving of presence. What dislocates presence introduces difference and delay, spacing between desire and pleasure."
51. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 90.
52. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 142.
53. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 94.
54. Kristeva, *Time and Sense*, 202.
55. Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 95.
56. Ibid., 269–70, where the views of Plato are dealt with more explicitly.
57. Ibid., 273 (emphasis in original). See 332–33.
58. On the distinction between the symbolic and semiotic, see Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 21–106; and the critical appraisals in Diana T. Meyers, "The Subversion of Women's Agency in Psychoanalytic Feminism: Chodorow, Flax, Kristeva," in *Revaluing French Feminism*, 144; Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms* (London:

Routledge, 1997), 81–82; and the critique of Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," in *Revaluing French Feminism*, 162–76. The link between metaphor and the image of the mother is explored in Marilyn Edelstein, "Metaphor, Meta-Narrative, and Mater-Narrative in Kristeva's 'Stabat Mater,'" in *Body / Text*, 27–52. See also Eva Feder Kittay, "Women as Metaphor," *Hypatia* 3 (1988): 63–86, esp. 69–72. Finally, we should recall the nexus between the originary nature of language as metaphor and the maternal characteristics affirmed in the reading of Rousseau offered by Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 271.

59. *Zohar* 1:244b–245a.
60. On this point, see Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 9–10.
61. For references, see Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 584 note 128.
62. Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, ed. Jonathan Chipman (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 184.
63. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 233; Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape*, 145–46, 163, 168; Tishby, *Wisdom*, 381; Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 42–54.
64. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, 110–12, and further references cited on 227 notes 158–60 and 228 note 168; Wolfson, "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath: Becoming Male and the Ascetic Ideal in Thirteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1997), 166–67; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 76, 182, 185–86.
65. See the interpretive gloss on this zoharic passage in the pietistic work *Ṭaharat ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 1989), 173: "After the union has been achieved she certainly says 'Place me as a seal upon your heart,' for she is called by his name, that is, after the union she is called by the name of her husband." It is worth noting that in a parallel passage in *Zohar* 2:114a, the verse "Let me be as a seal upon your heart" (Song 8:6) is said to have been uttered by *Shekhinah*, the "Community of Israel," when she is conjoined to her spouse and not in the moment of separation consequent to the unification. See Tishby, *Wisdom*, 301.
66. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626–1676* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 27: "The kabbalists, whose mystical thinking strained after expression in symbolic forms, endeavored to evade responsibility for their symbols by the frequent use of qualifying phrases such as 'so to speak,' 'as if,' 'as it were,' and the like. These reservations were supposed to minimize the real significance of the symbols employed."

While I do not deny that Scholem's assessment may apply in some instances, I would maintain that the qualifying phrases to which he refers generally maximize rather than minimize the significance of the symbol to serve as a mirror wherein the real appears as the image that is imagined as real.

67. The intent of the zoharic image is made explicit by Moses Cordovero, *Zohar im Perush Or Yaqar*, (Jerusalem, 1974), 6:260: "The reason for this request ['Place me as a seal upon your heart'] is that with regard to every reality in which her form is formed, that reality is the source whence she is illumined through it even if she is separated, and even though she is rooted in it, for every effect is rooted in its cause, she wants to be rooted in the aspect of her arrayments after she has been adorned for the unification and after he descends to the lower entities." The point is well captured in the depiction of the relationship between *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*, the attributes of the divine that correspond respectively to the father and mother, in Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem, 1962), 9:5, 58b: "In *Binah* there is an aspect of *Ḥokhmah*, and in *Ḥokhmah* an aspect of *Binah*, in the secret of 'Let me be as a seal' (Song 8:6), for after the two are united, they are sealed within one another and they are formed within one another."

68. The zoharic interpretation is anticipated in the kabbalistic commentary on the Song by Ezra of Gerona, printed in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. Ḥayyim D. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1964), 2:514: "'Let me be as a seal upon your heart' (Song 8:6), when we separate in the time of exile [place me] as the seal that is known."

69. On the motif of the exile of *Shekhinah*, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, 232–33, 275; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 58–59, 70–71, 107–9, 113–15, 141–53; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 164, 167, 194, 335; Tishby, *Wisdom*, 382–85; Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 317–18. The strong distinction between the rabbinic and kabbalistic approaches to this motif promulgated by Scholem and Tishby does not seem fully warranted; on the contrary, a close reading of the relevant texts suggests that the "gnostic paradox" (the language used by Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 113) that presumes that exile and redemption are processes that occur within God's own nature is already operative in the older sources. See Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, 52–54; Wolfson, "Divine Suffering," 105–07, 116–17, 145–46 note 34; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 374–75; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Myth and Rabbinic Mythmaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 134–46, 156–59, 195–99, 215–16, 223, 265–66, 285, 296, 357–70.

70. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 1:258.
71. Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 67–71, offers a typical account of this element in kabbalistic doctrine with special reference to zoharic symbolism. The emphasis on heterosexual coupling as the distinctive mark of the kabbalistic understanding of divine unity is the standard perspective affirmed by most scholars who have weighed in on the nature of eros in medieval Jewish mysticism. See, for example, Charles Mopsik, *Lettre sur la sainteté: Le secret de la relation entre l'homme et la femme dans la cabale* (Paris: Verdier, 1986), 45–163; Mopsik, *Sex of the Soul*, 128–49; Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 53–103. On divine pathos and the longing for reunion, see also Fishbane, *Biblical Myth*, 296–300.
72. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, ed. Reuven Margaliot (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978), sec. 22, 65b.
73. In the interests of full disclosure, the word I have rendered as "it" is *ihi*, the third-person feminine pronoun.
74. In some versions of the text, the third-person pronoun is in the masculine (*ihu*) while according to other versions it is in the feminine (*ihi*).
75. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 22, 65b.
76. For more extensive discussion of the kabbalistic depiction of *Shekhinah* as the archetypal image, see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 306–17, and esp. 313–15.
77. I explored this aggadic theme and some of its later reverberations in depth in "The Image of Jacob Engraved Upon the Throne: Further Speculation on the Esoteric Doctrine of the German Pietism," in *Massu'ot Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, ed. Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich 131–85 (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994), 131–85 (Hebrew), and in an expanded and revised English version in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism, and Hermeneutics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 1–62.
78. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 22, 65b-66a.
79. Ibid., 67b.
80. Babylonian Talmud, Moʿed Qaṭan 28a.
81. In *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 18, 32b, the expression *ḥotmenu le-ḥayyim* is applied to the supernal Mother, that is, the third emanation *Binah*, on account of which the ninth emanation *Yesod* (or *Ṣaddiq*) is called the "book of life" (*sefer ḥayyim*). On the expression *ḥotmenu le-hayyim* and its theosophic significance, see Ḥayyim Vital, *Shaʿar ha-Kawwanot* (Jerusalem, 1963), Inyan Yom ha-Kippur, sec. 5, 102c–d.

82. Implicit in this expression is the rabbinic tradition that the seal (*ḥotam*) of God is truth, a motif that is applied by many kabbalists to the phallic potency of the divine. See Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 55a.
83. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, Introduction, 18a, and compare parallel in *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 22, 65b.
84. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 22, 65b.
85. A similar dynamic is attested in a number of medieval Jewish thinkers who utilize the image of the seal and its imprint to convey the overflow from the form of the Active Intellect upon the matter of the human soul, engendered respectively as male and female. See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 194, 216–17 note 96; and for the later reverberation of this motif, see Bezalel Naor, "'A Raised Seal and Sunken Seal' in the Teachings of Abraham Abulafia and Lubavitch," *Sinai* 107, (1991): 54–7 (Hebrew). See below, note 97. Finally, it is worth noting that the reversal implied by the image of the seal is emphasized by Moses Alshikh in his commentary on Song 8:6 in *Shoshannat ha-Omaqim* (Venice, 1591), 55a.
86. Especially close to the language in the passage from *Tiqqunei Zohar* is the description of the "third explanation" of the words "Let me be as a seal" (Song 8:6) offered by Abraham Ibn Ezra: "These are the words of the community of Israel to the *Shekhinah* that I should be conjoined to you forever." See also *Numbers Rabbah* 5:6.
87. On this philological usage, see further evidence adduced in Elliot R. Wolfson, "Circumcision and the Divine Name: A Study on the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrine," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 78 (1987): 77–112, esp. 102–9. Needless to say, many passages from *Tiqqunei Zohar* and other kabbalistic treatises could have been cited to substantiate the point. On the symbolic significance of circumcision in *Tiqqunei Zohar*, see also Pinchas Giller, *The Enlightened Will Shine: Symbolization and Theurgy in the Later Strata of the Zohar* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 90–3, 115.
88. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 22, 65b–68a.
89. Compare *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 22, 68a: "Another interpretation: 'Let me be as a seal' [*simeni kha-ḥotam*], the power of the unblemished one [*koaḥ tam*], the power of the supernal *Shekhinah* . . . the unblemished one [*tam*] refers to Israel above, and on the basis of its name Jacob is called 'unblemished' [*tam*], as it says 'and Jacob the unblemished man' [*we-ya'aqov ish tam*] (Gen. 25:27). And since he is the image of the seal of truth [*diyoqna de-ḥotam emet*] that is above, it says concerning him, 'Bestow truth upon Jacob' (Micah 7:20)."

90. Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 23:1, s.v. "emet": Cf. ibid., 27:5, 61a: "There are those who explain that the [letter] *beit* refers to *Malkhut*, and since she united with her consort, there were formed in her the two arms that she embraces and he is in the middle . . . and this is the secret of 'Let me be as a seal,' for his form is engraved in her." And ibid., 28:5, 66b: "She discloses the seal of the king [*ḥotam ha-melekh*] that is engraved in her as in the matter of 'Let me be as a seal.'"
91. On the notion of the *reshimu* in Lurianic theosophy, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, 264, 267; Scholem, *Sabbatai Ṣevi*, 29–31; Isaiah Tishby, *The Doctrine of Evil and the 'Kelippah' in Lurianic Kabbalism*, rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1984), 58–59 (Hebrew); Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 130–31, 147–48.
92. *Tiqqunei Zohar*, sec. 22, 65b.
93. Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Kawwanot*, Inyan Tefillin, sec. 5, 9c, and parallel in Vital, *Peri Eṣ Ḥayyim* (Dubrowno, 1804), Sha'ar Tefillin, ch. 7, 21b–d. The latter version is cited and explicated by Zevi Aryeh ben Eleazar, *Imrei Binah al Megillat Shir ha-Shirim* (M.-Sziget: Mendel Wider, 1897), 92c–93b.
94. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 269–73; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 140–44; Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, 105–24; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 138–41.
95. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 269–71. My discussion there includes a brief analysis of Vital on the matter of the convergence of the noetic and erotic in kabbalistic symbolism.
96. See Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, 151–52; Fine, *Physician of the Soul*, 236–39. For the attentive reader I note that the Hebrew *moḥin* is plural, but I have rendered it in the singular "consciousness." As a consequence, I have translated verbal expressions associated with it in the singular as well, even though the precise Hebrew equivalent is in the plural.
97. Arthur Green, "Rabbi Isaac Ibn Sahola's Commentary on the Song of Songs," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6, nos. 3–4 (1987): 483. The expression *ḥotam be-tokh ḥotam* is used in Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 29b and 31a, with reference to the practice of double-sealing a container of wine placed in the hand of a Gentile, and it is found as well in any number of later medieval rabbinic sources. An application of the idiom beyond its halakhic intent is attested in the writings of Abraham Abulafia. See, for instance, *Ḥayyei ha-Olam ha-Ba*, 3rd ed. (Jerusalem, 2001), 77 and 79; *Oṣar Eden Ganuz* (Jerusalem, 2000), 3, 111, 168, 278, 368, 371, 372, 373; *Maṣref la-Kesef we-Khur la-Zahav* (Jerusalem, 2001), 21; *Ḥotam ha-Haftarah* in *Maṣref ha-Sekhel*

(Jerusalem, 2001), 113. On the use of the term *ḥotam* in Abulafia, see note 85. The expression also appears frequently in kabbalistic sources of a theosophic orientation and in some contexts it clearly denotes the ontic enfolding of the feminine in the masculine. A typical example of this application is Ḥayyim Vital, *Eṣ Ḥayyim* (Jerusalem, 1963), 35:3, 52a: "This is the secret of what the rabbis, blessed be their memory, said that in order to protect the container of wine there must be a seal within a seal . . . for *Yesod* is the first seal and *Malkhut* is the second seal." See Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Kawwanot*, Inyan Sefirat ha-Omer, sec. 11, 85b, and further elaboration in ibid., Inyan Yom ha-Kippur, sec. 102d–103a, and Inyan Sukkot, sec. 6, 106b; Vital, *Sefer ha-Liqquṭim* (Jerusalem, 1963), 117c. For other contexts wherein the expression *ḥotam be-tokh ḥotam* appears, see Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 23:19, 39b, 27:15, 62d; Vital, *Eṣ Ḥayyim*, 5:5, 23d, 34:6, 50b, 35:2, 52a; Vital, *Sha'ar ha-Kawwanot*, Inyan Yom ha-Kippur, sec. 3, 102b, sec. 5, 102c.

98. *Zohar* 2:114a. The intent of the zoharic passage is made explicit in Elijah de Vidas, *Re'shit Ḥokhmah ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Or ha-Musar, 1984), Sha'ar ha-Ahavah, ch. 1, 365: "From this the one who investigates will discern the matter of the love of the Lord, for when a man engraves the form of the name YHWH in his heart constantly . . . he causes the form of his soul to be engraved above, and the holy One, blessed be he, will love him. . . . When a man rouses his heart to love the Lord, the man is called in the secret of *yw"d h"a wa"w h"a*, which numerically equals *adam*, for the Lord will love him and be bound to him." An interpretation of the image of the seal in Song 8:6 that emphasizes the conjunction (*devequt*) of the soul and God is attested in Elisha Gallico, *Perush Shir ha-Shirim* (Venice, 1587), 59b–60a.

Finally, it is worth noting the following comment from *Ṭaharat ha-Qodesh*, 173, which immediately precedes the citation of the zoharic passage cited above (n. 59): "I have also already notified you that you should not wonder that the names of all the emanations are equivalent, and particularly that the husband is called by the name of the wife and all the more so that the wife is called by the name of the husband. And this is the secret of 'Place me as a seal upon your heart.'" The verse from the Song is utilized to anchor the conceptual point that the gender transformation is twofold, that is, as a consequence of the intercourse the male assumes the name of the female and the female assumes the name of the male, and thus both man and woman can utter the request to be placed as a seal upon the heart of the other with whom he or she has been united.

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF EROS

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