BETWEEN SYMPTOM AND SYMBOL: FREUD, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND THE

JEWISH MYSTICAL TEXT

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Between Symptom and Symbol: Freud, Psychoanalysis, and the

Jewish Mystical Text

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This comparative analysis of Freudian psychoanalysis and

Jewish mystical writing examines the thematic preoccupa-

tions, hermeneutic strategies, and discursive structures

that link these two bodies of thought. It maintains that

early Kabbalist writing and Freudian psychoanalysis share

an inherently Jewish episteme, with a fundamental consis-

tency and common ethos. The analysis argues that Jewish

mystical writing and psychoanalysis are linked by their

shared recognition of exile as a primary metaphysical con-

dition of human subjectivity. Because their understanding

of the Subject is rooted in an exilic configuration, in

which the Subject is constituted by an internal barrier or limitation, Kabbalist writing and psychoanalysis share similar understandings of materiality and embodiment. Specifically, both the mystical *symbol* and the Freudian *symptom* function as analogues for the conceptualization of language and of consciousness, and are each structured by a paradoxical process of veiling and revealing. From a strategic historic standpoint, the analysis shows how Freudian psychoanalysis and Kabbalism intervened in the rigid epistemological and religious structures from which they emerged by introducing uncertainty, indeterminability, and radical contingency into what were increasingly narrow and inflexible positivist worldviews. Drawing on the work of Daniel Boyarin, Eric Santner, and Jacques Lacan, the dissertation maintains that by placing Jewish mystical writing and psychoanalysis into dialogue, we can define a specific philosophy of ethical social relations. Through close reading and examination of the concept of idolatry, as well as pertinent literary instances drawn from Eco, Borges, and Pynchon, the analysis argues that both psychoanalysis and Kabbalism are concerned with the movement *away* from closed or self-aggrandizing discourse towards something more authentic, which for both involves the Subject's experience of self-truth through the Other. Finally, the dissertation

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performs a literary analysis of narrative techniques and
motif within the Bahir and Zohar as well as Freud's most
pertinent writings on culture, particularly *Beyond the
Pleasure Principle* and "The Uncanny," in order to examine
how these polyphonic bodies of thought each construct dis-
cursive strategies that subvert fundamentalist modes of
discourse, and how the human encounter with suffering and
unknowability informs their common devotion to the thera-
peutic bonds of community.

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consider your extraordinary scholarship, your sensitivity
to life, to literature, to affairs of the human heart and
twists of the human mind- I realize that I am truly blessed
to call you friend and mentor. If this really is a Mani-
chaean world, you're with the good guys- the very good
guys.

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bringing a critical eye to my research and ideas. For al-
ways being generous with your time and your insight, and

Rabbi Ḥiyya opened, saying, "*Set me as a seal upon
your heart, as a seal upon your arm. For love is fierce as
death...[its sparks are sparks of fire, a blazing flame]*
(Song of Songs 8:6). *Set me as a seal*- when Assembly of
Israel cleaves to Her husband, She says, *Set me as a seal*.
With a seal, once it adheres to a certain place, it leaves

its image there. Even though that seal moves elsewhere--

not remaining there, removed--it leaves its entire image

there, remaining there. Similarly, She says, 'Since I have

cleaved to You, My entire image will be engraved in You;

for even though I move here or there, You will find My im-

age engraved in You, and You will remember Me.'"

Daniel Matt, *The Zohar,* Volume V, 137-138

ברוך אתה יהוה

אלהינו מלך העולם

שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו

לזמן הזה

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Chapter 1

Mystical Symptom, Hysterical Symbol: Exile as Metaphor in
Psychoanalysis and Kabbalah

    A learned Jew, physician, and avowed atheist, Sigmund
Freud once lamented that it was the fate of psychoanalysis
to be situated forever between the realms of science and
religious mysticism.[1] Freud's project was to create a
"scientific psychology" in which the study of the mind--a
field once populated only by fortune-tellers and sham men-
talists--could be brought under the umbrella of legitimate
scientific discourse. Given this effort to establish medi-
cal credibility, it is understandable that the early psy-
choanalytic community would strenuously disavow any resem-
blance to mystical thought and praxis- resemblances which
Freud frequently noted and aggressively denied.

    My dissertation takes an alternative position. I ar-
gue that psychoanalysis can and must look its long-reviled
double--mysticism--square in the eye. Thanks to the rigor-
ous academic work in Kabbalism of recent years, literary
scholars now have the opportunity to approach the once in-
accessible field of Jewish mystical writing through a crit-
ical academic lens. In doing so, I have found that psy-
choanalysis can learn a great deal about its own place in
the history of ideas, about its structural presumptions,
and about its overriding ontological tendencies, precisely

by appreciating the mystical interpretative strategies it uncovers on its way to becoming a formal science.

My analysis reveals that Freudian theory and Kabbalistic tradition share an inherently "Jewish" episteme, with a foundational consistency and common ethos. There is a Jewish psychospiritual undercurrent to psychoanalysis that speaks--that *insists*--through both form and content, and it is the project of this analysis to lay some measure of that insistence bare and to consider its significance. I therefore offer a body of interpretive evidence which examines this connection and speculates on why it exists. It is perhaps not the sort of question that can be answered once and for all, but neither should it be ignored or minimized into obscurity. By putting Freudian psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing into a dialogue, I hope to elaborate upon parallelisms whose consistency and frequency exceed, I believe, the coincidental, and to allow the weight of evidence to open our minds to the question: Why? Why this connection, and what does it have to teach us about the ethical and psychosocial foundations of these two bodies of thought?

The affinity between Freudian psychoanalysis and the Kabbalist tradition has been the subject of academic interest already, most notably among psychologists. David Bakan (1958) takes up an examination of Freud's background in order to suggest ties, of one sort or another, to mystical

Judaism and its proponents. Bakan surveys Freud's biography with the goal of underlining Freud's connection to Jewish social and cultural life, and is the first to point out the curious resemblance between midrashic interpretation and the associative methodology of dream analysis.[2] More recently, Schneider and Berke (2008) study the interface of psychoanalysis and Kabbalism, paying particular attention to the interpenetration of the psyche and the social, and to the redemptive dimension of the healing process, that lies at the heart of therapeutic psychoanalysis and Jewish mysticism. Schneider and Berke theorize that Freud's exposure to Hasidic thought and theosophy served as a conduit for the mystical principles that had a decisive influence upon the development of his psychological theories.[3]

   To these efforts I contribute an analysis that is specifically textual in nature. As a literary comparatist with a psychoanalytic orientation, my approach to this question is grounded in the discursive and textual particularities that emerge through close reading of the two central works of early Kabbalah: the *Sefer ha Bahir* (Provence, ca. 1190) and the *Sefer ha Zohar* (Spain, ca. 1290).

   This thesis aims not only to explicate common discursive or hermeneutic strategies that are borne out in Kabbalist and psychoanalytic interpretation, but to demon-

strate the usefulness that this connection represents as a tool for literary and critical theory. Much of the study comes to pivot on the question of essentialism, from the manifest political and religious essentialism common in the global arena to subtler forms of ideological foreclosure that permeate ordinary social exchange. The reason for this concern stems from a recognition of the subversive character of psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing, and their seemingly infinite capacity to destabilize authoritative claims to truth. In their efforts to theorize the creative process and to formulate a philosophy of human existence, Jewish mystical literature and psychoanalysis share a remarkable range of thematic preoccupations and interpretive strategies; the question of essentialism and of the discursive strategies that subvert fundamentalist modes of discourse is a rubric under which many of these similarities can be constructively gathered, and under which some of the most diverse and imaginative material can be drawn into a coherent ethical commentary.

From both the Freudian and Jewish mystical point of view, the seed of religious and ideological fundamentalism--indeed, the seed of all evil, to use that problematized term--is embedded in the very faculty of human consciousness, inhabiting at the most basal level the activity of

language and individuated judgment. Co-implicating forces of destruction (i.e., evil) with forces of life and creative work (i.e., good) is a paradox these systems of thought share. What is unique to these systems, however, is not the presence of paradoxical formulas, which can be found in other traditions and epistemologies; what is unique is that the persistent tension of those paradoxes does not collapse under the weight of their ideological and interpretive constructions. Psychoanalysis and Kabbalism are bodies of thought that consistently valorize process and contingency over object and immutable law. Claims to eternal or singular truth are neither easily created nor well-sustained by the hermeneutic methodologies upon which they depend. The overarching concern for process over object is one reason these systems retain a unique potential to resist totalizing or reductive worldviews. I intend to demonstrate how both bodies of thought take an ethical position that focuses squarely on the character of the human ontological quest, over and above any concern as to the quest's aim or purpose.

Perhaps this shared orientation is a direct result of the social and historical positions from which these two fields emerged. Both psychoanalysis and Kabbalism might be seen as intervening in the rigid epistemological and reli-

gious structures from which they emerged by introducing uncertainty, indeterminability, and radical contingency into what were increasingly narrow and inflexible worldviews. If their thematic preoccupations and hermeneutic strategies bear witness to a kind of subversion— a resistance against prevailing social machinery, then in the case of psychoanalysis that resistance is immediately apparent in Freud's construction of a discipline that effaced all former boundaries, both disciplinary and moral. Freud's theories about the highly sexual nature of human psychosocial life were scandalous when held against the prevailing mores of Victorian Vienna. Freud was a maverick thinker whose transgressive work demanded the scientific community--a community which saw itself as a bastion of objective truth--take up the subjective workings of the mind, a topic which in fin-de-siècle Austria had advanced little since the Middle Ages, when concepts like bodily humors and physiognomy served to explain a whole range of mental and emotional events.

   Unlike the concept of "pure" science, psychoanalysis is polyphonic in its makeup; its method is to trace idea and sensation into whatever field of association it may lead, whether linguistic, acoustic, visual, or mathematic. Psychoanalysis draws from the language and substance of

myth and science, religion and history, in its effort to describe the processes of mental life. For psychoanalysis the singular is always replaced by the many: the cause of illness is never simple and discrete but instead embedded in a web of overdetermined, hybridized symptoms and in layers of mental association that dissolve the boundaries between external fact and internal reality.

As a discipline that hears many voices, so to speak, psychoanalysis requires hermeneutic strategies that allow for the expression of those multiple and often contradictory perspectives that inform an individual's experience of being in the world. A consideration of Freud's unique linguistic and cultural position might also suggest his own personal awareness that no single intellectual frame could adequately map human mental life, and that neither language nor truth were the transparent entities for which they are commonly taken. With his Jewish roots came the mixture of medieval German and Hebrew that is Yiddish, the overtly hybrid language of a people displaced in geography and time. It is a language molded by the vicissitudes of history, a mixture of compromise and persistence, an apt homologue for the discourse of the psychoanalytic subject that Freud will ultimately describe. Although a doctor and an Austrian national, Freud is a continuous outsider by virtue of his Je-

wishness, for despite being a religious atheist Freud considered himself every bit a Jew in terms of race and culture.

The prevailing idea that Freud was an assimilated Jew with little connection to Jewish religious practice has been contested with thorough and convincing biographical research. In particular, Yosef Yerushalmi (1991) and Emmanuel Rice (1990) have challenged the wall of academic consensus that has insisted on portraying Freud as only a racial or ethnic Jew otherwise isolated from Judaic religious thought. Their research shows that Freud in fact grew up in a home thoroughly immersed in Jewish tradition and religious study. That this should come as a surprise to many in the academy--a surprise often met with skepticism and hasty dismissals--is, for Rice, the *real* source of disbelief:

> Ordinarily, for those committed to a psychoanalytic frame of reference, an examination of the minutiae of our infantile and childhood past, both remembered or constructed, is an indispensible requirement. Influence of the family's religion and its practices, along with all other experiential factors, are to be taken into consideration. The Freud biography has become an exception. When it comes to the religious component of Judaism and its influence on him, Freud, as if like Athena suddenly sprung from the head of Zeus, is conceptualized as having been born at about the age of 20 when he became involved in philosophy and the physical sciences at the university and started life as the exemplar of the Enlightenment. Yes, there were bio-

graphical forays into his childhood experiences with religion but they were, for the most part, limited to the influences of the Catholic nanny on this brilliant child.   [238][4]

Rice details many of the motivating factors in erasing Freud's Jewish heritage, including self-hate and the desire for upward mobility that fostered a tradition of "biographical emendation." He shows that Freud's parents, Jacob and Amalia Freud, "came from a traditional, Orthodox, religious milieu that was thoroughly imbued with the values of piety, scholarship, scrupulous ritual observance and ethical practice" (246); that Jacob Freud "was a student of Talmud until the very end of his life in 1896" (247); and that Sigmund Freud's primary school was almost certainly a religious rather than secular public one- a fact erased from the official record (249).[5] Rice lays out further data supporting the extent of religiosity in Freud's family life, such as obvious proof that the Freuds maintained a scrupulously kosher home; that his half-brothers (Jacob Freud's older sons) were founders of an Orthodox synagogue in England; and most interestingly, that a birthday greeting sent to Sigmund by his father included a pun on a verse of Talmud- something that Sigmund would have required a significant religious education in order to decipher. This last

shard of evidence, put forward by Yosef Yerushalmi, was
part of careful research into letters and other documents
that showed Freud fully understood both Hebrew and Yiddish,
and was in fact raised in a strictly observant Jewish home
throughout his childhood.[6]

Others have argued against what they see as the spe-
cifically *Lacanian* effort to erase the Jewish cultural
roots of psychoanalysis. Examining attempts to "reclaim
Freud for, or on behalf of, Jewish traditions of one spe-
cific kind or another," Rael Meyerowitz echoes Yosef Yeru-
shalmi's appeal that "we not *foreclose* 'the possibility
that Freud's Jewishness was somehow implicated in the for-
mation of psychoanalysis'" (151).[7] She accuses Lacan and
his followers of forgetting or repressing these roots, in-
stead taking a "high-culture intellectuallist and 'assimi-
lationist' attitude":

> For all their return to the unconscious *in* Freud, in
> this regard they grant only the conscious desires and
> *données* of Freud himself when they "ascend" too quick-
> ly to the seductive level of the general, sophisti-
> cated and abstract, not to say universal, relevance of
> psychoanalysis without keeping a vigilant eye on the
> historical, political and social specificity of its
> origins. Such cultural elevating and flattening de-
> prive not only Jewish culture, but other cultures--not
> to mention the many individuals who might look to it
> for everyday help for the living of difficult lives--
> of the best uses of Freud's discovery.[8]

The dominance of Lacanian conceptions of psychoanalysis, especially within the academy, she asserts, is partly the result of "perhaps inadvertent steering of psychoanalysis away from...the specific and peculiar problematic of Jewishness at its cultural roots."[9] Rather than steer attention away from these roots, Meyerowitz looks squarely at the context in which psychoanalysis was born:

> Psychoanalysis arose not only in the culturally generalized milieu of fin de siècle and early twentieth century Central and Western Europe, but emerged from a very particular matrix within that era and location, from within the dynamics of a newly-emancipated, recently-immigrated Jewish enclave, which was itself trying to adjust to both the new satisfactions and the new anxieties of life in such cities as Vienna and Berlin.[10],[i]

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[i]My own analysis parts company with those of Meyerowitz and other critics who fault Lacan with effacing the Jewish origins and character of psychoanalysis. By examining Freud's work precisely in relation to Jewish mystical writing, this analysis finds that Lacan's understanding of the ethical, intersubjective, and process-oriented nature of psychoanalysis in fact captures and brings to the fore that which is arguably most *Jewish* about Freudian theory. In other words, by turning away from the linear and one-dimensional view of American ego psychology, my own sense is that Lacan *recuperates* a particularly Jewish psychospiritual ethos embedded in Freud's work. And while it is true that Lacan's metaphors and discursive posture have a decidedly non-Jewish character, Lacan cannot, in my view, be faulted for elaborating psychoanalysis through his own peculiar voice and vision, which for all its deliberate opacity, odd mathemes, and linguistic ornamentation, has nevertheless given the world of literary and critical theory a number of profoundly useful insights (symptom as metaphor and drive as metonymy, for instance).

Still others have pointed out a disjunction between Freud and Lacan based in their respective attachments to language: for Lacan, his relationship to French, and hence to language as a whole, is always dominant, whereas Freud's hybridized German-Yiddish milieu allows him to see the power that a dominant language exercises.[11] It has been argued that Lacan in fact fetishizes language,[12] while the particularity of Freud's linguistic context prevents any such pitfall. For Freud language is never transparent, and his multi-cultural, multi-lingual background serves to reinforce this awareness.

The particularity of context is also crucial to any consideration of the Jewish mystic of the 12th and 13th century whose work is examined here. For these mystics, as for Freud, language and truth are not transparent, either; language is understood as a living system in which meaning is sustained by the imagination and communal agreement of those who use it. Just as the unconscious and unknowable are central to the project of psychoanalysis, recognizing limits of knowability is at the core of Kabbalist thought. For the Kabbalist there are natural and permanent limits to human knowledge and perception, and it is this persistent opacity which propels material existence. Such a belief

and its attendant philosophical repercussions proved con-
sistent with a strategy of negotiating life in exile and
persecution. Thirteenth century Kabbalism emerged from the
nearly silent margins of mainstream Jewish thought at a
time when final and authoritative claims to complete know-
ledge surrounded the Jewish mystic: on one hand, he is part
of a minority reviled by Christendom, conceiving of a
greater cosmological reality but living in a dominant cul-
ture that denies any personal experience of truth save the
single, fundamentalist path to salvation through Jesus Chr-
ist. On the other hand, the Kabbalist's own religion is
suffused with a different kind of tyranny, that of Jewish
Law, which does not represent the same violent threat to
life as the tyranny of the Church, but which nevertheless
fed into other forms of spiritual deadening. Maimonidean
rationalism, then at the height of its influence on Jewish
thought, held out the frigid concept of a perfect and un-
changing God who neither required nor stood to gain any-
thing from human action or spiritual devotion. The Kabbal-
ist is thus positioned between these two religious systems,
ostensibly friend and foe, each in their own way closed to
the forces of contingency, possibility, and the ineffable
experience of Divine consciousness in human life that is at
the center of all mystical endeavors.

The rigidity and excesses of law encountered by Freud and by the early Kabbalists is countered, however, by the limitless excess of voices that psychoanalysis and Kabbalism bring to their every engagement with text and textual life. Like the unpredictably divergent material of Freudian analysis, the voices of the Zohar are generated from all over the Jewish literary spectrum, appearing as Rabbis and sages both real and imaginary. Taking fearless imaginative license, the Kabbalists not only blend fact and fiction to create new mystical re-readings of scripture, but they, like Freud, also understood this activity as the process at the heart of all creation and creative work: all text, all religious doctrine, all notions of history, are for psychoanalysis and the Kabbalist alike hybrid products of the eternal collaboration between inner reality and the external world. Because their permutations are endless, so too is the potential for diverse readings and discursive techniques, no single one capable of expressing the fullness of being.

Before undertaking the close textual analyses that are the basis of this study, however, it is essential to explain some deeply-rooted ontological suppositions that I believe link Kabbalism and psychoanalysis from the very start. The connection between psychoanalysis and Kabbalism

turns on two central connective principles, from which a wide range of latter similarities emerge. The first is exile and the second is symptom/symbol.

Primal Repression and Primal Murders: Exile and Metaphor

The first and perhaps most important step towards understanding this connection begins with a consideration of exile, both as a physical condition of Jewish life and as a metaphysical condition of the psychoanalytic subject. For this purpose, we must conceive of exile not only as an event or a position, but as a broader metaphor whose referents in psychoanalysis and in Kabbalism overlap in formative ways. By this I mean to consider the structure of exile, in which a part is conceived of as cut off from a greater whole, a whole with which the part retains a connection but is denied complete or satisfactory access.

Psychoanalysis understands the human subject as always and already split: human beingness is constituted by an essential opacity from within--by the unconscious--a psychical system from which the subject is perceptually barred by the activity of consciousness. It is this barrier of consciousness that provides the requisite perception of discontinuity between subject and object necessary for indivi-

duated life. Freud theorized the nature of this barrier in relation to the unconscious throughout the corpus of his work, not only within the individual human psyche, but at varied levels of social and biological organization, using wide-ranging and imaginative models.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud's struggle to understand the repetition-compulsion seen in traumatic neuroses leads him to speculate about the origins of living matter, asking what forces might have prevented a nascent cell from instinctually regressing to its earlier, non-living state. If in fact the instincts are essentially conservative, and "tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things," as Freud noted, a newly individuated organism should seek to relieve the persistent tension of maintaining independent form. Freud concludes that this instinct to regress--which obviates all possibility of life-- is therefore interrupted by a subject-object exchange: "The phenomenon of organic development must be attributed to external disturbing and diverting influences," he concludes- influences that cause the organism to detour from its direct course towards self-annihilation. It is in this circumstance that Freud identifies the paradoxical death-drive that will be so important in Lacan's radical "return to Freud":

> It is possible to specify ... [the] final goal of all organic striving...it must be an *old* state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads... For a long time, perhaps, living substance was constantly being created afresh and easily dying, till decisive external influences altered in such a way as to oblige the still surviving substance to diverge ever more widely from its original course of life and to make ever more complicated *détours* before reaching its aim of death....Hence arises the paradoxical situation that the living organism struggles most energetically against events (dangers, in fact) which might help it to attain its life's aim rapidly—by a kind of short-circuit.[13]

Freud describes a system in which the most direct pathway to complete satisfaction of the instincts is barred by a third functionary, something that prohibits the basic unit of living matter from regressing into the surrounding environment. The individuated life form is instead forced out, into a broader biological network. Freud understood the incest taboo as a social instantiation of this dynamic in the human community; it is, for Freud, a fractal iteration of those psychical processes ongoing at other levels of organization. Incestuous union, in which the subject travels a backwards path to the satisfaction of desire, is a social expression of that "short-circuit" of the drives in non- or pre-exogamous culture- an impulse which, like the drive to return to a non-living state, must be repressed.

The critical point is that a split occurs, which results in a persistent internal imbalance. For Freud this primal splitting, which he associates with the emergence of individual consciousness, takes a highly paradoxical form. "The psychical apparatus" he writes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), "which is turned towards the external world with its sense-organ of the [perceptual] systems, is itself the external world in relation to the sense-organ of the Cs. [consciousness], whose teleological justification resides in this circumstance."[14] Like the single-celled organism which was once unified with the surrounding environment but which has become separate and self-perceiving, human consciousness emerges as the result of some separation from a prior level of organization. Limitation, boundary, and censorship inhere in the constitution of the human subject, who is perceptually dissociated from the self-same environment of which he or she remains a part. In Freud's model for consciousness, the subject is at once the seer and the seen; we *are* the external world, perceiving ourselves from a relative point, and our consciousness originates with this dissociation which permits and creates the possibility for subjective perception.

For Freud, this is primal repression, the dimension at which subject splits from object and access to the uncons-

cious is barred. The act of primal repression is also the subject of the Oedipus complex, a pattern that recurs with altered content throughout Freud's work. To many, the so-called Oedipus complex, in which the male child uncons-ciously displaces sexual desire onto his mother while (again, unconsciously) desiring the death of his father, is an essentialized Western family drama whose prominence in Freud's work is highly discrediting. Yet Freud understood this complex as a derivative of the paradoxical nature of human instinctual life, an expression (and by no means the only expression) of unconscious drives as they play out in an altered form. The "killing of the primal father" for example, which is the subject of *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), always retains a metaphoric quality for Freud; the literalness of Freud's patriarchal Western content is secondary to the broader paradigms they describe. "Detaching himself from his family," writes Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), "becomes a task that faces every young person....We get the impres-sion that these are difficulties which are inherent in all psychical--and, indeed, at bottom, in all organic— development" (59). Foucault asserts that Freud (and Marx) are not just authors judged by their works; they establish a whole new discourse, a whole new worldview, beyond any

local "errors" they might make.[15] In the triangulated Oe-
dipal paradigm especially (and its many iterations), the
structure of Freud's discourse is what exceeds the particu-
larity of his local content. Psychoanalysis comes to un-
derstand the "I" as a virtual effect of primal repression,
one that buries a greater signified beneath the individual.
It is a model for consciousness that inheres in alienation;
from the instant of awareness we are always other to our-
selves. This internal alienation effected by conscious-
ness, which resides at the heart of psychoanalytic ontolo-
gy, has a counterpart in Kabbalist narrative. That coun-
terpart is exile, which is constituted by the same struc-
tural dynamic at work in Freud's understanding of primal
repression.

Just as we speak of the split subject of psycho-
analysis, we may legitimately speak of the split subject of
Jewish mystical writing— the subject in exile past and
present, whose relationship with and conception of mate-
riality is thoroughly entrenched in exilic configurations
and their derivatives. The formative role that exile plays
in the structure and content of Jewish mystical exegesis
cannot be overstated. It is in fact one of the innermost
concepts around which all Kabbalist theosophy is spun. In
a sense Jewish mysticism could be conceived as a narrative

on the metaphysics of exile in its manifold human and Divine manifestations. Exile as it is understood by Kabbalism is not merely the historical and psychosocial condition of the Jewish people; it is a cosmic condition, reflective of some divine reality whose instantiation on the material plane is borne out in the plight of the Jewish nation on earth. Their suffering and displacement shaped the whole character of Kabbalist theosophy, which developed along the tides of continual social exclusion and physical expulsion. The Spanish exile of 1492, while not unique, was devastating in its sheer magnitude. Spain had been home to thriving Jewish communities and Kabbalist circles whose doctrines were deeply influenced by the trauma of being driven out, once again, from a safe haven outside the Holy Land for which they yearned. Of these Kabbalists Scholem writes:

> The exiles from Spain must have held an intense belief in the fiendish realities of Exile, a belief that was bound to destroy the illusion that it was possible to live peacefully under the Holy Law in Exile. It expressed itself in a vigorous insistence upon the fragmentary character of Jewish existence, and in mystical views and Dogmas to explain this fragmentariness with its paradoxes and tensions.... Life was conceived as Existence in Exile and in self-contradiction, and the sufferings of Exile were linked up with the central Kabbalistic doctrines about God and man....Humanity was threatened not only by its own corruption, but by that of the world, which originated in the first

> breach in creation, when subject and object first
> parted company.[16]

Scholem insists this whole phase of Kabbalah "may be de-
scribed as a mystical interpretation of Exile and Redemp-
tion, or even as a great myth of Exile," and that from a
theosophical standpoint exile was understood as a mystical
symbol which pointed "to something in the Divine Being."[17]
While not using the language of psychoanalysis, Scholem's
description nevertheless invokes the ontological principle
which psychoanalysis calls primal repression, that is, "the
first breach in creation, when subject and object first
parted company." While Scholem refers specifically to a
later phase of Kabbalism which developed in the 16th century
(known as Lurianic Kabbalah, after its sage, Isaac Luria)
it is important to note that this phase is entirely consis-
tent with the mystical tradition that precedes it; its
chief differences with earlier Kabbalah reside in particu-
larities of content and an increased messianic character.
But if we may put the particularities of Lurianic Kabbalism
to one side for a moment, Scholem's insight about the
psychical effect of exile remains profoundly important and
is not limited to the exiles of 1492. Rather, it is a de-
fining feature of Jewish identity for twenty centuries
prior to the Spanish expulsion, and the backdrop against

which the earliest mystical doctrines were created and passed on. The events of 1492 are but a repetition and culmination of the same historical and psychosocial paradigms which shaped the development of Kabbalist theosophy since its earliest beginnings.

Kabbalist scholar Arthur Green, for instance, describes the centrality of exile to the narrative of the *Sefer ha Zohar* [Book of Radiance, alt. Book of Splendor], the central text of Jewish mysticism composed in late 13th century Spain. A pseudoepigraphic work set in the second century CE, the Zohar centers around the shared insights of a mystical brotherhood as they wander the Galilee with their sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. Of their wandering and its Divine significance Green writes:

> The peregrinations of Rabbi Shim'on and his disciples are more, however, than the "story" of the Zohar....The adventures of the companions show their participation in Israel's greatest suffering, that of exile...
>
> Israel's historic exile...is itself symbolic, an earthly representation of a still greater exile.... In order for our life to come about...God had to undergo a transformative act of great pain, one in which the divine became separated from itself, its future reunification depending entirely upon the actions of these creatures below. According to this story, exile and suffering are inherent in the cosmos, and the balm provided by human goodness is somewhat superficial, an oasis of relief in the wandering that is indeed the necessary human and cosmic condition.[18]

In stark contrast to the philosophical stance of Maimoni-
dean rationalism, these Kabbalists conceived of Jewish life
as entirely interpenetrated with the cosmic plane. Repair-
ing the intrapsychical rupture in Divine consciousness, of
which Jewish exile and suffering were only symbolic instan-
tiations, became the primary reason for earthly existence.

In addition Green points out that no house of study or
synagogue ever appears in the companion's wanderings in the
Zohar. "While the ancient rabbis suggest to the would-be
scholar to 'exile yourself to a place of Torah,'" he
writes, for the Zohar "exile or wandering is itself that
place."[19] The word *Shekhinah*, explains Green, which is the
feminine dimension of the Godhead in exile from her Divine
spouse, is etymologically linked to the word *mishkan*, or,
"dwelling-place." For the mystic, God, Torah, and Israel
are one in their shared exile; the wandering companions'
devotion to a life of study and worship created a terre-
strial site for Divine reunification. They are themselves
the locus of Divine disclosure, and the text is their infi-
nite territory.

This mythic orientation of Kabbalist theosophy again
brings it together with psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis un-
derstands large-scale events not only as discrete or iso-

lated historical occurrences. The "murder of the primal father" for instance--whether it occurred in history or not--is understood by Freud as an external event corresponding to an internal event. So it is with exile. "The historical aspects of religion," writes Scholem in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, "have a meaning for the mystic chiefly as symbols of acts which he conceives as being divorced from time, or constantly repeated in the soul of every man." Events of massive significance "cannot, according to the mystic, have come to pass once only and in one place"; the exodus from Egypt, for example, "must correspond to an event which takes place in ourselves, an Exodus from an inner Egypt in which we all are slaves."[20]

With this insight we might reconsider the presumptions upon which Freud builds his thesis in *Moses and Monotheism*. In *Moses and Monotheism,* Freud relies entirely upon the particularities of Oedipal and totemic content in order to theorize how and why Judaism retains such vitalizing force after so many centuries and against all historical odds. Freud speculates that the Jews in fact murdered Moses in the wilderness, and that this traumatic event, long repressed in Jewish collective memory, had the decisive and uncanny effect of re-kindling the act of primal repression,

thereby contributing a measure of psychical reinforcement to Judaism's staying power.

The problem with Freud's analysis, however, is that he understands the "act of primal repression" in *Moses and Monotheism* only as a literal murder of the primal father in the primal hominid horde. He essentially theorizes one external event, the supposed murder of Moses, as corresponding to other external events occurring earlier in human history. Yet the corpus of Freud's own work clearly suggests another connection: we might also understand the very real external event of exile as corresponding to the internal event of primal repression. To borrow Freud's own words, whether one has killed their father or not "is not the decisive thing," for like the imagined murders in the primal horde, whose uncanny repetition throughout prehistory Freud believed most influential on psychical development, exile was the ongoing traumatic event, oft-repeated from the Babylonian exile of the 7th century BCE to the destruction of the second temple and beyond. Exile has been the definitive physical and psychosocial condition of world Jewry until modern times, and it bears the self-same ontological structure of detachment and internal separation that Freud locates in the "murder of the primal father." Whether any such murder or murders ever actually occurred

is irrelevant, for it is only the homologic quality of such an event in which psychoanalysis should take any real interest. Everywhere Freud diagnoses "patricide" as the pivotal Jewish event, "exile" can occupy the same locus, because it is structured by the same dynamic of internal ambivalence and self-separation that gives the narrative of "primal murder" its compelling force. If Freud seeks a paradigm for primal repression, therefore, he need look no further than this inner and outer dislocation that has framed the spiritual, intellectual, and creative life of Judaism since time immemorial. And if in fact there is a common ontological structure to Kabbalism and psychoanalysis, it hinges on this mystical fixation with exile as a psychical complex in which the subject is constituted by an internal limitation. In this way, Kabbalism very plainly adopts the same structural assumptions as psychoanalysis. "Primal repression" and "exile" are paradigmatic metaphors for a deeply held metaphysical doctrine which they closely share, and from which so many of their common preoccupations and interpretive strategies emerge.

These commonalities become apparent from the moment we begin examining their respective theories of embodiment, which grow directly out of the presumption that the human psyche holds this exilic configuration and is constituted

by an internal barrier or limitation. How psychoanalysis
and Kabbalism each negotiate the concept of materiality and
theorize object relations brings us to the next deep-rooted
connection, that between *symptom* and *symbol*.

Mystical Symptom, Hysterical Symbol: Exile and the Revela-
tory Occlusion

     The first ontological unit of being, so to speak,
which emerges for Kabbalism, is the mystical symbol, which
in its broadest sense refers to all things in manifest cre-
ation perceptible by human sense and experience. For psy-
choanalysis, we can say that the basic unit of being is the
manifest symptom, which, again in a broad sense, is any-
thing perceptible arising in thought, action, or culture as
the result of the subject's interaction with the external
world. What is remarkable is how the Freudian *symptom* and
the mystical *symbol* come to function as self-similar para-
digms for the conceptualization of language and of con-
sciousness, and that these similarities lead to common mod-
els for the construction of meaning and the action of crea-
tion, whether it be social or discursive. Because they
frame their understanding of subjectivity around this idea
of a persistent internal inhibition, both psychoanalysis
and Kabbalism become ontological systems structured by (or,

that have as their generating structure) a process of reve-
latory occlusion. Just as the psychoanalytic symptom is
constituted by a censorship--by the occlusion of something
inassimilable and incommensurate with the perceptible sign-
-so too does the mystical symbol central to Kabbalist on-
tology unfold through a dialectic of veiling and revealing.

In *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* Scholem offers an
evocative definition of the mystical symbol that pointedly
underscores its coherence with the form and function of the
psychoanalytic symptom. In describing the way symbol tran-
scends religious allegory, Scholem writes:

> In the mystical symbol a reality which in itself has,
> for us, no form or shape becomes transparent and, as it
> were, visible, through the medium of another reality
> which clothes its content with visible and expressible
> meaning.... The thing which becomes a symbol retains
> its original form and its original content. It does
> not become, so to speak, an empty shell into which
> another content is poured; in itself, through its own
> existence, it makes another reality transparent which
> cannot appear in any other form. If allegory can be
> defined as the representation of an expressible some-
> thing by another expressible something, the mystical
> symbol is an expressible representation of something
> which lies beyond the sphere of expression and communi-
> cation, something which comes from a sphere whose face
> is, as it were, turned inward and away from us. A hid-
> den and inexpressible reality finds its expression in
> the symbol. If the symbol is thus also a sign or repre-
> sentation it is nevertheless more than that.   [27-28]

The symbol, like the Freudian symptom, represents a compro-
mise. It is a collaboration between expressible and inex-
pressible dimensions of being. Its materiality is a veil
for something else, something barred from expression, with
the nature of that unknowable thing revealed partially by
its occlusion. To the Kabbalist, letters, language, narra-
tive, stories- all are as garments cloaking what is unknow-
able and perpetually resistant to symbolization. Indeed it
is a Kabbalist notion that the "Real" Torah lay in the
blank spaces of the white parchment, against which the
black letters represent but a persistent commentary on the
Vanished Text.[21] When, in referring to the Torah and its
narratives, the Zohar insists that "all those words and all
those stories are garments," we can also hear the poignant
echo of psychoanalysis and its most fundamental insights. [22]

The discoveries of psychoanalysis teach us that all of
human culture is, at bottom, an aesthetic compromise be-
tween the subject's internal unconscious drives and what
the subject perceives as the external world. Everything
internal that remains unsubdued after the satisfaction of
our vital human needs will, by its very nature, collaborate
with what it encounters in the external world to produce a
kind of "veiled text"--a discourse that, no matter how quo-
tidian or unremarkable it may seem, bears the mark of its

engagement with the unconscious and its processes. As a literary and cultural theory psychoanalysis asks that we recognize the aesthetic, intertextual nature of life it-self- to understand that the processes of symptom formation that reveal themselves in dreams, jokes, or creative writing are the self-same processes propelling the subject's aesthetic transactions with the world.[23] These transactions are always compromises, so in a sense they are all symptoms, collectively definitional of life in the human community. It is of course in the clinical setting that Freud came to see the patient's discourse, like their overt hysterical symptom, as a garment clothing the inexpressible, its ultimate objective ever outside the reach of language and thought. Like the mystical symbol, the symptom is also a metaphor, yet it is more than that; it is a site through which what is repressed and unconscious can transfer some part of its reality, allowing the unspeakable to make its presence manifest in an altered form. Like the words of the Torah to the Kabbalist, the patient's discourse, too, is a "persistent commentary" on drives that persist ever outside linear time and consciousness.

Kabbalism understands the whole of the Torah, and indeed the entire earthly realm, in just this way- as an un-ending *symptomatic* discourse. Torah is a universe of sig-

nifiers whose appearance in the brute world is the product of inexhaustible and unseen creative processes. Biblical scholar Elliot Wolfson writes that "the ultimate secret of Scripture in the Kabbalistic imagination embraces the paradox that the revealed word is the mirror whose visibility consists precisely in its invisibility, and, as such, the task of revisioning remains constant, as the invisible can never be seen once and for all." Because the task of scriptural reading is never complete, "there can be no 'final' veil to lift as there is always another veil through which the nonmanifest will be made manifest."[24]

As pointed out, the activity of mystical exegesis is interpenetrated with the life processes in much the same way that psychoanalysis locates the structure of dream-work or symptom formation at other registers of social and biological life. Indeed Freud evokes the same dialectic of visibility and invisibility, and the subject's same insistent propulsion forward, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The drives that enliven the symptom never cease to strive for complete satisfaction. "But," writes Freud, "no substitutive or reaction formations and no sublimations will suffice to remove its persistent tension." Like the task of scriptural reading, the human organism's task of living, of seeking satisfaction, must by definition remain incom-

plete. For it to be satisfied once and for all is the re-
gressive "short-circuit" and backwards path to death, and
so Freud explains, "there is no alternative but to advance
in the direction in which growth is possible- with no pros-
pect of reaching the goal.[25,26]

In later psychoanalytic theory Jacques Lacan asso-
ciates this action with the metonymic function, the move-
ment from metaphor to metaphor that is the activity of lan-
guage. Lacan terms this the "displacement of desire,"
which could serve as an especially apt metaphor for the
Kabbalist project, for which the distinctly erotic quality
of the exegetical drive is a foremost characteristic. The
Torah scholar is in a romantic relationship with the un-
folding text; the Torah is his beloved partner, and in
their courtship "the beloved is disclosed in an erotic pro-
gression before her lover out of a desire to reveal secrets
that have been forever hidden within her."[27] This active
Eros is also a key element in theorizing the resistance to
fundamentalist modes of discourse, with which this study is
later concerned.

For now, however, perhaps the most important element
to underscore in the similarity between symptom and symbol
is the abiding internal imbalance and incongruity that
their structures share. The Kabbalist love affair with To-

rah can only be carried out in a state of perpetual dise-
quilibrium, for it is only the partial satisfaction of de-
sire that gives rise to the creation of new meaning. Like
Freud's single-celled life form in pursuit of ultimate re-
lief, the balance offered to the Kabbalist in the form of
total Divine disclosure is an anathema to the life of the
intellect and the activity of Divine revelation. For the
dialectic of revelation and occlusion to continue, the sub-
ject must negotiate the perpetual remainder of drive
yielded by each and every exchange: "It is the difference,"
writes Freud of the repressed drive, "in amount between the
pleasure of satisfaction which is *demanded* and that which
is actually *achieved* that provides the driving factor which
will permit of no halting at any position attained, but, in
the poet's words, '*ungebändigt immer vorwärts dringt*'"
[Presses ever forward unsubdued].[28] It should be pointed
out that this active Eros, in terms of a social or inter-
personal erotic, is present in the analytic situation as
well. The relationship between the analyst and analysand
is an erotic one, not in an exclusively sexual sense, but
because of the transferential dynamic through which the pa-
tient displaces some measure of the strongest and most hid-
den affects of their psychic life onto the analyst.

For Freud it is always and only imbalance (both excess and lack), between hallucinatory wish and external cathected object, that gives rise to all the vicissitudes of thought and culture. The foil to satisfaction is symbolized in a myriad of ways for Freud, at times as "primal father" or "external disturbing and diverting influence," but it is always there, its presence demanding the detours definitional of life.

Nor is the Kabbalist mystic concerned with achieving some ecstatic short-circuit to God. On the contrary, unlike other forms of mysticism which focus on complete self-effacement or spiritual journey to the nether-regions of Divine consciousness, Kabbalah focuses squarely upon the process of exegesis and the world of its symbols. The Infinite Divine is always and already mediated through the mystical symbol, and there is no effort, no fixation, with escaping that necessary medium. The work of interpretation and study--the exercise of the mind in those circuitous routes of reading, writing, and imagining--are the only forms of divine self-disclosure to be had, and they are for the student sacred activities. For again the mystical symbol, whether in the form of text, language, or event, is never just a static sign. Because it is a hybrid of seen and unseen forces it retains always a kernel of the Divine.

Words are visible, but their meaning is never transparent;

the mystic reads them in the present, but they are also al-

ways symbols enlivened by something outside linear time.

In this sense, Scholem describes the mystical symbol as "a

'momentary totality' which is perceived intuitively in a

mystical *now*– the dimension of time proper to the symbol."[29]

It is an idea echoed by Freud, who imagined the symptom as

a sign in which "past, present and future are strung to-

gether...on the thread of the wish that runs through

them."[30] Furthermore both the symptom and the mystical sym-

bol are conceived as embodying the same paradoxical move-

ment of the creative process. Scholem points out that the

esoteric doctrine of creation, *Maaseh Bereshith*, has always

been one of Kabbalah's main preoccupations, and that in its

interpretation, "Kabbalism comes nearest to Neoplatonic

thought, of which it has been said with truth that 'proces-

sion and reversion together constitute a single movement,

the diastole-systole, which is the life of the universe.'"[31]

Scholem's characterization is also an elegant summation of

Freud's insight into the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure*

Principle, in which it is the simultaneous movement towards

and away from death that constitutes the activity of life.

For each, the movement from unknowability into the medium

of signifiers is a central point of interest, whether it is

pictured--as in psychoanalysis--in the "binding" work of consciousness upon primary process, or in Kabbalah as through the emergence of letters and language by way of the divine dimension of judgment.

No where however are these concepts more abundantly pondered, and imaginatively expressed, than in the literature of mystical Judaism, which--while iconoclastic in so many regards--nonetheless carries on a tradition of all-consuming devotion to text. Arthur Green points out that all of the external creations other cultures produce in the form of buildings, monuments, or landscape- all of that creative energy is channeled for the Jews into the project of scriptural exegesis, into the living text that is at once Israel, God, and Torah.[32] Just as the mystical symbol is itself a strategy of negotiation, the tenacious devotion to text can also be understood as a broad cultural strategy, as a metaphysical statement of place, in which the spirit of the Jewish nation can unfold and blossom without benefit of sovereignty or territory. As a mystical exegete the student of Torah is himself the vessel vouchsafing Jewish nationhood. The topography of Jewish life in exile is reestablished in a dimension of text and idea; text is the territory and language its field of psychic and social operation.[33] The interpretive methodologies of midrash rely

ever upon the connections between texts, and the inexhaust-
ible associations to be drawn from one text to another. A
word of scripture or Talmudic verse might serve as the
launch point into a new web of ideas or mystical interpre-
tation, signaling also the crucial role of intertextuality
in the world of Kabbalah. And while the exact nature of
Freud's own Jewishness will likely remain a source of de-
bate, there is no question that Freud's work displays the
same fascination with textuality, and with the activity of
language, through which in his view the unconscious and its
processes make themselves known.

It is with an understanding of these fundamental con-
nections between psychoanalysis and Jewish mysticism that
this study undertakes the analysis of their shared herme-
neutics and preoccupations. It argues that this unique
dual lens can not only enhance our reading of literature
but also offer compelling ethical insight into modern reli-
gious and political conflict. Mysticism, like psychoanaly-
sis, is also a kind of psychical and social theory, and the
ethical commentaries to be drawn from its discourse colla-
borate with those to be drawn from psychoanalysis in ways
that are both meaningful and highly unique.

There will likely always be resistance in one form or
another to this sort of comparison, for reasons that are

both understandable and in many regards, valid. While the
renowned scholarship of Gershom Scholem is credited with
establishing Kabbalah's rightful place within mainstream
Jewish letters, the suggestion that psychoanalysis take up
even his impressive research sparks the same disapproving
assumption: that mysticism is simply incongruous with psy-
choanalysis, a discipline whose central project has always
involved the unmaking of those religious and mythical para-
digms that haunt our collective history. In the place of
archaic cultural narratives, psychoanalysis describes human
experience and human psychical tendencies in the metaphors
of science and of social ontology. Asserting that psychoa-
nalysis and religious mysticism have something in common
therefore strikes many, at the outset, as a retrograde ef-
fort that misses the whole point of Freud's scientific psy-
chology– an implosive "short-circuit" in the deployment of
a theory whose intent is clearly to expose, not affirm,
those illusions and delusions that since time immemorial
have plagued individual and social consciousness.

This is also a project with which Freud would have ab-
iding discomfort. As pointed out, the fiercely atheistic
Freud could only lament the proximity of psychoanalysis and
religious mysticism, and his project was always to move
away from the impression of "mysticism or of sham profundi-

ty," as he poignantly asserted in *Beyond the Pleasure Prin-ciple*. But to pervert Galileo's famous, if apocryphal say-ing: nevertheless, there it is, and indeed it reemerges at the core of Lacan's "return to Freud." If, as Freud said, psychoanalysis does reside somewhere between science and mysticism, then psychoanalysis has every reason to face this arcane body of thought that lies so close to itself along the continuum of great human ideas, to *work through* those uncanny semblances it has seen fit only to repress and disavow.

In the next chapter, I read *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* and *The Interpretation of Dreams* with sections of the Bahir and Zohar; I assert these Kabbalist texts self-consciously theorize the very psychoanalytic principles which validate their own heretical emergence from the confines of normative Jewish law and belief. Drawing on Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, I ex-amine how and why the Jewish mystical texts deploy the pa-radox of unpredictable determinism as a strategy with which to theorize the creative process.

In chapter three, I argue for the ethical insights that emerge through this comparison. I propose that Freu-dian psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing exhibit a common philosophy of linear time, one that structures the

relationship between past and present into a mutualistic partnership that allows for the movement *away* from self-delusionary discourse towards something more authentic, which specifically involves the subject's experience of self-truth through the Other. In this chapter I also further the idea that psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing subvert fundamentalist constructs and overtly counter the internal psychic mechanisms that support dogmatism and essentialist ideology.

Chapter four uses Freud's theory of "The Uncanny" as a lens into the Zohar's ongoing struggle to express the mystery of suffering, the limits of knowability, and the ultimate inability of any analysis or any religious narrative to fully signify the unspeakable.

Whether these two bodies of thought mirror one other, whether they are analogues, homologues, or something else entirely, is also an ongoing question to which this study addresses itself. Where psychoanalysis might be seen as an honest effort of the intellect, mysticism can be seen as an honest effort of the soul, each one an ontological enterprise whose methodology and content leads over and over again to the most profound questions of human existence: What is life? What is consciousness? What is the nature of creation and of the creative process? Scholem writes

that the mystic's attitude is "determined by the fundamen-
tal experience of the inner self which enters into contact
with God or the metaphysical reality."[34] In a very real
sense, Freud's attitude is determined by that same inter-
subjective experience, as he came to understand it through
his patients and through his own participation in the ana-
lytic setting. We begin therefore with the perspective
that Kabbalism and psychoanalysis do share the self-same
project and subject, namely, to draw a mental picture of
human beingness and subjectivity; to define the relation
between the inner psyche and the external world in which
the subject is embedded; to theorize the construction of
meaning and the action of creation, whether through litera-
ture or culture at large; and to theorize the relationship
between the infinite and the finite, the imperceptible and
the bound.

Notes to Chapter 1

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[1] On this topic Freud writes: "We have heard during the war of people who stood half-way between two hostile nations, belonging to one by birth and to the other by choice and domicile; it was their fate to be treated as enemies first by one side and then, if they were lucky enough to escape, by the other. Such might equally be the fate of psychoanalysis. However, one must put up with one's fate whatever it may be; and psycho-analysis will somehow or other come to terms with hers." "Psycho-analysis and Telepathy" (1921), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited and translated by James Strachey, 180.

[2] In *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition* (1958) David Bakan considers elements of Freud's biography in order to speculate how Freud's Orthodox Jewish roots influenced his work. Bakan's text provides an interesting personality study of Freud functioning within, and also against, a Jewish social milieu. My own analysis and conclusions however, differ with those of Bakan in fundamental ways. Bakan concludes (for instance) that Freud developed a method of tracing associative links in psychoanalysis quite simply because he was already familiar with this method from Jewish mystical texts, and so used it on patients; my analysis, on the contrary, argues that parallels such as these arise from intrinsic (as opposed to extrinsic) factors that bind Jewish mystical writing and psychoanalysis in their respective efforts to formulate a philosophy of human existence. See David Bakan (New York: Schocken Books, 1965).

[3] Stanely Schneider and Joseph H. Berke, *Centers of Power: The Convergence of Psychoanalysis and Kabbalah* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 2008). See also "The Oceanic Feeling, Mysticism and Kabbalah: Freud's Historical Roots." *Psychoanalytic Review*, 95(1) February 2008.

[4] Emmanuel Rice, "The Jewish Heritage of Sigmund Freud," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 81 (2), Summer 1994.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Yosef Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[7] *American Imago*, Volume 50, 1993 (131-159). Meyerowitz is citing Yerushalmi.

[8] Ibid., 141.

[9] Ibid., 135.

[10] Ibid., 137.

[11] Ed Cohen, Rutgers University (September 2010).

[12] See Marcia Ian, *Remembering the Phallic Mother: Psychoanalysis, Modernism and the Fetish* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

[13] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 45-47.

[14] Sigmund Freud, The *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) (New York: Avon Books, 1965), VI, F.

[15] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (1969).

[16] Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1941), 249.

[17] Ibid., 286.

[18] Arthur Green, Introduction to *The Zohar* Volume I, ed. Daniel Matt. (Stanford: Standford University Press, 2004), lxvii-lxviii.

[19] Ibid., lxvii.

[20] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 19.

[21] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1978) 174.

[22] Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (Edison: Castle Books, 1997), 137.

[23] In "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908) and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) Freud elaborates on the "veiled text" and the notion of the "aesthet-

ic" as that which emerges only when our vital needs are met.

[24] Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Bible in the Jewish Mystical Tradition" in *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1,989.

[25] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* 50.

[26] Here again we could take up Freud's initial question in *Moses and Monotheism*, namely, why are Jews so successful against such extraordinary historical odds? From where does Judaism receive some compelling reinforcement in the dynamics of the unconscious and its drives?

[27] Arthur Green in *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 69. Green is citing Melila Hellner-Eshed.

[28] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 50-51.

[29] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 27.

[30] Peter Gay, The *Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 439.

[31] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 20.

[32] Arthur Green, Introduction to *The Zohar* Volume 1, xxxi.

[33] Here I am elaborating upon the ideas of Amy Jill Levine, who points out that the physical space Jews do not control in exile is instead discovered inwardly, and that the Jewish story of creation valorizes temporal rather than physical markers.

[34] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 4.

Chapter 2

"Everything Follows the Straight Path Perfectly": Joke-
work and Dream-work in the Bahir and Zohar

Normative rabbinic interpretation of Torah operated as
the foil against which Kabbalist writing emerged. The con-
ventional Judaism of the 12th century was characterized by a
rationalism and predictability that would be turned com-
pletely on its head by the iconoclastic texts of Kabbalist
literature. The earliest work of distinctly Kabbalistic
literature is The *Sefer ha Bahir* (Book Bahir). *Bahir* is
alternatively translated as "brightness," "luminous," or
"clarity," although this is an ironic title, considering
the difficulty scholars have had making sense of this puz-
zling text. The Bahir is a pseudoepigraphic work, delibe-
rately and falsely attributed to the Talmudic sage Nechu-
niah ben HaKana of the 1st century. In fact, the text first
appeared in Provence, in the late 1100s. The Bahir dif-
fered tremendously from the normative Rabbinic Judaism from
which it emerged. It is primarily concerned with theoriz-
ing the intrapsychical processes of the divine mind, specu-
lating how divine consciousness unfolds from infinite and
unknowable dimensions of being into manifest existence.

Gershom Scholem offers the following description of the text:

> [It is] assuredly one of the most astonishing, not to say incredible, books in the Hebrew literature of the Middle Ages.... It is a wretchedly written and poorly organized collection of theosophical sayings in the form of Bible commentaries, for the most part imputed to imaginary authorities supposedly living in the Talmudic period.[1]

What was so "incredible" about the Bahir--in addition to the abstruse language and audacious use of fictitious authorities to which Scholem refers--was that it blended mythic narratives and Gnostic motifs into established Jewish doctrine. Employing Gnostic motifs in the service of a particularly Jewish theosophical system represented an astounding, as well as ironic, re-direction of that area of mystic endeavor. Christian Gnosticism held that the material world was created by a lesser God known as the demiurge, and that all matter was generally evil. These Christian Gnostics associated the demiurge with the God of the Old Testament, scorning that text while celebrating in many cases those biblical figures rejected by the demiurge, such as Cain and the Serpent in Eden. According to this form of gnosis, the demiurge was responsible for the creation of the physical world, from which Jesus Christ was sent to rescue men and return them to the world of the spi-

rit.[2] As one would expect, Jewish Gnosticism does not share the antisemitic character of Christian gnosis, nor does it adopt the idea that matter and physicality are the evil products of an inferior deity. What the Jewish Gnostics do adopt, however, is the principal Gnostic belief in a multiplicity of divine levels through which God emanates in a process of self-disclosure. This idea, enthusiastically developed by the Kabbalists, becomes the basis for some of the most radical re-readings of Torah to ever emerge. For this reason, among others, the Bahir created enormous anger in the rabbinic establishment and was vigorously denounced as heretical. Today, some eight hundred years later, traditional Orthodox Judaism accepts the Bahir as the ancient and authoritative source text that it always claimed to be. As a faithful testament of religious wisdom, therefore, the Bahir has certainly come into its own in the last many centuries!

Modern scholarship, however, continues to give the Bahir short shrift. Its ideas are considered largely underdeveloped; its theosophy inconsistent and unpredictable. The text is, for the most part, regarded as a valuable if only semi-coherent precursor to finer works, such as the *Sefer ha-Zohar,* the central text of Jewish mysticism which appeared nearly a century later. There is, however, a dis-

tinct coherence to the Bahir that has been generally over-looked. It is a coherence that resides not in its particu-laristic theosophy, but rather in its unrelenting ideologi-cal and interpretive aims. The Bahir can essentially be seen a self-reflective work of literary and psychical theory, one whose preoccupations and interpretive strate-gies serve above all to valorize its own mystical re-reading of scripture. In both form and content, the Bahir deconstructs the concept of complete knowledge, insisting upon the partial validity of all perspectives. As such, it functions as a meta-commentary on the creative process. The Bahir's novel re-reading of Torah takes direct aim at the singular legitimacy of rabbinic authority by introduc-ing indeterminability and radical contingency into what was becoming an increasingly closed religious structure. In this way it also represents an alternative to the Maimoni-dean rationalism gaining prevalence in Jewish theology of the era.

   As scholars it is prudent to be mindful of the "inten-tional fallacy," that is, the error of assuming authorial intent as part of literary criticism.[3] However in the case of the Bahir, the text's thematic content comes together with its distinctive interpretive strategies in ways that strongly suggest a noticeable, self-conscious agency at

work in the writing and redaction, an agency sufficiently forceful as to allow us to speak in terms of textual "goals"– a problematized, but also useful metaphor. The first of these goals is to read the hidden reality imagined by Kabbalistic theosophy into preexisting scripture. In order to do this, i.e., in order to discover what is not there until the reader brings it, the text uses all manner of inventive strategies: puns and word-play, strange counting systems, juxtaposing different phrases from scripture or Talmud in order to validate Kabbalistic ideas. The Bahir essentially uses sum total of Jewish literature like a word bank. Scripture is a vast reservoir from which phrases are fished out of their context and re-arranged into new stories and new conceptions of the Divine mind that claim every bit the same validity as that claimed by mainstream Judaism. The relationship of this mystical reading praxis to the reader-response theories advanced by Norm Holland, Stanley Fish, and Wolfgang Iser, among others, takes shape through a radical application of this hermeneutic, which calls not just for active reading, but activist reading of Torah that revolutionizes Jewish conceptions of God. I shall first offer a description of these strategies, after which we can examine their significance from the standpoint of comparison with psychoanalysis.

One of the Bahir's transgressive activities is its radical deconstruction of words and letters. Numerous passages are devoted entirely to deconstructing letters of the alphabet. With pictorial imagery and inverted sound combinations, the Bahir shows, for example, that the letter *beth* [ב] might be read as *bayit* (trans: house), and since proverbs 24:3 states "With wisdom the house is built," this reveals that the opening letter and word of the Bible, *Bereshit* [בראשית] "In the beginning," is in fact a textual expression of the Divine attribute of *Hokhmah*– wisdom, through which the Divine begins a processes of emanation from mystical Nothingness. In similar fashion, the text will read the word "dal" (poor) into the letter *dalet* or explain how the letter *tzadi* [צ], which in its final form has a tall stem and seraphs, is in fact a visual and acoustic iteration of the *tzadik*– the righteous who are the pillars of the world.[4] The reader is constantly instructed--exhorted, in fact--to read one word of scripture in place of another, or is directed to phonetic associations between words that reveal some hidden connection between the two.

In the same spirit, the Bahir constructs mathematical proofs for its doctrines. For instance, in its reflections on the name of God the text offers this:

> There is a name that is derived from the three verses (exodus 14:19-21), "And traveled...And came...And Stretched..."
>
> The letters of the first verse, "And traveled…" are arranged in this name in the order that they are in the verse.
>
> The letters of the second verse, "And came..." are arranged in the name in reverse order.
>
> The letters of the third passage, "And stretched..." are arranged in the name in the same order as they occur in the verse, just like the case of the first verse.
>
> Each one of these verse has 72 letters
>
> Therefore, each of the names that is derived from these three sentences, "And traveled...And came...And stretched..." contains three letters.
>
> These are the 72 names. They emanate and divide themselves into three sections, 24 to each section.
>
> Over each of these sections is a higher officer.
>
> Each section has four directions to watch, east, west, north and south. They are therefore distributed, six to each direction. The four directions then have a total of 24 Forms....
>
> All of them are sealed with *YHVH*, God of Israel, the living God, Shaddai, high and exalted, who dwells in eternity on high, whose name is holy, *YHVH*. Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever.[5]

The topicality of Kabbalist thought for further aspects of literary theory such as deconstruction, or for nonlinear science, is perceptible here as well. Donna Haraway, in her work on contemporary technoscience, asserts for instance that mathematics is a kind of trope; the idea that mathematics offers objectivity through hard numbers, she insists, is self-delusive. Math, which is the language of science, is but another medium for the expression of ideo-

logically propelled narratives that lay claim to eternal truth, i.e., "scientific truth."[6] Haraway's point about modern science provides constructive insight into the medieval Bahir as well. The text's use of numbers and counting is indeed trope-like. Its deviant method of number-crunching has the effect of defamiliarization; it elides the validity of our normative communal agreement about how numbers should function, what they really describe, what they really represent, and it exposes the perceptual conceits at work in what is supposed to be unimpeachable– simple math. All three of the cited verses do, after all, contain seventy-two letters. In the spirit of the best postmodern fiction, the Bahir directs the reader to that obvious truth, so that he or she may go along with its paranoid construction of meaning. The role of reader--both the Kabbalist readers of Torah and the reader presented with their mystical constructions--is clearly central to this hermeneutic.

We see something similar to the number work in the construction of question-and-answer sentences. The Bahir has an interrogative rhythm that simulates the back-and-forth of Talmudic study. A standard passage begins with "why" or "what is the meaning of the verse" and explanation ensues with words like "because" and "therefore." But the

"why-because" formula that is basic to the process of Tal-
mudic exegesis has, in the Bahir's universe, come unhinged
from its moorings. Following most of the "becauses" and
preceding most of the "therefores" are usually multiple and
contradictory explanations for the meaning of a given
verse, explanations that most often have no basis in norma-
tive Jewish theology and whose variety and inconsistency
only create further uncertainty and provoke the further
construction of meaning.[7] Like the numbers, these words are
also tropes in the service of highly particularistic, some-
times absurd interpretations. "Why" and "because" belie
their standard definitions; the words are queer, in the
critical sense that they expose a constructedness where be-
fore the reader presumed a naturalness. This sense of con-
structedness will thereafter haunt what is normative and
familiar, such as the logic of *halakhah* (Jewish law) or of
the Talmudic canon, whose unimpeachable legitimacy had thus
far been taken for granted. This method of defamiliariza-
tion also contributes to the distinct comic quality of the
Bahir. The text is funny; and while the degree to which
this is purposeful or culture-bound is certainly debatable,
this much is true: all the puns, word-play, and alinear
counting defy any conventional understanding of Jewish be-
lief at the time. It is not just the 21st century reader

who would hear the Bahir's madcap use of words and numbers;
the medieval Jewish reader would also be aware of the non-
sensical playfulness and seemingly random flights of asso-
ciation, all being imbued, in turn, with the directive
sense and logic of Kabbalist theosophy.

One of the Bahir's most emblematic passages is also
one of its most shocking:

> Rabbi Amorai sat and expounded:
>
> What is the meaning of the verse (Psalm 87:2),
> "God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwel-
> lings of Jacob."
> "The Gates of Zion" are the "openings of the
> World."
> A gate is nothing other than an opening. We thus
> say, "Open for us the gates of mercy."
> God said I love the "gates of Zion" when they are
> open. Why? Because they are on the side of evil.
> But when Israel does good before God and are worthy
> that good be opened for them, then God loves them—
> "more than all the dwellings of Jacob."
> [The dwellings of Jacob] are all peace, as it is
> written (Genesis 25:27), "Jacob was a simple man,
> dwelling in tents."[8]

Plainly stated, God does not love peace; God loves evil.
Astonished by this passage, Scholem writes, "this much is
certain: the last thing we should expect to find in a work
of Jewish piety is the notion that the Gates of Zion
through which, to the Jewish mind, the creative energy of
Israel is communicated and in which it is concentrated are
on the side of evil."[9] Yet this radical statement is en-

tirely consistent with the Bahir's internal understanding of "peace," a metaphor that this text associates with creative and psychical death. For the Bahir "peace" represents the closed discussion, the final interpretive product, and the statement of the law. The Bahir, on the contrary, is entirely preoccupied with unmaking that authority and with unmaking the idea of a final object or a finished product of scripture. For the Kabbalist, there can no last immutable word on the subject of being- no word of scripture, no halachic ruling, no principle of faith, not even a number or letter of the aleph-bet exists without a persistent uncertainty subtending that signifier.

The Bahir is very short text, with only about 12,000 words. So while it is disjointed and confusing, at times breaking off in mid-sentence, it is nevertheless easy to zero in on its broad preoccupations, if only because they arise so many times in the span of so few pages. One of those preoccupations (mentioned a moment ago) is with unmaking of the idea of a "final object" or a "finished product." This motif is checkered throughout the text. In one passage, for instance, the Bahir speaks of a king and his object: The king wants to give the object a name, but the object cannot be fully named, because "the object is incomplete." Another passage, citing Moses' encounter with the

burning bush, asks what the meaning is of the verse "you saw no image only a voice." The Bahir then insistently interjects: "You did not see an entire image.... You saw an image but not an entire image."[10] For the Bahir, no image can ever be an entire image. Wholeness or completion are not proper to the dimension of material life for this text, and while the text is concerned with Divine process, or, with Deity-as-process, bear in mind that traditional Judaism asserted only the fact that God exists. This is insufficient to the Kabbalist, for whom the existence of God is not only evidenced by, but also sustained by the ongoing activity of interpretation and experience. God unfolds perpetually into the universe through human physical and intellectual work and through the performance of *mitzvot* (commandments). The stale fact of existence is at the very least lazy and uninspiring to Kabbalist imagination, and at the very worst--as making reference to the burning bush might here suggest--it veers towards idolatry. When God says, *Ehyeh asher ehyeh* (I am that I am), Kabbalists are keen to point out that in Hebrew, this can also mean "I will be what I will be." The static and unchanging God whose existence simply is, without creative exchange or interaction at the interstices of old and new--at the "gates," so to speak, of metonymic function--is rejected,

just as a static and unchanging letter of the alphabet is rejected.

Many passages fall into the general category of asserting what might be called the limits of knowability. Scholars agree that one achievement of the Bahir is its use of symbolic language- its thoroughgoing, unrelenting presentation of existence as a symbolic order that only instantiates on the terrestrial level some fractal iteration of non-manifest registers of being. This is crucial, because the mystical symbol exists only by virtue of limitation; it inheres in the concept of boundary. As explained in chapter one, the mystical symbol can be thought of in terms of the psychoanalytic symptom. It is a manifest sign structured by a paradoxical process of revelatory occlusion.

That the basic ontological unit of Kabbalist theosophy as presented by the Bahir is the *symbol* bespeaks the most acute and immediate awareness that whatever knowledge unfolds into the universe is not transparent in any way. There are limits to what a human being can and cannot express; there is a limit to the scope of any one-point perspective, and no form of materiality--in law, in word, in visual perception--is ever a complete truth. This distinctive ideological (and ontological) position elides every authoritative claim upon the meaning and purpose of Torah

while granting every reading of scripture a measure of inherent validity.

One can argue that the Bahir is not really interested in words themselves, so much as the activity of language and the Divine forces of creation instantiated in that activity. This idea also comes through in a remarkable example. In several dispersed sections the Bahir takes up the phrase "let there be light, and there was light"– the ultimate performative declaration. The text offers different analogies to explain that verse:

> "[…] And God said, 'let there be light,' and there was light."
> They said to Him, "Before the creation of Israel your son, will you then make him a crown?" He replied yes.
> What does the crown resemble? A king yearned for a son. One day he found a beautiful, precious crown, and he said, "This is fitting for my son's head."
> They said to him, "Are you then certain that your son will be worthy of this crown?"
> He replied, "Be still. This is what arises in thought."
> It is thus written (2 Samuel 14:14), "He thinks thoughts [that none should be cast away]."[11]

> Rabbi Berachiah said:
> What is the meaning of the verse (Genesis 1:3), And God said, "Let there be light...and there was light"? Why does the verse not say, "And it was so"?
> What is this like? A king has a beautiful object. He put it away until he had a place for it, and then he put it there.
> It is therefore written, "Let there be light, and there was light." This indicates that it already existed.[12]

In these analogs about the king and his object, and God and the pre-fashioned crown, we are presented with the first articulation of what will become a central tenet of the Jewish mystical tradition. Kabbalah holds that the Torah is a blueprint of the cosmos. But it is no ordinary blue-print; as suggested earlier, Torah is an organism whose life processes are constituted by the reader's unique spi-ritual and intellectual exchange with the text. It is only through this engagement that the pre-existing blueprint of the cosmos already contained in the infinite text can un-fold into manifest creation. It is a paradox, in which the subject is both the composer and the composition, writing him or herself into existence. The construction of meaning is at once the construction of the world; revelation and creation are the same act.

In a letter attacking the Kabbalists, one 13th century Rabbi wrote, "We have heard that a book has already been written for them, which they call Bahir, that is, luminous, but no light shines through it."[13] So contends the Rabbi. But when the Bahir keeps repeating "let there be light and there was light," asserting: it was preexisting; it arises in thought; we think thoughts that none should be cast away; there will be a place for this beautiful object- the

Bahir is ultimately speaking about itself, about its own words and its own beautiful thoughts, that actualize part of the preexisting blueprint of the cosmos. This text does not require the affirmation of traditional Judaism; it is valid because it says so. Kabbalism's existence is proof of its validity.

Say what one will about the Bahir's haphazard organization, the concluding chapter is most superbly positioned. This last section takes up a well-known midrash about mankind's exile from Eden. In the midrash, the Rabbis are trying to resolve a textual inconsistency in the book of Genesis. God has told Adam not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge lest he die, but when the serpent encounters Eve, the story has changed: Eve tells the serpent she must not eat it *or touch it*, lest she die. Thus the warning not to *touch* the fruit was somehow added, significantly changing God's original statement to Adam. To explain this discrepancy, the Rabbis construct a midrash. They reason that Adam was so afraid Eve would eat from the tree that, much like a parent would with small child, he lied in order to frighten her, saying essentially, "don't eat it– *don't even touch it*!" Thus Adam lies to Eve by elaborating upon the word of God. It was through that lie, the Rabbis reason, that the serpent was able to trick Eve: he must have ap-

proached the Tree and touched it, as proof that no ill con-
sequence would befall her. In this way (with a few more
twists and turns to the story) Eve is duped into eating the
fruit.

What is so curious is that the Bahir ends with what
amounts to a rather basic, fairly faithful re-telling of
that midrash. There is little elaboration here; no puns,
no acrobatics with numbers– the Bahir simply provides the
midrash relatively unabused as its closing statement. Per-
haps this is because, in this case, the midrash really does
say enough. Humanity was exiled from an endless life of
perfect quiescence because somebody told a lie about what
God said, offering in effect another version of truth, and
as a result we are all cast into mortality and conscious-
ness, out from the eternal peace of Eden– peace, which is
an anathema to the Bahir, and which signals only monolithic
agreement and creative withdrawal. For the Bahir, this mi-
drash might serve as something of an anthem, for it effec-
tively tells the story of this revolutionary text. The Ba-
hir, too, is stepping into life and into the creative
process by telling a lie about what God said, that is, by
deviating from the finished word of conventional Jewish in-
terpretation, and by affirming the imperfection and dise-

quilibrium around which the activity of meaning-making un-
fold.

Rabbi Meir ben Simeon, quoted earlier as saying that
no light shines through the Bahir, railed that the text's
authors "boast in mendacious speeches and statements of
having found confirmation and encouragement [for their
ideas] in countries inhabited by scholars and knowers of
the Torah." He counsels, "God save us from inclining to
such heretical words, concerning which it would be best to
keep silence in Israel."[14]   Such is the Rabbi's earnest ad-
vice, but to quote Oscar Wilde, the Bahir understands that
a lie is "simply that which is its own evidence," and it is
precisely the "silence in Israel,"– the quiet of formal and
discursive unanimity, against which the Bahir positions it-
self.

Joke-work and Dream-work

The Bahir has the quality of an urgent manifesto and
an ideological counterpoint to mainstream Judaism. But
more importantly, the Bahir functions as a work of theory,
using language and hermeneutics to describe psychical dy-
namics known to us almost exclusively through the language
of psychoanalysis. One of the most salient examples is the
Bahir's display of "jokework"— in the illogical and unpre-

dictable use of language and counting that consistently

catches the reader off-guard. Here psychoanalysis, partic-

ularly Freud's insights in *Jokes and Their Relation to the*

Unconscious, becomes invaluable to us. Like a good joke,

the Bahir uses unpredictable exegetical antics in overcom-

ing a variety of censorships, and also in obfuscating a

shocking final punch line (that God loves evil, for in-

stance) until the very end to safeguard its impact. The

Bahir's interpretive strategies also overcome the inhibi-

tions of numeric and linguistic logic, not to mention those

of religious convention. Jokes, Freud explains, display

the nonsensical associative freedom of the dream-work at a

social-aesthetic register precisely in order to subvert the

tyranny of social custom.[15]

But perhaps most revealing is that the Bahir performs

its joke-work with disarming aggression, a characteristic

of jokes that Freud cannily recognized. The text's "punch-

lines" so to speak, are both shocking and deadpan: Gershom

Scholem remarks that the Bahir presents its bold ideas

"without the slightest apology, as if it were the most nat-

ural thing in the world."[16] For the Bahir this aggression

is bound up in the creative process, as evidenced in the

declaration that God loves the Gates of Zion because they

are on the side of evil: violent disruption of the peace is

the self-same movement of creative life within this text. While the reader might not share the same Kabbalistic orientation as that of the text, this is of little conse- quence; the content of the Bahir's jokes, i.e., the speci- ficity of its radical statements, is less important than the way it takes advantage of shared inhibitions. The text and reader form a bond not because the reader believes the truth of every Kabbalistic assertion, but because of the shared pleasure in overcoming so many forces of religious and linguistic constraint.

   The similarity of certain Bahir verses to Freudian dream analysis is also starkly apparent. As Freud de- scribed, in the processes of the dream-work no connection proves too loose, too weak or too absurd to serve as a bridge from one thought to the next.[17] Here we have bibli- cal verses, words, and imagery completely unhinged from their original context and standard definitions. With flights of association from one sound or phrase to the next the Bahir produces unified compositions of meaning based upon partial and unpredictable connections.

   Asserting the validity of these new unities is of the utmost importance. The Bahir has a vested interest in ex- posing the constructedness of interpretation, history, and meaning, precisely because this validates the creation of

its own new stories and new conceptions of the Divine. The
bald-face distortions and inventiveness that are part of
the joke-work also exposes the decidedly non-absolute, so-
luble nature of religious truth. This resonates deeply
with the reader precisely because the text grasps him or
her in the intimate experience of social transgression.
From the Kabbalist perspective however, rabbinic law is not
at all transgressed. Rather it is rediscovered in a trans-
gressive fashion, by interpretive means that valorize the
Kabbalist's crucial participation in the process of Divine
creation. In this way Judaism is again alive and imme-
diately relevant even in the most ordinary actions:

> Since God is not just static being but also dynamic
> becoming, God needs us as we need God.... Without our
> conscious, willed, inspired participation, God is in-
> complete; God needs us to realize God's design in and
> for the world. We are co-creators through God's grace
> with God Itself. What we do and what we choose af-
> fects, in fact, not only this world but also the
> structure of the entire universe.[18]

As no two people are ever the same, no two readings are ev-
er the same, and every person's engagement with text is
tantamount to an act of creation. Nosson Scherman furthers
this idea by using Kabbalist principles to describe the na-
ture of prayer. Scherman explains that just as the sacred
letters of the Hebrew aleph-bet can be arranged into count-

less combinations, with each rearrangement resulting in a new blend of cosmic and spiritual forces, so too human beings in their infinite diversity are as Divine prayers, compositions through which God unfolds into the medium of symbol and idea. Participation with liturgical or holy texts is never prescribed or imitative because prayer combines its spiritual force with the particular set of circumstances prevailing on earth and within the soul of the individual at the instant the words are uttered. Kabbalist study and worship are thus rescued from rote repetition by the recovery of unpredictability, which makes possible energetic and invigorated re-readings. Some part of the infinite blueprint emerges from hiding and finds voice at a specific locus in space and time. In this way the element of unpredictability opens a space for mystical re-reading.

For Freud, too, unpredictability is a critical factor in the production of external symptoms at the individual and cultural level. The relationship between an expressed thought and a manifest symptom can be so oblique as to seem random; but the symptom has an entirely determined nature, as is propelled by specific psychical investments whose locus of displacement is unforeseeable. It is this paradoxical sense of determined-randomness that the Bahir so effectively presents through its nexus of associative leaps.

The Bahir's manipulation of numbers to construct mystical revelation, for example, co-mingles the quality of unpredictability with determined cathexis, so that objective assessments of the Bahir's "truth" are no longer attainable. Interestingly, Freud offers a number-related example which inspires the same blend of skepticism and wonder as the Bahir's "72 names of God, 24 to a section." In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud describes writing a letter to a friend in which he comments that he would not make any further corrections upon the manuscript for *The Interpretation of Dreams* "even if it contains 2,467 mistakes"- an ostensibly arbitrary number invented off the top of his head. Reminding himself, however, that "nothing in the mind is arbitrary or undetermined," Freud follows up his letter with a post-script in which he constructs the following analysis:

> You will find that in the letter I put down the number 2467 as a bold arbitrary estimate of the number of mistakes which will be found in the dream book. What I meant was some very big number; but that particular one emerged....Now, immediately before, I had read in the newspaper that a General E.M. had retired from the post of Master of Ordinance. I should explain that I am interested in this man. While I was serving as a medical officer-cadet he came to the sick quarters one day (he was then a colonel) and said to the medical officer: "You must make me well in a week, because I have some work to do for which the Emperor is waiting." After that episode I decided to follow his career, and lo and behold! Now he has reached the end of

it, having become Master of Ordnance, and is already
(1899) on the retired list. I wanted to work out how
long he had taken over this. Assuming that it was in
1882 that I saw him in hospital, it must have been se-
venteen years. I told my wife this and she remarked:
"Oughtn't you be on the retired list too, then?"
"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed. After this conversation
I sat down to write to you. But the earlier train of
thought went on in my mind, and with good reason. I
had miscalculated; I have a fixed point in my memory
to prove it. I celebrated my majority, i.e. my twen-
ty-fourth birthday, under military arrest (having been
absent without leave). So that was in 1880, or nine-
teen years ago. That gives you the "24" in 2467. Now
take my present age—43—add 24, and you have 67. In
other words, in answer to the question whether I meant
to retire too, my wish gave me another 24 years' work.
I was obviously annoyed at having failed to get very
far myself during this period in which I have followed
Colonel M.'s career; and yet I was celebrating a kind
of triumph over his career being at an end, while I
still have everything in front of me.[19]

In this passage alone one can discern the enormous influ-

ence which Freud has had on postmodernists like Thomas Pyn-

chon or Paul Auster, authors whose characters manage to

construct the very patterns that they seek in the pursuit

of transparent answers to opaque mental riddles. In keep-

ing with that brand of metaphysical detective story, it

would behoove us to now explain the connection between

Freud's 24 years of future work and the Bahir's 72 names of

God! One senses reading Freud's analysis (or the Bahir's

numeric passages, for that matter) that there is nothing

preventing us from doing so. It is this sense of limit-

lessness, and of the elision of difference between what is random and what is determined, that will prove one of the most critical linkages between these two bodies of thought, and which I shall examine later in more detail. Returning first to the question of the joke-work, however, the open joke of the Bahir is its candid exposure of such mental activity occurring behind-the-scenes, and the advantage the text takes of the resultant indeterminability of any objective truth. By depicting the processes of interpretation as also processes of *mis*-interpretation, the Bahir positions its wildest flights of association and numeric acrobatics on par with conventional Jewish belief: both are products of the same processes; both are aesthetic collaborations between one's internal reality and the external world. Its exaggerated misreadings suggest the hybrid and contingent nature of canonical Jewish thought, and it is alongside these canons that the Bahir dares to stand. In another sense, the Bahir presents its own misreading of Torah as a kind of wish fulfillment, for as *Psychopathology* illustrates, even our dreadful misinterpretations of text have another kind of validity, as they disclose something in the psyche that has found voice in error. This is of special importance for the Bahir, as it is only through

such extreme misreading that this revolutionary text gains any voice at all.

The practice of deconstructing letters also recuperates a dynamic of the unpredictable into the interpretation of Torah. But more importantly, the deconstruction drives home the impossibility of ultimate transparency through external symbols. Freud speaks of the "navel" of the dream- an irreducible point beyond which no analysis, no conscious effort, can grab hold of some train of thought to determinatively disclose further analysis or further meaning. For the Kabbalist this navel persists in all signs and symbols; it is not meaning-*less*, rather it is a knot of overdetermined meanings that resists any single meaning. If even the building blocks of words retain this unattainable dimension for the Kabbalist, the process of reading can surely never exhaust meaning nor will the external signifier completely coincide with its ultimate social or linguistic referent.

In a sense, the deconstruction of letters establishes an inherent motility in the heart of written word. Here Eric Santner contributes excellent insights in *On The Psychotheology of Everyday Life.* Holiness and the Holy, explains Santner, exist in the infinitized dimension of the divine. By positioning the Hebrew language as a *lashon ha-*

kodesh [holy tongue] Judaism proposes a kind of infinitization of language; it positions language as essentially unattainable, its referents perpetually resistant to encapsulation by the signifier. The relationship Judaism claims to its own language, then, involves a recognition of the Other's radical alterity. The infinitized language is perpetually out-of-joint with its Signified, expressing the fundamental recognition that language, along with the religious and cultural discourses it produces, is neither transparent nor attainable in terms of expressing some total truth.[20] What Freud refers to as the irretrievable nature of the object of primal repression, is, in this sense, embedded in the Jewish understanding of the Hebrew language as retaining an infinitized dimension of the holy.

In his work on reader response theory Wolfgang Iser underscores the role that indeterminacy plays in provoking the reader to construct meaning, asserting that "the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence." He writes that by bringing "to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious," we approach "the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had preciously seemed to elude our consciousness." In his view confirmation of any singular interpretation is a "defect" of the text to be

avoided. [21] It is this sort of indeterminacy that the Bahir, too, establishes at the heart of its exegesis, provoking the reader not only to construct their own meanings but to call into question the concept of error and the porous boundary which constitutes the error/fact dyad.

But the question of what constitutes historical or theological error is best exemplified in the Zohar, which like the Bahir before it, unmakes the binary opposition between the random and the determined in order to disrupt conventions of Jewish learning. The *Sefer ha Zohar* [Book of Radiance, alt. Book of Splendor] is the central text of Jewish mysticism, considered among the most luminous mystical treatises of all time. While traditional Judaism holds that the Zohar was written in the second century CE by Rabbi Shim'on bar Yochai, who is also its central figure, Gershom Scholem's monumental research has shown this is almost certainly not the case. In fact, Scholem has established that the Zohar first appeared in the late 1290s in Spain, and was most probably compiled then. Vast portions of the text, if not the entire work, were composed by Moses de Leon, an extraordinary man who in all probability never set foot in the Holy Land about which he wrote. A remarkable scholar and mystic in his own right, De Leon draws upon various oral and written sources, Kabbalist tra-

dition, and his own imagination to produce the Zohar, which is a mystical commentary on the first five books of Moses. The text is written in what Andrew Harvey describes as "a quirky, polyvalent, polyphonic Aramaic," a language not in use in 13th century Spain, but which de Leon inventively reconstructed from ancient source texts.[22] The Zohar's plot revolves around a mystical brotherhood who wander the Galilee while exchanging Kabbalistic insights. "By penetrating the literal surface of the Torah," explains Zohar translator Daniel Matt, "the mystical commentators transform the Biblical narrative into a biography of God. The entire Torah is read as one continuous divine name, expressing divine being."[23]

The Zohar lays claim to a universe of knowledge that exists nowhere but in the imagination of its author(s). It makes frequent reference to sacred texts and personages who never lived, citing the authority of fictitious Rabbis and sages to advance its mystical insights. In his own translation and commentary, Matt duly notes each appearance of these apocrypha, referring to such nonexistent works as "The Book of Adam" and "The Engraved Letters of Rabbi El'azar" as "one of many housed in the real or imaginary library of the author(s) of the Zohar."[24] In the "vast corpus symbolicum" of this text nothing is self-evident; eve-

rything points to something else beyond itself, something in the life of the Divine Being.[25] Once again the reader is presented with the exhortation to read biblical verses in new and unexpected ways, as seen in the Bahir, only this time it is a directive shared among the Rabbis of the brotherhood, as they peel away layers of literal meaning to uncover the secret life of the universe pulsing beneath the words of scripture. Just as for psychoanalysis there is always another, less obvious discourse to be found in the fabric of history or in the patient's story, so too in Zoharic analysis nothing in the Torah or in the material world will be taken at face value. The Rabbis of the Zohar read Torah as a dream-text, with overdetermined layers of meaning that can be elicited only through the process of analysis and interpretation. Gershom Scholem writes that in the Zohar, "the life of the soul is pictured through the activity of language."[26] The style and methodology of the text can leave a profound impression upon the reader whether or not he or she is familiar with its theological content. Like other sacred texts which have succeeded in inspiring a new level of religious consciousness, Scholem points out that "the effect upon the soul of such a work is in the end not at all dependent upon its being understood."[27] Something is understood, however, at an intuitive

level: the reader experiences an uncanny recognition of internal mental processes as they are metaphorized across the Zohar's pages, and it is to this strange and magical sensation that psychoanalysis directs its best insights.

The following passage is emblematic of many to be found in the Zohar. It succeeds at condensing a vast amount of Zoharic methodology and character, and it advances several of the themes addressed earlier in our discussion of the Bahir. Tracing various appearances of the phrase "separation" and "separate" from Genesis to Numbers to Deuteronomy, the passage presents an inventive if not random construction of meaning that nevertheless asserts its own deterministic perfection:

> This is the mystery of: *Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, that it may separate*—the first conflict, outburst of seething fury. He sought to mediate, but before the fury cooled, Hell aroused. The God *fashioned the expanse and separated* (Genesis 1:7)—arousing a conflict of passionate love, endurance of the world. In accord with this mystery was the conflict of Shammai and Hillel, for Oral Torah approached Written Torah in love, together consummating existence.
> Separation is certainly on the left. Here separation is written: *that it may separate,* and *He separated;* and there is written: *Is it too little for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the community of Israel...?* (Numbers 16:9). Similarly: *At that time YHVH separated the tribe of Levi* (Deuteronomy 10:8). Separation, indeed, is solely on the second, on the left. Now you might say, "Indeed, separation is on the second, so why is it associated with Levi, who is third? It should be with Simeon,

who is second." But although Levi is third, in Ja-
cob's mind he was second, and separation is always on
the second. Everything follows the straight path per-
fectly.[28]

Plucked from their original context and re-woven according
to Zoharic logic, the passage utilizes the raw material of
Torah language to present a most radical revision of Jewish
history, namely that Levi, and not Simeon, is truly to be
considered Jacob's "second" son. It is an assertion based
upon no external historical evidence, but upon an internal
psychical truth which only Kabbalist exegesis can decode.[ii]

The passage serves up another instance of a kind of
mystical joke-work with its frank depiction of the inter-
pretive conceits girding its reconstruction of history.
Like the Bahir before it, the Zohar validates this activity
as a form of truth-making. For the Zohar, counting Levi as
"second" is not an *error*, because the text simply does not
function within the error/fact dyad. For the Zohar the
psychical real is real, a position depicted not only in its
highly subjective construction of meaning, but in this pas-

[ii] "Separation occurred on the second day of Creation, sym-
bolizing the *sefirah* of the left side, *Gevurah*, which is
also symbolized by the tribe of Levi...When Jacob had sex-
ual relations with Leah, he thought she was Rachel (Genesis
29:23, 25), so the child who was conceived (Reuben) was in
his mind Rachel's. Simeon was therefore considered Leah's
firstborn, and Levi was the second." Matt, *The Zohar* Vo-
lume I, 131 (notes 185, 187).

sage, plainly stated: "In Jacob's mind she was second."
The error/truth dyad which is eroded by this innovative re-
presentation of history is further undone by eroding the
language of authority. The entire section is saturated
with the language of assured self-evidence: "clearly" "cer-
tainly" "everything" "perfectly" "solely." The sheer num-
ber of authoritative words calls attention to itself. Like
the Bahir, which disrupts the logic of the why/because for-
mula for getting at truth, the Zohar is subverting the lan-
guage of authority and exclusivity by placing it in the
service of the most obvious subjective investiture. And
like the earlier "gates of Zion" example with its radical
punch-line, there is an aggressivity to this shocking send-
up of Jewish belief. Jacob is the embodiment of Israel,
having taken that name after wrestling with the angel (Gen.
32:29), and Israel's sons represent the twelve tribes from
whom the entire nation descends. But in the Zohar's re-
imagined genealogy, the Jewish family tree is no longer a
matter settled by history. The communal agreement which
edifies the facts of Jewish lineage is called into ques-
tion; indeed, the communal agreement about how we should
all count from one to three is called into question! Joke-
work brings forth something concealed or hidden, and as
Scholem beautifully described, we have here the hidden life

of the mind portrayed in the activity of association and distortion, and in the emergence of a history shaped once again by those compelling forces of the psyche that ordinarily go unseen.

That the Zohar presents this distortion as it is being stitched is certainly part of the audacious humor. We might laugh at the text's depiction of truth-under-construction, but it is precisely this phenomenon that Freud undertakes to expose in *Moses and Monotheism*, where the layering or grafting of psychical paradigms onto historical events is at the center of Freud's argument. Freud's analysis, which begins with the proposition "if Moses were an Egyptian," suggests that history and religion as we know them are hybrids of psychical and factual reality; that psychical reality indeed becomes the world in which we function. *Moses* reveals that the "errors" enshrouding the official story of past events commence instantaneously upon their negotiation with language. What we might call "raw facts"- physical events that occur in time, are always mediated by metanarratives of ideology and culture, just as they are by the subjective prism of the individual. Associations are forged in the mediation of historical happenings that distort and perhaps take the place of any original kernel of truth. But are they er-

rors, exactly? Does such distortion render a story or history invalid? It is here that Freud too unmakes the error/fact dyad by asking that we reconsider the activity of distortion, not as a pathology, i.e., a lie or a mistake, but as a rearrangement sculpted by the valid and inescapable activity of the mind in an open system of meaning making.

Freud points out that the term *distortion* "should mean not only 'to change the appearance of,' but also 'to wrench apart,' 'to put in another place.' That is why," he explains, "in so many textual distortions we may count on finding the suppressed and abnegated material hidden away somewhere, though in an altered shape and torn out of its original connection."[29] In the Zohar, biblical phrases are in this way "wrenched apart" from their context and "put in another place." The passages' unpredictable flights of word association give rise to fresh composites of meaning. A transferential collaboration between the archaic and the new--a process Freud understood as the generative source of dream-formation--also finds expression here, in the union of oral and written Torah of which the passage speaks: "Oral Torah approached Written Torah in love, together consummating existence." "Oral Torah" is understood as Talmud, midrash, and the received Kabbalist tradition, which

together represent centuries of commentary, explication and response to written Torah. The combination of oral and written Torah is an erotic coalescence, a marriage that gives birth to a vital aesthetic product, enlivening the words of Torah in the present moment for each generation of Jews.

This aesthetic recognizes the social character of all interpretation and validates the communal construction of meaning— a share in the truth, as opposed to the agency of any single person. Here too the Zohar, much like psychoanalysis, is concerned with the soluble boundaries between individual egos. No one text or person creates meaning on their own. There is a social dynamic to interpretation which in the Zohar is metaphorized by the work's basic premise: its plotline does not involve an individual, on a direct journey, offering objective wisdom; rather we have a wandering brotherhood, exchanging ideas and sensation from one mind to the next, each participant amplifying the insights that came before, sharing their own unpredictable turns of thought in the landscape of communal literary tradition. In the case of myth, this works over time, through the collective intergenerational elaboration, distortion, and insertion of new material. Thus, writes Freud, "myths...are distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies

of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humani-
ty."[30]

Freud offers further insight into this fluid process
when he addresses the problem of inserting "new" ideas and
daytime associations into the dream analysis, i.e., of the
patient's weaving in thoughts and associations that are not
recollected as part of the original dream. He writes:

> [I]n the daytime we drive shafts which follow along
> fresh chains of thought and…these shafts make contact
> with the intermediate thoughts and the dream-thoughts
> now at one point and now at another. We can see how
> in this manner fresh daytime material inserts itself
> into the interpretive chains.[31]

Again that fresh meaning is not understood as an error.
New associations that emerge in daytime analysis are not
invalid changes; they are living engagements with the in-
terpretive chain, and Freud analyzes the dream precisely by
engaging its affective and ideational contents with other
texts, other ideas, and other links themselves suffused
with meaning. Our Zoharic passage puts this activity on
open display, adding a twist of self-conscious humor: like
the title character of *Don Quixote* who insists on tracing
the impossible "camino de la verdad cuya madre es la histo-
ria" [road of truth whose mother is history], the passage's
assertion that "*everything follows the straight path per-*

fectly" is a bit of biting humor, since what we are offered

here is the wholesale disruption of certainty. There ex-

ists no "road of truth whose mother is history," no

straight path of perfection. There are only the tangled,

impure stories that emerge from the collective human effort

to understand and describe human experience as it unfolds

across a web of social relations.

There is a fascinating section of *Dreams* in which

Freud unapologetically inserts his own ideas into the tape-

stry of an analysand's dream-thoughts. In the dream,

Freud's analysand recollects the experience of laborious

climbing accompanied by a sensation of inhibited movement.

This sensation and its attendant imagery trigger an associ-

ation for Freud, who shares his impression with the pa-

tient, who in turn alters the whole trajectory of his dis-

course. Freud writes:

> The piece of the dream-content which described how the
> climb began by being difficult and became easy at the
> end of the rise reminded me, when I heard it, of the
> masterly introduction to Alphonse Daudet's *Sappho*.
> That well-known passage describes how a young man car-
> ries his mistress upstairs in his arms; at first she
> is as light as a feather, but the higher he climbs the
> heavier grows her weight. The whole scene foreshadows
> the course of their love-affair, which was intended by
> Daudet as a warning to young men not to allow their
> affection to be seriously engaged by girls of humble
> origin and dubious past. Though I knew that my pa-
> tient had been involved in a love-affair which he had
> recently broken off with a lady on the stage, I did

> not expect to find my guess at an interpretation jus-
> tified....But to my astonishment my patient replied
> that my interpretation fitted in very well with a
> piece he had seen at the theatre the evening before.
> It was called *Rund um Wien [Round Vienna]* and gave the
> picture of the career of a girl who began by being
> respectable, who then became a *demimondaine* and had
> *liaisons* with men in high positions and so *'went up in
> the world,'* but who ended by *'coming down in the
> world.'* The piece had moreover reminded him of anoth-
> er, which he had seen some years earlier, called Von
> *Stufe zu Stufe [Step by Step]*, and which had been ad-
> vertised by a poster showing a staircase with a flight
> of *steps*.[32]

Freud's uninhibited participation in this analysis elicits

questions as to the validity of such an interpretation,

which extends quite obviously beyond the boundaries of the

dreamer's own mind. Freud simply connects ideas along with

his patient, helping the patient work through the dream-

thoughts by throwing in a few of his own, and in the end it

is unclear with whom the greater psychical interest in the

staircase image originally resides- with Freud, or with the

young man, who appears to follow this new train of thought

entirely at the doctor's suggestion. But the question of

where the analysand's associations end and the analyst's

begin is no longer a useful question. Like the Zohar's

technique for constructing meaning, which functions outside

the error/fact dyad, Freud here elides the most basic sub-

ject/object boundary. The interpretation is an activity

that re-iterates what the dream has itself done: draw some

expression of the unconscious *out*, into a living picture

that makes meaning. The joining of analyst and analysand--

like the engagement of Oral and Written Torah, of the arc-

haic and the new--is a remarkable instance of aesthetic

collaboration, a kind of basal metaphor for the formation

of culture. Just as the unconscious motivations effecting

transference in the dream-work have an extimate character

(to borrow Lacan's terminology) within in the dream, so too

does the dream interpretation rely upon a continuousness

between self and other, past and future, instinct and cul-

ture.[iii] The dreamer must *create* meaning, and must there-

fore reach into the currency of signifiers, into the inter-

pretive chain of language and of community, which does not

[iii] "Lacan coins the term *extimité* by applying the prefix *ex*
(from *exterieur,* 'exterior') to the French word *intimité*
('intimacy'). The resulting neologism, which may be ren-
dered 'extimacy' in English, neatly expresses the way in
which psychoanalysis problematises the opposition between
inside and outside, between container and contained (see
S7, 139). For example, the real is just as much inside as
outside, and the unconscious is not a purely interior
psychic system but an intersubjective structure ('the un-
conscious is outside'). Again, the Other is 'something
strange to me, although it is at the heart of me' (S7, 71).
Furthermore, the centre of the subject is outside; the sub-
ject is ex-centric (see E, 165, 171). The structure of ex-
timacy is perfectly expressed in the topology of the torus
and of the moebius strip." From Dylan Evans, *An Introduc-
tory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Rout-
ledge, 1996), 59.

reserve for dreamers any impermeable boundaries within which to contain themselves. The construction of interpretation will also displace, conceal, disguise, and divert our apprehension away from certain disclosure; in this way it is--like all products of secondary agency--both creative and defensive, presenting to the dreamer an elaborated filtration whose appearance is as suspect as those of linear time and immutable space.

Indeed another dyad to come uncoupled, both for the Zohar as for Freud, is that of cause and effect. Returning to the passage involving Jacob and his sons, the logic and necessarily linear language of causation are unraveled by Zoharic reasoning. Its conclusive phrase, that *everything follows the straight path perfectly,* diverts the directive language of certainty *par excellance*, lavishing exaggerated reverence upon the very linear perfection and closure that are an anathema to the mystical creative process. And like the Bahir before it, this passage does not take aim at the fringes of Jewish identity or some esoteric nuance of *halakha*. Rather, it hits at the very core of who the Jewish people believe they are: this is *Jacob* we're talking about, Jacob *is* Israel. In this way, the Zohar suggests that it is that which we take most for granted that is also most suspect.

It is here that psychoanalysis can provide some of its
best insights. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*
Freud also undertakes the paradoxical nature of causation,
drawing a distinction between external chance and psychical
accidents (of which of course there are none). For in-
stance, in case upon case, Freud demonstrates how the in-
stinct for self-destruction is "capable of making skilful
use of a threat to life and of disguising it as a chance
mishap."[33]   Tracing motive for such accidents and "bungled
actions" as Freud refers to them, back through time, i.e.,
teleologically, Freud takes up what is also one of the most
outstanding features of our Zoharic passage, namely, the
orchestration of the world disguised as chance. As we have
seen, by directing a thread of logic whereby "separation"
must inevitably be associated with what is "second," our
passage depicts the paradox of unpredictable determinism,
that is, the lack of randomness in an infinite field where
relations end nowhere but are nevertheless traceable into a
specific sequence of intent. Freud's effort in *Psychopa-
thology* was to demonstrate that the unconscious dynamics
participating in eruptions of hysteria or in the broad for-
mation of cultural paradigms are the self-same forces whose
participation in daily life subtends the most quotidian hu-
man concerns. In this way, Freud asks that we recognize

motive at work in the very basic ways that we remember,
forget, and distort our own history as we move through our
daily exchanges. *Psychopathology* makes us wonder at the
astonishing capacity of the unseen to play a role in the
accidents and errors, the minor gestures and unremarkable
occurrences, that otherwise appear so indisputably arbi-
trary.[iv]

[iv] On the topic of causation, one might consider the possi-
ble link Spinoza offers between Freud and Jewish mystical
thought. Both Freud and Spinoza address the phenomenon of
a strict but complicated determinism at work in human life.
Kaplan (1977) points out that "both Spinoza and Freud carry
their determinism to its logical conclusion, and repudiate
the belief in free-will." Echoing the mystical and Freu-
dian notion of a determinism that is both unpredictable and
infinite, Kaplan cites Spinoza's belief that "'in the
mind...there is no absolute or free will; but the mind is
determined to wish this or that by a cause, which also has
been determined by a cause, and this last by another cause,
and so on to infinity'" (314). A further link to Freud and
Kabbalah is seen in Spinoza's recognition of the struggle
between opposite but coinciding affects in mental life.
Rathbun (1934), asserts that "[o]f all the comparisons be-
tween Spinoza the rationalist and mystic, and psychoanaly-
sis...the most striking is to be found in the common recog-
nition of the role of ambivalence in the emotional life,"
which Freud worked into his dualistic theory of the drives
(9). Silberman (1973) writes that "it cannot be emphasized
too strongly that [Freud's] theory of the drives rose from
a position that Spinoza had originated- namely, that there
is nothing in man that is 'outside Nature' or due to 'some
mysterious flaw' in his nature; that all things in man can
be shown to stem from 'causes through which they are un-
derstood.' Here Spinoza creates and enunciates the philo-
sophical ambience so essential of the development of psy-
choanalysis, wherein the mind of man can be seen and stu-
died as part of Nature, as susceptible to the same laws of
causality and rational analysis that are applied to the
phenomena of the external world" (612). This last idea al-

In one revealing example, Freud cites a case from his
colleague Theodor Reik, in which two young women were
speaking with several men at a University. During the con-
versation, the young woman who was Reik's analysand found
that she was unable to recall the title of the novel *Ben
Hur*. She described the novel, and several of the men knew
what novel she was talking about, but they, too, were una-
ble to recall the title. During analysis, it became appar-
ent that this was a motivated forgetting: "Saying the words
'Ben Hur' [which sound very much like bin hure = I am a
whore] was unconsciously equated by her with a sexual of-
fer, and her forgetting accordingly corresponded to the
fending-off of an unconscious temptation of that kind"
(60). But what is so fascinating is Reik's explanation for
why the *men* forgot: "Their unconscious understood the real
significance of the girl's forgetting and, so to speak, in-
terpreted it.... It is as if the girl who was talking with
them had by her sudden lapse of memory given a clear sign,

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so resonates with the Kabbalist view of creation as emerg-
ing from an infinite blueprint in which all things to be
actualized are contained. See Abraham Kaplan, "Spinoza and
Freud" (*Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis,*
5(3):299-326); Constance Rathbun, "On Certain Similarities
Between Spinoza and Psychoanalysis" (*The Psychoanalytic Re-
view*, XXI:1, 1-14); and Isidor Silberman, "Some Reflections
on Spinoza and Freud" (*Psychoanalytic Qtly* 42, 601-624).

which the men had unconsciously understood well enough"
(60-61).

The case is remarkable because on the surface the con-
versation was so *un*remarkable--because it was an event like
the millions of others that go unexplored over the course
of a day, its trajectory and outcome taken for granted as a
self-evident social transaction. The men did not realize
what had happened, and most likely never would. But the
visible picture of their conversation was the product of an
exchange that they did not see. Their most quotidian dis-
course was in a sense orchestrated- shaped by the partici-
pation of a repressed thought in the unfolding conversa-
tion.

The Zohar's alternative genealogy for the nation of
Israel also demands that we abandon the delusion of seam-
less, self-evident history by exposing those points of rup-
ture, distortion, and unconscious investment. It chal-
lenges the Jews' communally accepted heritage, presenting
its own version of truth as a contingency, a possibility
among possibilities. In this way Jewish self-understanding
can branch in a new direction, and what is understood by
the Kabbalist as "Torah" is depicted in a process of ongo-
ing creation and ongoing *distortion*. The new truths con-
structed by Kabbalistic interpretation are, in the psychoa-

nalytic sense, the *distorted* products of their mystical in-
terpretive goals; they are neither absolutes nor immutable
law, and they do not follow straight roads of truth with
pure intellectual or theological heritage.

Here the metaphor of the *rhizome* and the *nomad* ad-
vanced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their study
A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1980),
is very useful (if ironically so). Unlike the root-tree-
branch paradigm, which underpins all the Western discip-
lines, Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizome as an en-
tirely anti-hierarchical, anti-dualistic, anti-genealogical
"map" of infinite multiplicities, resisting any vestige of
structuralism in language, philosophy, politics, and theo-
retical interpretation. Placing Deleuze and Guattari's
rhizome in the service of psychoanalysis is of course prob-
lematic, given that *A Thousand Plateaus* purports to be a
scathing critique of Freudian psychoanalysis, which the au-
thors describe as a hierarchical, dictatorial, phallocen-
tric episteme that produces mere "tracings" of language and
the unconscious.[34]

In this the authors are clearly mistaken, however, as
their rhyzomatic configuration proves especially useful in
characterizing mystical interpretative strategies and their
semblance to Freudian paradigms. In particular the rhi-

zome-nomad aptly underscores the *wandering* dimension of the
creative process reflected in both bodies of thought. No
one knows what interpretive turns the questing spirit of
the Kabbalist will inspire, nor in which direction the wan-
dering members of the brotherhood will take their spontane-
ous reflections upon Torah and the Divine mind. Nor can
one predict the circuitous turns of thought which come dur-
ing analysis: "The dream-thoughts to which we are led by
interpretation," explains Freud in *Dreams*, "cannot, from
the nature of things, have any definite endings; they are
bound to branch out in every direction into the intricate
network of our world of thought" (564). Such infinite
thoughts will lack definite beginnings: they will create
new traumas, whose symptoms began years prior; new ques-
tions and new mysteries whose solution has already been
given. This is the assumption of psychoanalysis, which
would incorporate all manner of associations from the fu-
ture to interpret a dream from childhood: people we did not
yet know; events which had not yet happened. It is also
the assumption of the Kabbalist, for whom the linear histo-
ry of Jewish holy texts and religious literature is irrele-
vant. The Zohar shakes off its own historical impossibili-
ty, grafting textual and liturgical connections without any
regard for the chronologic limitations of history. How

could it be otherwise for the Kabbalist, who understands the totality of being in past, present and future as always and already contained in the infinite blueprint that is at once God, Torah, and Israel? It is a blueprint seeded with unresolved and sustained contradiction, which in fact allows for the *absence* of contradiction, a quality that also characterizes the Freudian unconscious.

Notes to Chapter 2

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[1] Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 90.

[2] See Lewis Loflin, http://www.sullivan-county.com/id2/gnosticism.htm

[3] See W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946, rev. 1954).

[4] *The Bahir*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan. (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1995) Sections 14, 27, 61 (and others).

[5] Ibid., Section 110.

[6] Donna J. Haraway*, Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium. Female-Man©_Meets_OncoMouse*™ (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[7] Here I draw upon Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, 1990 and Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," 1972.

[8] Kaplan, *The Bahir*, Section 38.

[9] Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1965),93.

[10] Kaplan, *The Bahir*, Sections 24-24; 47.

[11] Ibid., Section 16.

[12] Ibid., Section 25.

[13] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 90.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1960).

[16] Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, 91.

[17] Sigmund Freud, The *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900)(New York: Avon Books, 1965), 568-9.

[18] Daniel C. Matt, *Zohar: Annotated and Explained* (Woodstock: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2002), xvi.

[19] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1965), 310-311.

[20] Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 110-111.

[21] Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, David Lodge, ed. (London: Longman, 1997) 212, 227, 215.

[22] Matt, *Zohar: Annotated and Explained*, xv.

[23] Ibid., xxiii.

[24] Daniel C. Matt, *The Zohar* Volume I, Pritzker edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 206 (and others).

[25] Scholem writes: "Of such symbols the world of Kabbalism is full, nay the world is to the Kabbalist such a corpus symbolicum." *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 27-28.

[26] Gershom Scholem, *Zohar: The Book of Splendor, Basic Readings from the Kabbalah,* (1949)(New York: Schocken Books, 1977), ix.

[27] Ibid., ix.

[28] Matt, *The Zohar* Volume I, 131.

[29] Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, 52.

[30] Sigmund Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908), in Peter Gay, The *Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 442.

[31] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 571.

[32] Ibid., 319-323.

[33] Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 234.

[34] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3-25.

Chapter 3

From *Daemonic* Repetition to the Bonds of Community

Both psychoanalysis and Kabbalist writing are funda-
mentally concerned with being-in-community, whether by this
we refer to a social intersubjective web, or to a *corpus
symbolicum* that constitutes the material and discursive
world of the Kabbalist. In this chapter, I suggest that by
placing psychoanalysis and Kabbalist writing into dialogue,
we can identify a distinct model for ethical social rela-
tions, one that is implicit in their respective formula-
tions for the creative process. One of my primary concerns
is to further explore how these bodies of thought operate
in ways that destabilize the psychic mechanisms upon which
rigid dogmatism or essentialist ideology depend, and there-
by subvert totalizing or dogmatic efforts to organize know-
ledge.

I also propose that Freudian psychoanalysis and Jewish
mystical writing have produced a common conception of li-
near time, a conception that structures the relationship
between past and present into a partnership through which
the present moment is enlivened by the past, and the past
lives anew in an altered form. Both these systems function
through an inter-subjective and inter-textual process of

"quoting" the past, not for the sake of repetition, but for innovation. By way of this structure, I suggest that both systems of thought are concerned with the movement *away* from self-delusionary discourse towards something more authentic, which in particular involves the subject's experience of self-truth through the Other.

To introduce these ideas, I would like to look specifically towards their literary expression in the work of Umberto Eco and Jorge Luis Borges, postmodern authors whose writing has been strongly influenced by both Kabbalism and psychoanalysis, and who incorporate overtly Jewish mystical and Freudian motifs into their fiction. For Eco and Borges, this movement to which I refer--from repetitive or delusionary discourses towards something more authentic--is an important concept that we can begin to flesh out through their stories. Postmodernism holds that we do not simply encounter an objective reality outside of ourselves, rather that we construct reality through the perceptual and discursive orders we bring to our engagement with the world. Thus the postmodern ethos rejects any claims to universality, arguing instead that no fixed vantage point exists beyond our own particularistic structuring of objects and events. In particular, Michel Foucault argues that all human thought becomes discourse, and it is discourse that

makes and unmakes our perception of the world; no natural order lies beyond what we invent through the use of language. The act of knowing, asserts Foucault, is an act of violence- that is to say, *knowing* is an exercise of dominance over Others embedded in the same discursive domain or domain of knowledge.[1]

Foucault's Pendulum (1988), deploys this whole nexus of ideas through the typically postmodern theme of conspiracy. The text is filled with Kabbalist references of all sorts, everything from the name of the protagonists' trusted computer (Abulafia, a famed Jewish mystic) to the ten chapter titles, each named for a Kabbalistic dimension of divine consciousness. More importantly, Eco masterfully incorporates the substance of Kabbalist thought into the novel in a way that crystallizes its distinct coherence with psychoanalysis. The characters in Eco's novel are on the sort of subject-propelled quests that pervade the postmodern detective story: they persist in connecting mysterious dots of ever more complex information, drawing constellations of meaning from seemingly random occurrences. The more they look, the more they find; the more connections they imagine, the more there are. To borrow John Irwin's clever title from his work on the Quixote, Eco's characters construct the "mysteries to their solutions" by

searching for a mythical power source.[2] They come to be-
lieve this source has been hidden through an elaborate con-
spiracy whose tendrils seem to permeate the whole of human
life and history since time immemorial.

As we saw in the preceding chapter, Kabbalism assumes
the metaphysical interpenetration of the physical body and
the written text. Eco deploys this motif in the novel, as
well: the ethical problems inherent in the character's ob-
sessive quest for perfect answers are expressed in the un-
canny way that biological and discursive processes comingle
throughout the story. The underlying violence of their
quest, and its potential to short-circuit into a self-
annihilating pathology, is best seen through the character
of Signor Salon, a sinister, antisemitic taxidermist whose
encounter with the narrator-hero Casaubon late in the novel
marks a turning point, at which Casaubon sees the folly of
the paranoid quest that has propelled him thus far.

Signor Salon is a rabid spinner of conspiracy theo-
ries, a classic antisemite convinced of a Jewish plot to
control the world. Armed with the *Protocols of the Elders
of Zion*, Salon's rhetoric reads like that of the typical
fundamentalist who claims to have all answers to all ques-
tions. He describes the underground constructions world-

wide through which, he insists, Jews control the govern-

ment:

> "Dominion over the world means dominion over what lies
> beneath it...why did the Celts dig sanctuaries in the
> heart of the earth, making tunnels that communicated
> with a sacred well...the well goes down into radioac-
> tive strata, as everyone knows. How was Glastonbury
> built? And isn't the island of Avalon where the myth
> of the Grail originated? And who invented the Grail
> if not a Jew?"   [443][3]

Salon weaves connections on and on in this vein, imposing

his own essentializing order over a vast multiplicity of

human and natural events. It is important to point out,

however, that while Salon is overtly constructed as a vil-

lainous and perhaps insane character, his paranoia is only

a grotesque magnification of the same insidious mode of

thinking that slowly overtakes Casaubon and his friends

over the course of the novel.

Signor Salon's internal psychical condition is exter-

nalized in his work: as mentioned, he is a taxidermist. In

this pivotal scene he invites Casaubon into his laboratory,

where Casaubon first lays eyes on Salon's haunting "petri-

fied zoo." Casaubon describes the macabre room, where "a

bear cub with glassy eyes [climbs] an artificial bough; a

dazed and hieratic owl stood beside me on a table." Glory-

ing over his craft to Casaubon, Salon explains:

> "[Y]ou see? You skin the animal, on the inside of
> the skin you smear arsenic soap, then you soak and
> bleach the bones.... Look at that shelf and you'll
> see a great collection of spinal columns and rib cag-
> es. A lovely ossuary, don't you think? You connect
> the bones with wire, mount it on an armature. To
> stuff it, I use hay, paper mâché, or plaster. Final-
> ly you fit the skin back on. I repair the damage
> done by death and corruption. This owl— doesn't it
> seem alive to you?"   [439]

For Casaubon the taxidermist's frozen compositions evoke a

sense of the uncanny: "From then on," he says, "every live

owl would seem dead to me, consigned by Salon to a sclerot-

ic eternity. I regarded the face of that embalmer of ani-

mal pharaohs, his bushy eyebrows, his grey cheeks, and I

could not decide whether he was a living being or a master-

piece of his own art" (440).

Signor Salon's grotesque and macabre reproductions

mirror the "taxidermic" discourse of his own essentialism,

which, like the tapestry of dead animal parts he stitches

together, presents only the semblance of something living.

Showing off his monstrous "compositions," Salon directs Ca-

saubon to his varied collections of animal parts, such as a

"box full of glass corneas and pupils" (ibid.). With these

disjointed parts Salon produces a whole menagerie of unna-

tural imaginary creations- monstrosities stitched from the

lifeless pieces of different species, which offer only the

vulgar illusion of coherence. He shows Casaubon "a dragon, a reptile with black membranous wings, a cock's crest, and gaping jaws...'Handsome, isn't he?'" Salon eagerly inquires. "My own composition. I used a Salamander, a bat, snake's scales...A subterranean dragon" (441). Salon explains that this particular composition was inspired by the picture of a mythical dragon found in a text by a Jesuit who--like the quintessential paranoid--"knew everything about the known, the unknown, and the nonexistent" (ibid).

Jacques Lacan provides a very valuable insight into the portrait of Signor Salon. In his *Seminar on The Psychoses (1955-1956)*, Lacan focuses direct criticism upon what he calls the "completely understandable kernel" that emerges in a patient's dialogue; that is, the simple answer or answers that emerge clear and self-evident to resolve internal complexities. This "completely understandable kernel," warns Lacan, is "inaccessible, inert, and stagnant with respect to any dialectic." He insists "elementary interpretation...comprises an element of meaning, but it's a repetitive one, it proceeds by reiteration [and]...is closed to all dialectical composition."[4]

This is a useful understanding through which we might re-consider Eco's diabolical taxidermist. Through the characters of Salon and Casaubon, Eco essentially depicts his

characters' discourse according to their openness to or
(fore)closure of the kind of dialectical composition Lacan
is getting at. Salon's relationship to the external world
is stagnant, and in his own mind it is also completely un-
derstandable; he is the paranoid fundamentalist for whom
all of life's mysteries can be stitched together by the to-
talizing thread of his worldview. Like the stuffed crea-
tures on his shelves, Salon's own discourse only pretends
to life; it is shielded from the processes of introjection
and intersubjective exchange that make up a living system.
His dialogue is ideologically cleansed of uncertainty, of
doubt, of concern for contingency or context; thus this
scene is the turning point for our hero. Casaubon is an
expectant father, and in an overt reference to *das Ding*--
i.e., the Freudian "Thing" that is the unattainable object
of primal repression--he and his Girlfriend Lia refer to
the growing fetus as "the Thing." Standing in the lab with
its morgue-like odor, Salon's mad soliloquies ringing in
his ears, Casaubon says, "I was thinking of the living
creature that throbbed in Lia's belly. A chilling thought
seized me. If the Thing dies, I said to myself, I want to
bury it. I want it to feed the worms underground and
enrich the earth. That's the only way I'll feel it's still
alive" (440-441).

Casaubon's realization, and his reference to the col-
laborative cycles of life and death, signal his internal
shift back into an open, dynamic system of thinking and in-
terrelating, as well as back into the web of nature and its
processes. The fog of paranoia begins to lift. As he
leaves the lab he affirms, "No, enough of this. No more
coincidences. I didn't stuff dead animals; I created liv-
ing animals" (445).

This tension, however, between what I would refer to
as "taxidermic discourse," (i.e., the paranoid stitching of
random events into an artificial meaning), and "living dis-
course," (i.e., something that bears an authenticity out-
side of a pre-scribed ideological *telos*) is complicated in
Foucault's Pendulum. The reader is not presented with a
simple hero/antihero in the figures of Casaubon and Salon,
because Signor Salon's fundamentalist modality is not mere-
ly an evil to be avoided. It is, instead, presented as a
dynamic that is to a grave extent unavoidable, and that un-
derlies any subjective quest for meaning or perceived at-
tachment to objective knowledge. For Casaubon and his
friends, the ordinary act of connecting dots of information
into logical patterns becomes a hypertrophic activity that
reaches a tipping point: "Everything points to everything
else," says Casaubon. "Our brains connect, connect until

we did it automatically" (467). Like Salon, Casaubon and his friends do not so much engage with as *assimilate* new information; every new fact is brought under the dominion of their imaginary ideas. In this mindset, no data ever disproves the paranoid theory that is taken for truth; all new information, no matter how contradictory or inconsistent, functions as yet further proof of the pre-existing beliefs.

Through Salon's taxidermy we are also provided with a corporeal metaphor for the prefabricated qualities of language, narrative, and text. We are always reconnecting and recombining pieces of language, laying pre-existing words onto the framework of grammar. Like all taxidermists we too have "great collections" of words, histories, ideas-whole narratives that we pull from the shelves of culture and reconstruct over the framework of our own lives.[5] This is the taxidermy of language: metaphor freezes, metonymy stitches.[6] Thus Casaubon's experience of the uncanny while looking at Salon's taxidermic specimens also gestures to a discursive question: what makes a *text*--which like Salon's owl, can never be other than a rearrangement of preexisting material--seem alive to us? What defies the taxidermy of language? What, for that matter, differentiates paranoid knowledge from something more authentic or engaged?

One answer again resides in the difference between object and process. In "The Freudian Thing" (*Écrits*, 1955), Lacan decries what he sees as the under-appreciation for *function* (as opposed to form) in understanding the active, intersubjective quality of Freudian relations. "The truth said, 'I speak,' writes Lacan. "In order for us to recognize this 'I' on the basis of the fact that it speaks, perhaps we should not have jumped on the 'I,' but should have paused at the facets of the speaking" (118).[7] It is the paranoid who fixates on the *ça* [of *ça parle*] as if it were a static object to be decoded, but it is at the interstices of intersubjective engagement that *speaking* occurs. What Freud "proposes for us to attain," writes Lacan in "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious," "is not that which can be the object of knowledge, but that...which creates our being" (103).[8] It is in the *process* of perpetual conveyance that meaning insists, in the activity of reaching ever towards something out of reach and creating, along the way, the myriad forms of expression that are the evidence of this activity, but never its goal. Casaubon realizes this at the end of the novel, when he gazes out over a beautiful hilltop behind which there is no code, no secret, no riddle; he realizes it too in Salon's gallery,

when he locates *ça* in the life processes sustaining "the Thing" in his lover's womb.

But beyond the process vs. object orientation, there is another critical element to overcoming this taxidermy of language. Here I suggest the other link between psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing introduced at the beginning of the chapter. The question centers upon how Jewish mystical writing and psychoanalysis understand linear time, particularly the relationship of the past to the present. Both systems are fundamentally concerned with escaping that "sclerotic eternity" of the preexisting sign (in the form of the symbol or the symptom) which threatens us with being repetitious and closed to social participation. To escape or forestall this stagnation, both psychoanalysis and Kabbalist writing paradoxically rely upon the past, which they conceive of as being reborn by entering into a working relationship with the present moment. What is considered archaic (but also outside of time, i.e., the timeless unconscious) must graft itself into the present, not only so that it may live anew, but also so that the present moment may be enlivened by the past. In this way Jewish mystical exegesis and psychoanalytic interpretation understand past and present according to a transferential structure, in which the past gives life to the now, and the present mo-

ment quotes the past in order that it may live. They affect an identity with each other. This identity between past and present, old and new, is also emblematic of a more general reverence one encounters in the shared ethos of psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing- an elevation of the sense of archaic heritage, of continuity and memory, that binds the human community.

One way to examine how Jewish mystical writing and psychoanalysis understand the past in relation to the present is to examine how they each theorize repetition, whether as a "return of the repressed," or, in the form of midrashic quoting (for instance), a return of the formerly-expressed. I would suggest that both psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing deploy strategies that are preoccupied with overcoming time, with bringing the past and the dead back to life by continually immortalizing them in the now. But unlike Signor Salon who "repairs the damage" of death by a kind of sartorial freezing, they each articulate a structural hermeneutic in which past and present collaborate to create a symptom or a symbol that is open and alive, that maintains a space to connect with new ideas and to continually transmit new meaning. It is a strategy that reflects the paramount importance of transference and intertextuality in both systems of thought.

First let us consider Freud's models for temporal or spatial transference. In these models, which describe the motor cause of symptom formation or dream formation, we have a recurring theme of compromise involving past/future or inside/outside. It is important to point out that for Freud, the inside/outside dialectic is closely implicated in the past/present one; in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as well as *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud consistently associates what is inside or internal to the psychical apparatus with the "archaic," the "ancient" or the "primordial childhood," and what is outside--in the external environment--with what is new and diverting. In these Freudian models for transference, a negotiation always takes place between the psychical apparatus and the external world.

In "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), Freud tells us that "the aim and end of all thought processes is thus to bring about a *state of identity*, the conveying of a cathexis...emanating from outside, into a neurone cathected from the ego."[9] Effecting a partial identification between what's *in here* and what's *out there* is a dynamic that we recognize again in dream-formation: in dreams, the timeless and immortal wishes of the unconscious have as their "aim and end" the creation of an *identity* between themselves and the recent material of daily life,

onto which they effect a transference. Together, old and
new create a dream. The dream's "emphasis upon recent and
upon infantile material," which bespeaks an *exchange* be-
tween primordial drives and external stimulus, is recogniz-
able in still another form in *Beyond the Pleasure Prin-
ciple*, where the interplay between the *ancient* and the *re-
cent* lies at the heart of Freud's single-celled model for
consciousness that is propelled by a paradoxical struggle
between primary, archaic drives and immediate "external
disturbing and diverting influences."[10]

The "indestructible wishes of childhood" which Freud
says mold the dreamer's future "into a perfect likeness of
the past" hearken, too, the primitive and instinctual "com-
pulsion to repeat" which Freud outlines in the same text.
Thus when Freud tells us in *The Interpretation of Dreams*
that "unconscious wishes exercise a compelling force upon
all later mental trends, a force which those trends are ob-
liged to fall in with or which they may perhaps endeavor to
divert and direct to higher aims" (642-3), he is describing
the trends of secondary process, i.e., consciousness, which
create the architecture of our lives through *detours* which
come into being only under the "compelling force" of the
instincts.[11]

What I wish to call to attention with these many supe-
rimposed references is that each of Freud's constructions
has the same collaborative temporal dynamic: the past en-
gages the future; death engages life. Timelessness and the
undead past are woven extimately (to borrow Lacan's term)
into the fabric of the present. Temporal boundaries be-
tween past and present are elided in these models, just as
they are elided in the symptom, through which something un-
dead has insisted into the very substance of the living.
The present quotes the past, so that they both may live.

  Midrash, too, is a strategy to create something living
out of what has come before. In *Intertextuality and the
Reading of Midrash* (1990), Daniel Boyarin explains that Mi-
drash (i.e., oral Torah) "performs its hermeneutic work by
quoting" (26); it is "a program of preserving the old by
making it new," a kind of radical intertextual reading of
the canon "in which potentially every part refers to and is
interpretable by every other part" (37, 16-17).[12] Midrash
quotes Torah in such a way as to enliven the present with
new layers of meaning, to make new revelation endlessly
possible. He writes:

> The relation between the midrash and the Bible pro-
> vides not only a model of the relation between text
> and interpretation but between the present and the
> past....

> The rabbis, faced with the disruption of their times, the destruction of the Temple and Jewish autonomy in Palestine, and with the necessity of appropriating scripture for their times, found in the creation of an explicitly and pervasively intertextual literature the ideal generative and reconstructive tool, which preserved the privileged position of the biblical text by releasing it from its position of immobilized totality [37-38].[v]

Through the strategy of midrash, history is brought into the present. It is a reading strategy that can conquer death, time, and history, explains Boyarin, "by effacing the difference between past, present and future" (125). Midrash does not cite the past for the sake of repetition and predictability. Instead the old signs, in the form of established narratives, stories, and signifiers, are liberated continually into a newness of being. Because the midrashist enters into a relationship with the text that allows the past and the present to breathe new life into each other, the structure of midrash can be understood as transferential, in the Freudian sense that an identification and exchange take place between old and new. "The midrash is not, then, a reflex of [tradi-

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[v] Boyarin is clear to point out that Kabbalistic midrash, in its aims, content, and understanding of language, differs significantly from Talmudic midrash and should not be conflated with it; for the purpose of this discussion, however, Boyarin's insights on the structure of midrash are particularly relevant, for it is precisely this structure that Kabbalist exegesis so successfully appropriates in the service of its mystical re-reading of Torah.

tional rabbinic] ideology," writes Boyarin, "but a dialogue with the biblical text conditioned and allowed by that ideology" (17). Citation is the basis of a dialectical relationship in which the activity of interpretation is privileged over its product. The transfer of meaning from past to present, through which new creative work emerges, relies upon the maintenance of this interaction. Most importantly, by privileging the activity of interpretation over the products of interpretation, midrash enables successive generations of readers to experience and participate in the construction of meaning, free from the tyranny of certainty granted to any single reading that has come before.

There is a remarkable passage in the Zohar, in which the Rabbis ask what it is exactly that makes idols--literal idols in the form of household statues--idolatrous? Is it just the simple, obvious difference between a graven image and the unrepresentable God of monotheism? How, in effect, do we know idolatry when we encounter it? The Rabbis suggest several different answers: that idols are associated with decay and filth, or that they were created through witchcraft or magic. These answers, however, are not satisfactory, and in the end Rabbi Yehuda offers an explanation of the difference.

The Zoharic passage begins with a citation from Genesis, after which the ḥaverim open their dialogue:

> *Laban had gone to shear his sheep, [and Rachel stole her* father's תרפים (*terafim*), *household idols*] (Genesis 31:19).

> Rabbi Yose said, "What are terafim? They were idolatry. Why are they called terafim? Out of disgrace, as we have learned: 'place of תורף (toref), pudenda.' And how do we know they were idolatry? As is written: Why did you steal my Gods? [Isaiah 60:30], and similarly: Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live! (ibid. 32). Now, Laban was steeped in all sorceries of the world, whereby he discovered whatever he wished to know."
>   Rabbi Ḥiyya said, "they were made by magic."
>   Rabbi Yose says, "By witchcraft."
>   Rabbi Yehuda said, "They were made only at precise times. Why are they called *terafim*? Because one strikes and then ארפי (*arpei*), withdraws, the hand, as is said: Now הרף (*heref*), *withdraw, your hand!* (2 Samuel 24:16). When a craftsman fashions them, an expert in moments and hours oversees him, saying: 'Now withdraw!' 'Now fashion!' You won't find another craft from which one withdraws like this.[13]

This is a very significant passage. What Rabbi Yehuda refers to when he says *an expert in moments and hours oversees him* is the presence of an astrologer, who oversees the artist as he constructs his idols, directing the artist exactly when to craft and when to stop crafting in order to attract propitious astral powers. Making a pun on the Hebrew words *arpei, heref*, and *terafim*, Yehuda links the words for "idol" and "withdraw," which allows him to conclude the substantive difference between an idolatrous sta-

tue and authentic artistic representation: *You won't find another craft from which one withdraws like this*. The artist's act of *withdrawal* is what constitutes idolatry for Rabbi Yehuda. The idolatrous craft is the craft from which genuine creative or intellectual engagement is ceased, or has come under the dominion of an external regulation- in this case, the astrologer. The idol-maker's craft is no longer about crafting, but about a crafted object; it is an object that, unlike other aesthetic products, does not ask you to read any veiled discourse or to participate in any measure of interpretation. Instead, the idol-maker reproduces the directives of the astrologers, who adhere to the fixed and predictable map of the night sky. This sort of static, codified art form is a far cry from the creative dialogue between midrashist and canon, or between the wandering Rabbis of the *chavuroth* and their beloved Torah. In the above passage, their citation of Genesis, Isaiah, and Samuel is not for the purpose of slavish adherence to preformulated text, but for the construction of revelatory discourse out of the past. "The paradoxes of quotation, implicated in the 'general dialectic of cultural processes,'" writes Boyarin, "were utilized by the Rabbis as a way of *avoiding* the seeming necessity of 'choosing between innovation and the duplication of canonized exem-

plars.' The midrash realizes its goal by means of a herme-
neutic of recombining pieces of the canonized exemplar into
a new discourse" (38).

   The metaphor of stellar constellations is prevalent in
the Zohar. Kabbalistic midrash sees itself as drawing new
constellations of meaning, new stories and explanations
from scriptural points of light, often to the exclusion or
contradiction of previous scripture, including the cano-
nized Midrash, i.e., oral Torah of which Boyarin speaks.
But the Zohar's reconstructive technique is unlike that of
the aforementioned idolater, or of a Signor Salon, because
its hand is never *withdrawn* from the activity of scriptural
exegesis. The bottomless feeling, the sense of infinity of
association--much like the infinity of association in dream
analysis--is a product of this hermeneutic.

   The constellation is also an apt metaphor because it
crystallizes the activity of judgment, and of exclusion, at
work in the creative process. How else could elaborate
pictures materialize in the night sky if we did not ignore
the other innumerable points of light? We all construct
our own constellations of meaning, carving in one direction
to the exclusion of others; the pattern that emerges traces
the shape of our own lives, our beliefs and our choices
over linear time.

In Freudian psychoanalysis, the faculty of judgment is understood as a latter iteration of the primary censorship constitutive of consciousness. Without internal limitations and perceptual barriers the individual subject dissolves into psychosis, an effacement of the boundaries necessary for psychic health. As pointed out in the first chapter, the need to separate from and repress Otherness in order to exist is a primary ontological supposition of both Freud and Jewish mysticism. But this creates a problem, because it locates what could come to function as an essentializing modality at the very core of their understanding of subjectivity. If an essentializing modality is bound up in the subject's psychical nature, by what mechanisms does the individual within the social body disrupt what is arguably an innate tendency to totalize when constructing meaning? How do we not default to this modality in conscious life and social relations?

Consider the academy as a practical exemplar: how does the social theorist or the academic scholar not make idols of their ideologies? How do we not slouch into blinding and excessive adherence to our favored frames of reference? What determines whether a subject's relationship to information has become predictable and codified, or otherwise corrupted by forces of repetition? How, like Eco's hero

Casaubon, we can continue to create "living animals" rather than repetitive, taxidermic golems? I would argue that Kabbalism and psychoanalysis exhibit an awareness of, and sensitivity to, these sorts of questions, which center upon what they both recognize as the inherent aggression of meaning-making.

To explore this further I would like to look first at the figure of Abraham, and the Zoharic understanding of evil, and then at Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.

"Go You Forth"

For the Jewish mystic, the divine attribute of Judgment and its proper deployment in creativity is a theme that plays out through the figure of Abraham, the first Jew. In Kabbalist tradition Abraham is usually associated with *Chesed* (loving kindness), however it is only because *Chesed* is held in appropriate balance with *Gevurah* (power, which encompasses *din*, harsh judgment), that Abraham is able to *become*, to bring into being, that which God requires of him. Abraham is also a destroyer of idols: Jewish tradition holds that Abraham's father, Terah, was an idol-maker, and that the young Abraham (then Abram) smashed all the idols in his father's shop in an act that was at

once violent and intelligent. The Jewish faith began when Abraham broke away from what was imitative and from what his father did before him. He is a figure through whom the persistent tension between loving kindness and harsh judgment is also evidenced: The Torah verses in which God exhorts Abraham to "Go forth" [Heb.: *Lech lecha*] is one the Zohar expounds upon with great enthusiasm.

Opening with the Torah passage, the Zohar reads:

> *YHVH said to ABRAM, "*לֶךְ לְךָ* (Lekh lekha), Go you forth!" (Genesis 12:1)*
> YHVH said to Abram, "Go you forth [alt. go for yourself] from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.
>
> "Once the blessed Holy One saw his arousal and desire, He immediately revealed Himself to him, saying: לֶךְ לְךָ (*Lekh lekha*), Go to yourself, to know yourself, to refine yourself.
> "*From your land* –from that habitation to which you clung. *From your birthplace*—from that wisdom through which you envision and gauge your birth, the precise moment you were born, under which star and constellation. *From your father's house*—Do not consider your father's house, whether you are rooted in your father's house to succeed in the world. So, *Lekh Lekha, Go you forth!*—from this wisdom, this speculation."[14]

In the Zoharic explication, Abraham is exhorted to abandon all he thinks he knows, his history and his heritage. He is to disregard any astrological predictions or preconceptions. He is to begin life in complete exile. One of the

most interesting, and also poignant, elements of this pas-
sage is how it exhorts Abraham to leave behind the *wisdom*
which precedes him: a reverent word for something on which
he is asked to turn his back. But Abraham's creativity de-
pends upon a decisive break with the past, and the Zohar's
enthusiasm for this passage is perhaps also self-
reflective, a metaphor for the Jewish mystical tradition
itself- for the activity of the Zohar and its heretical
progenitor the Bahir, which go forth from the wisdom of
their own conventional antecedents with the courage and
spirit of Abraham, marking for Judaism a new beginning.

The injunction to go forth from "the precise moment
you were born, under which star and constellation" is taken
up with force in another passage that re-imagines God's
words to Abraham. The yoke of astrological destiny does
not matter, assures God, when met with creative action and
trust in the Infinite Divine:

> "Abraham saw from his horoscope that he would not
> engender children. What is written? ויוצא *(Va-yotse),*
> *He took (him)...outside* (Genesis 15:5). The blessed
> Holy One said to him, 'צא *(Tse)*, Leave, your astrolog-
> ical speculations! Abram does not engender; Abraham
> does engender.' The blessed Holy One said to him, 'Do
> not gaze at that, but rather at the mystery of my
> name: כה *(Koh), So, shall your seed be* (ibid.)'—
> mystery of the holy name; from there a son was linked
> to him, not from the other aspect. *Koh*—the aspect
> emerging from the aspect of *Gevurah*, from which Isaac
> emerged. That aspect of *Gevurah* is called *Koh*, be-

cause from there fruit and verdure enter the world,
not from the aspect of stars and constellations below.
      "Then, *He trusted in YHVH* (ibid. 6)—cleaving
above, not cleaving below. *He trusted in YHVH*-- not
in stars and constellations... *He trusted in YHVH*—in
that rung granted to him, that from there seed would
reach him so he could engender in the world."

                          [Matt, *The Zohar* Volume II, 67-68]

With a single act--changing Abram's name to Abraham--
Abraham's whole life is open to a new set of possibilities,
including what he thought was impossible- becoming a fa-
ther. As discussed in the earlier chapter on the *Sefer ha
Bahir,* there is for the Kabbalist no last immutable word;
just as no fixed constellation dictates Abraham's fate, no
word or name or other identifier is ever closed to the po-
tential for dialectical engagement. Rather than fixating
on the crushing limitation dictated by his horoscope, Abra-
ham is told to cleave to that aspect of *Gevurah* by which
the fruit of creative action enters the world. The Zohar
celebrates this active construction of a new life, a new
way of seeing, and rejects the adherence to old narratives
and everything that functions to reinforce them. It is on-
ly through the dimension of *Gevurah,* encompassing the qual-
ities of judgment, consciousness, and separation, that Ab-
raham overcomes the idolatrous enslavement to the constel-
lations of his birth, and is able to carve a new picture of

his future. This also underscores the paradoxical nature
of *Gevurah*. Cleaving to the creative power of *Gevurah,* Abraham thus gains the capacity to engender--both spiritually
and biologically--that *Gevurah* offers. At the same time,
Abraham must not be beholden to the products of *Gevurah*,
i.e., the signs and symbols bound into the material order
in the form of static constellations and names, for these
are objects and signs which, when identified with too completely, bind Abraham in the way the idol-maker is bound by
the limitations he sees written in the stars. Such is the
paradoxical dynamic of creative works: every revelation inheres in occlusion; every stroke of the pen collapses the
infinite potential represented by the blank page. Creative
products exist by the activity of proscription and limitation. The Zohar underscores the physicality of this action
with very corporeal metaphors:

> Twenty-two elemental letters. God engraved them,
> carved them, weighed them, permuted them, and transposed them, forming with them everything formed and
> everything destined to be formed....
> When Abraham our father, peace unto him, gazed—
> looking, seeing, probing, understanding, engraving,
> carving, permuting, and forming—he succeeded in creation. Immediately God manifested to him, embracing
> him, kissing him on the head, calling him "Abraham, my
> beloved."   [Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah*, 102] [15]

In order for the Infinite Divine to manifest in his life, Abraham must work- physically, intellectually, and spiritually, carving and sculpting in one fashion to the exclusion of another. This is Abraham's responsibility as the first member of God's covenant community, to participate with and to enliven the words and symbols that surround him in the world. "What is written in Torah?" asks the Zohar: "It is not an empty word מכם (mi-kem), for you (Deut. 32:47); and if it is empty, it is mi-kem, from you- because of you!" (Matt, Volume II, 410). In accessing the ambivalent nature of *Gevurah,* Abraham achieves communion with God through the emergence of the bound signifiers of the alephbet, the partial representations of the Signified that are the building blocks of life.

But to return to the problem mentioned earlier, there is a fundamental aggression involved in the exercise of individual judgment and creative work. The Kabbalist connection between judgment and evil is therefore pertinent. In Kabbalist thought, the relationship between good and evil is the dialectical basis of the material world. (In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Freud takes great pains to disavow any vestige of mysticism when he, too, proposes that the dialectic of good and evil, i.e., the forces of creation and destruction, or, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, together constitute

what he calls the paradoxical death drive that is the basis

of life).[16] The philosophy of evil in Jewish mystical writ-

ing is complicated and this study by no means undertakes a

complete discussion. What is pertinent, however, to this

analysis, are three characteristics that the Zohar asso-

ciates with evil. These I wish to mention for their reson-

ance with Freudian psychoanalysis, and because they offer

what I believe is a critical ethical linchpin linking these

bodies of thought. These characteristics are *absolutism*,

imitation, and *lack of context*.

The Zohar, as previously noted, sees evil as originat-

ing in the divine dimension of *Gevurah,* which is mitigated

by *Chesed*, the attribute of loving-kindness. Scholem,

Green, and other Kabbalist scholars explain that when the

quality of judgment escapes the demands of love--which en-

compass the bonds of fellowship, charity, and community--it

cannot be trusted; it becomes a perversion of justice,

wreaking destruction without cause.[17] Evil in the Zohar "is

seen in an act which transforms the dimension of judgment

into an absolute"; it is a hypertrophic breakaway that

takes on a life of its own, "in mocking imitation of the

Divine world."[18] Scholem writes that in a mundane sense,

evil is associated with a world of false contexts, a force

that maintains itself in isolation.[19]

These are very specific characterizations of evil and they are compelling from a standpoint of comparison with Freud. In defining evil, Jewish mysticism cites an activity that is inauthentic and decontextualized; it imitates divine consciousness but is not part of it. It is a quality that functions in the absolute, shielded from any dynamic exchange with other dimensions of Divine being. Evil inheres in the faculty of judgment that propels all creation, but, having taken on a hypertrophic life of its own, it is no longer part of a living system, instead enacting its unmitigated singularity without any symbolic context.

I venture to point out that this nexus of characteristics is remarkably familiar to Freud. In fact they constitute Freud's own understanding of the *evil* force of destructive *thanatos* in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* alluded to earlier. Struggling to comprehend the repetition compulsion seen in the hysterical neuroses, Freud zeroes in on the repetitive and decontextualized action that only imitates the creative work of *Eros*; having taken on a life of its own, however, the symptom is closed to any dialectic-any partial identity with the *Umwelt* or world outside itself. Thus existing in the absolute, the seeming inescapableness of the repetition-compulsion takes on (to quote Freud), a "*daemonic*" quality. Setting Freud's uncanny (if

satisfying) choice of language aside, it is my sense that both he and the Jewish mystics converge here upon the same phenomenon of human psychical life, each metaphorizing (albeit in separate and unique languages), a condition in which the human or Divine Subject suffers being radically cut-off from the Other, shielded from the identifications that constitute the subject through a living social web—existing, as it were, in a perpetual "short-circuit." Freud's project, and the project of psychoanalysis, is to release the subject from this short-circuit and from the repetitive hysterical symptom into something less delusionary, less dominated by primary process, so that he or she may enter the *long* circuit that is life, unencumbered by the isolating misery of hysteria. The characteristics of Freud's "daemonic" repetition come together with the *demonic* realm of the Zohar precisely in their sustainment of the repetition and isolation that keep the subject cut off from the Other. Here it is possible to draw a connection back, to fundamentalist ideology, which at its core is a modern form of *idolatry*.

Consider again the Zohar's idol-maker whose every hand-crafted figurine meets the demands of his astrologer: the finished idols are predicated on an inflexible coordination of meaning; the aesthetic product must conform to

specifications. This deadening hyper-regulation is also characteristic of the intellectual products of dogmatism: radical ideologies, sustained by the dogmatic regulation on thought, are worldviews that assign to a single constellation of meaning the status of finished, immutable truth-the final word on a subject, now closed to the unpredictable intervention of anything or anyone. This is *idolatry*. And in this sense, any of our favored frames of reference can become idolatrous: Marxism, postcolonialism, feminism, even monotheism, which as we saw in chapter two is one of the sub-textual accusations levied by the early Kabbalists against establishment Judaism.

Understanding, like thought itself, is an ongoing process that requires openness to the Other and continual engagement with new information. At those ideological dead-ends where the subject's understanding attains the fantasy of completion, something in the process of living and being in community is short-circuited. We are then left, like Eco's taxidermist, with idols and corpses instead of ideological *positions* and a corpus of work that continues to breathe and to discover new dimensions of understanding, new questions, and most importantly, new areas of opacity.

The Zohar includes a parable about a man who lived in the cliffs and knew nothing of those in the town. He sowed wheat and ate only the raw kernels. Rabbi Shim'on tells the *ḥaverim*:

> "One day he went into town and was offered good bread. The man asked, 'What's this for?'
> They replied, 'It's bread, to eat.'
> He asked, 'And what's this made of?'
> They replied, 'Wheat.'
> Afterward they brought him cakes kneaded with oil. He tasted them and asked, 'And what are these made of?'
> They replied, 'Wheat.'
> Later they brought him royal pastry kneaded with honey and oil. He asked, 'And what are these made of?'
> They replied, 'Wheat.'
> He said, 'Surely I am king of all these, since I eat the essence of all of these!'
> Because of...that opinion, he knew nothing of the delights of the world, which were lost to him. So it is with one who grasps the principle but is unaware of all those delectable delights deriving, diverging from that principle."[20]

To attain one dimension of understanding is not to understand all things in all contexts. The *ḥaverim* who together explicate the secret meanings of Torah achieve through their shared insight an experience of internal truth as it is revealed through the text, but this experience of revelation represents only a contingent truth, a particular form of meaning that does not foreclose other truths that emerge through the process of scriptural interpretation.

The passage also speaks to the value of mediation and diversity over essentialism and purity, that is, a fixation on the indigestible kernel that defines all-things-wheat instead of the many processed forms of that kernel which bring delight. Moreover, the illusion of intellectual purity and of complete mastery, as seen in the passage, is just that— an imaginary construct, that leaves the individual bereft of the willingness to learn, to think, and to experience newness. Thus the kernel in Jewish mystical writing is only relevant in that it is the impenetrable "raw" presence around which the work of scriptural exegesis produces meaning. The midrashic strategy is to relate signifiers with other signifiers, not signifiers to an Ultimate Signified.[21] In Kabbalistic tradition Torah is always and already a processed and mediated entity.

In "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism," Scholem explains that the notion of an original, written Torah is a wholly mystical concept. Written Torah is embodied only through the power of Oral Torah, through which the concealed Divine is communicated and understood:

> What we call written Torah has itself passed through the medium of the oral Torah, it is no longer a form concealed in white light; rather, it has emerged from the black light, which determines and limits and so denotes the attribute of divine severity and judgment. Everything that we perceive in the fixed forms of the

> Torah, written in ink on parchment, consists, in the
> last analysis, of interpretations or definitions of
> what is hidden. *There is only an oral Torah...*and the
> written Torah is a purely mystical concept. It is em-
> bodied in a sphere that is accessible to prophets
> alone. It was, to be sure, revealed to Moses, but
> what he gave to the world as the written Torah has ac-
> quired its present form by passing through the medium
> of the oral Torah.... In the mystical organism of the
> Torah the two spheres overlap, and there is no written
> Torah, free from the oral element, that can be known
> or conceived of by creatures who are not prophets.[22]

There is no fixed form that is not also a veil; for the

Kabbalist, the "Real" Torah is analogous to *das Ding*, just

as for psychoanalysis nothing that emerges in discourse or

in the social exchange represents transparent significa-

tion. This is why, for instance, the process of dream in-

terpretation is far more crucial than any originary notion

about what, precisely, was dreamt. Even recollections of

dream material in waking life have passed through the fil-

ter of consciousness and are mediated by the act of remem-

bering; meaning is elicited *through* verbalization and

transferential associations, i.e., the activity between

signifier and signifier.

On this subject Jacques Lacan offers some of his best

explication of Freudian theory. In "The Function of Lan-

guage in Psychoanalysis" (1953), Lacan explains that trans-

ference has a constitutive effect; that is, our subjectivi-

ty is constituted in a relationship with the Other. The subject constitutes him or herself in his or her own quest for truth. "It is in the intersubjectivity of the 'we'... where the value of language resides," writes Lacan, "not as a system of simply informing but of evoking." *Désir*, which makes itself recognized in the paths of intersubjective experience, is propelled in language, "which effects transference and seeks reply."[23]

What Lacan says about the constitutive nature of transference, as not informing, but rather *evoking* and *seeking reply*, is vitally important. How do we distinguish between the repetitive, imitative recitation of a product--an activity of speaking or writing that is bound by imaginary ideological constraint--and something more genuine, a living enactment of the unconscious in the now that invigorates the now, that is not just the "daemonic" re-enactment of the drive without any contextual field, without openness to the unpredictable intervention of the Other in the trajectory of that drive? Lacan refers to the *evocative* quality of language that compels response. This seems particularly important, as it suggests the difference between repetition and authenticity (repeating and working through?) is not so much manifest in an external quality of speech or writing but in a psycho-spiritual activity between self and

Other in which the Other calls to mind, brings into con-
sciousness, that which the subject cannot evoke in him or
herself alone. If subjects constitute themselves in a
quest for truth, they do so by encountering and identifying
with this unpredictable Other, which allows renewed access
to their own interiority and which prevents their journey
from circling back, from falling into the gravity well of
repetition that bereaves the subject of experiencing the
wonder and astonishment of their own creativity.

Jorge Luis Borges allows us to consider this nexus of
ideas in his beautiful short story, "Pierre Menard, Author
of the Quixote." In the story, the title character under-
takes to write the *Quixote*. Menard's goal is not to tran-
scribe the text, but to actually *write* it, to produce it
through his own experience:

> He did not want to compose another *Quixote*--which is
> easy--but *the Quixote itself*. Needless to say, he
> never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the
> original; he did not propose to copy it. His admira-
> ble intention was to produce a few pages which would
> coincide--word for word and line for line--with those
> of Miguel de Cervantes....
>   The first method he conceived was relatively sim-
> ple. Know Spanish well, recover the Catholic faith,
> fight against the Moors or the Turk, forget the histo-
> ry of Europe between the years 1602 and 1918, *be* Mi-
> guel de Cervantes. Pierre Menard studied this proce-
> dure...but discarded it as too easy....To be, in some
> way, Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less ar-
> duous to him--and, consequently, less interesting--

> than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quix-*
> *ote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard.
> [39-40][24]

And indeed, Menard succeeds in his intellectual journey,

writing two chapters of the *Quixote* and a fragment of

another!

But what are we to make of Pierre Menard's composi-

tion? Is it just a replica, a static reproduction of life—

a "dead owl" like those stuffed by Eco's taxidermist? Or

do we imagine that Pierre Menard's *Quixote* is a living text

that engages and evokes- one that defies, somehow, mere

taxidermic reconstruction? The suggestion that Menard's

Quixote is a *living* text insists in the story, and it

emerges, remarkably, from under the dead weight of an unre-

liable narrator, to whom Menard writes:

> "Thinking, analyzing, inventing...are not anomalous
> acts; they are the normal respiration of the intelli-
> gence. To glorify the occasional performance of that
> function, to hoard ancient and alien thoughts, to re-
> call with incredulous stupor that the *doctor universa-*
> *lis* thought, is to confess our laziness or our barbar-
> ity. Every man should be capable of all ideas and I
> understand that in the future this will be the case."
> [44]

Pierre Menard's *Quixote* is born of the natural processes of

life; his intelligence breathes the text into being. There

is no dynamic of repetition involved. In fact Menard's

text, though identical to Cervantes', cannot accurately be called a *re*-production.[25] Menard's journey and its creative fruits are every bit as authentic as those of Cervantes. At first "Pierre Menard" seems to undercut the privileged place of the author, but in another sense the tale uplifts the authorship that each of us bears in our own lives: the interpenetration of discursive processes and life processes in "Pierre Menard" defy any sense of hopelessness in the face of repetition, whether in social history at large, or in the intimate experience of our own lives. The text be-seeches us to *take up* the responsibility of our position in this world, it exhorts us to *live*, even as the tapestry of our lives unfolds into narratives seen countless times be-fore. "The certitude that everything has been written," laments the narrator of another Borges tale, "negates us or turns us into phantoms."[26] The alternative to existing as phantoms is to live the text of our lives, even if it's been lived before; to create a text, even if it's been created before. In the sense that Lacan says: "ça parle" [it speaks], and urges us to focus upon the *parle* and not the ç*a*, Pierre Menard says, "I write the Quixote," and it is the writing, not the *Quixote* that constitutes Menard's creation. Borges also offers a unique twist on Santner's idea of infinitized language (chapter two), for in "Pierre

Menard," even the same signs are not the same signs; his text is an act of revelation that only appears to its reader to be an act of repetition.

There is, incidentally, something "taxidermic" in this story, but it does not reside in Pierre Menard's *Quixote*. It resides in the narrator-critic, who, armed with static bits of academic knowledge stitched together by the conventions of his trade, is closed to any real dialectical engagement. At one point the unreliable narrator thumbs his nose at a passage of Cervantes' while lavishly praising the identical passage of Menard's. To the eyes of any reader these passages are exactly the same, but the narrator-critic, intent on applying his pedantic theories and puffed up literary criticism, claims to see only brilliance in Menard's version and dullness in Cervantes'! The narrator, like the paranoid or the fundamentalist, reveals that he can only relate to text through the narrow lens of his totalizing point of view. Ironically, it is the narrator who misses the vital lesson imparted by Menard, whom he claims to venerate: "There is no exercise of the intellect," he smugly tells the reader, "which is not, in the final analysis, useless" (43). Of course he's gotten it backwards, as it is precisely the "respiration of the intellect" that brings to life what was otherwise mere repetition, and it

is his attempt at a masterful critique that is rendered
useless. Psychoanalysis teaches the same lesson: what
Freud "proposes for us to attain" writes Lacan, "is not
that which can be the object of knowledge, but that...which
creates our being."[27]

A critical point that begins to emerge here is that
for Jewish mystical writing and for psychoanalysis, the
transferential structure of human exchanges--which is a
centerpiece of their ontological beliefs--is bound up with
social responsibility. There is an ethical dimension in-
volved in working through the imaginary, ideologically dri-
ven, imitative relationship to knowledge and to the Other.

Ethical links between psychoanalytic theory and Jewish
thought have been productively examined by scholars in re-
cent years. In particular Marcus (2007) argues for an ap-
proach to psychoanalysis inspired by French-Jewish philoso-
pher Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), in which the analysand's
responsibility to the Other takes a central role in restor-
ing psychic health.[28] Oppenheim (2006) also points to Levi-
nas, among others, in his work on Jewish philosophy and
psychoanalysis, explaining that the ethical demand of re-
sponsibility to the Other is, in a Levinasian view, placed
prior to individual self-regard in the therapeutic quest.[29]
In his study of Spinoza and Freud, Kaplan (1977) points out

that for both theorists the movement from pathology to understanding of the passions causing distress requires an active participation on the part of the sufferer, which can only be had in community, through the process of socialization that allows man to become a moral being fully accountable for his actions.[30] Most notably, Eric Santner elaborates a unique theory of ethics and community by reading Freud in conjunction with Franz Rosenzweig's principle work, *The Star of Redemption* in *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (2001). Santner argues that for both Freud and Rosenzweig, "the biblical traditions inaugurate a form of life structured precisely around an openness to the alterity, the uncanny strangeness, of the Other as the very locus of a universality-in-becoming."[31] By placing them in dialogue, Santner's analysis allows us to "rethink what it means to be genuinely open to another human being or culture and to share and take responsibility for one's implication in the dilemmas of difference."[32] Santner's formulation of the Freudian-Rosenzweigian subject who bears an "answerability to the Other with an unconscious" is particularly resonant to the linkage between Kabbalah and Freud, and will be examined in more detail.

In the meantime however, I believe that an ethical philosophy linking psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writ-

ing can, in addition to these positions, also be drawn

through an examination of Freud's *Group Psychology and the*

Analysis of the Ego (1921), a text that deals directly with

the relationship of the individual to the larger community,

and that has significant implications for an ethical phi-

losophy of social life. In *Group Psychology* Freud de-

scribes the regressive character of the group, which, like

the dream or the hysterical symptom, has come under the do-

mination of primary process: in groups contradictory be-

liefs exist side by side (i.e., "the Jew is subhuman"; "the

Jew secretly rules the world"); exaggerated feelings over-

take rational thought. If, for instance, a mild annoyance

occurs during the day it may be converted to a dream of the

person's death at night; in the same vein, if a suspicion

is expressed in the group it immediately becomes a certain-

ty (14).[33] Individual differentiation washes away in favor

of regressive coalescence and identification with other

group members, especially through the group leader. In

groups, "the individual can throw off the repressions of

civilization"; the necessary repressions of culture thus

lifted, the individual is no longer restrained by the lim-

its of conscience (9-10, 12-13). In groups, "individuals

equate themselves with other members" (43). This efface-

ment of the ego, this diminution of the faculty of individ-

ual judgment, is likened by Freud to the regressive short-circuit in which the organism self-annihilates in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Seeking a perfect, oceanic feeling of sameness with other group members, the subject no longer exercises the social responsibility bound up in secondary process, that is, the responsibility of taking up their own frame of reference, i.e., of being an individual. They abnegate this responsibility to civil society and instead re-create an illusion of absolute truth. But all the group creates is lifeless, paranoid knowledge. There is no short-cut through culture, through the requirements of civilization, that does not have violent consequences.

Freud's insights in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* are so useful because one need not be in a physical or formal group to come under the influence of collective thinking- thinking that is ideologically driven and closed to the particularity of the Other who is outside the closed system which the group maintains. Signor Salon, Eco's diabolical taxidermist, is under the influence of a collective way of thinking, i.e., an essentialist ideology. Salon believes that one can *know* the *unknowable* and the nonexistent. Like the Zoharic parable of the man who sowed wheat, his every curiosity is instantly satisfied with the illusion of having attained the universal kernel of truth.

But without the difference, which Freud points out, between subject and object--between internally cathected wish and external realities--there is no remainder of drive to displace in the social network, no partial identification with the Other, no *Eros,* as Freud calls it, to propel the healthy libidinal ties that constitute a real community. Everything the fundamentalist creates is deadened, and again Salon is the perfect portrait of such an ideologue-recall Casaubon's words: "I could not decide whether he was a living being or a masterpiece of his own art." Salon's character embodies death, and from an intersubjective standpoint he is, in fact, dead, for his individual ego and the requisite exercise of judgment is completely effaced. All information that enters his field of perception sinks into the black hole, the gravity of utter conformity: from diversity to monolith, all things sink into one in a psyche such as his.

Here again Borges provides a helpful elaboration of these principles in his tale of "The Zahir," which serves as an eerie counterpoint to "Pierre Menard." In contrast to the latter story, "The Zahir" theorizes a creative and psychical death. The narrator (a Borges persona) comes into possession of a coin, the Zahir, which has a haunting and hallucinatory effect on whoever sees it. Borges be-

comes obsessed with the image of the Zahir and investigates the legends surrounding it. The Zahir is, according to those legends, the "Rending of the Veil," (163) and there is "no created thing in this world which could not take on" its properties (162). The precise impact a Zahir has on its bearer is suggested from the very first: when Borges receives the coin he immediately begins associating it with a number of other mythic or symbolic coins throughout the ages. Any difference between these disparate coins is effaced or forgotten by his compulsion to group them together. The event is telling, for indeed the Zahir does have a regressive effect on human beings: it dissolves the boundaries of subjectivity and the faculty of judgment. "In a school at Shiraz," Borges writes, "there was a copper astrolabe 'fashioned in such a way that whoever looked once upon it could thereafter think of nothing else; whence the king ordered that it should be sunk in the deepest part of the sea, lest men forget the universe'" (161-162).

It is the "veil" of consciousness that the Zahir so diabolically rends; the censoring function which buries the Signified--whether by this we mean God, the Primal father, *das Ding*--beneath the autonomous perceiving subject. The King's order that the astrolabe be sunk into the sea "lest men forget the universe" suggests not only the hypnotizing

effects that make men forget civilization and the external world, but also a forgetting of the barriers that constitute our *internal* world- the self that is a microcosm of the universe, and that cannot exist without the inhibitions that create a coherent sense of ego. Having fallen under the Zahir's beguiling sway, the Borges narrator writes, "I shall no longer perceive the universe: I shall perceive the Zahir. From thousands of images I shall pass to one" (164).

There is something pleasing about the sense of oceanic oneness the Zahir offers: the single, perfect idea; the ultimate equation. But while it might seem compelling in a mystical sense, in the realities of human culture the hypnotic fixation with a single image, a single idea, or a single norm, is nightmarish, for the precise reasons Freud enumerates in *Group Psychology*. The loss of the sense of the limits of individuality, and the compulsion to remain in harmony with the many are, like the hypnotic effects of the Zahir, a foreclosure of intellect and creativity. To internalize the group's "Zahir," i.e., to adopt its single-minded ideology or goal, is to negate the responsibility of being an individual within the social body. Unlike many other forms of mysticism, including the Merkavah mysticism that preceded Kabbalah, the practice of Jewish mystical ex-

egesis in the Bahir and the Zohar is not at all preoccupied with effacement of the ego or mystical union with the Divine; rather, it is squarely concerned with the inscription of the Infinite Divine into the fabric of the living, by the activity of the living, with the "binding work" of the intellect and the imagination.

Freud also understood that there is no such thing as a perfect, quiescent *Zahir*. *In Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) Freud underscores that aggression is primary; no community includes all- there must be someone or something left over to receive a group's aggression (70-71).[34] Freud notes that the Devil is the agent of discharge for those believing in a perfect God (79). By the same psychic mechanism, we might extrapolate to say that the maligned and persecuted Other (the Jew, the homosexual, etc.) functions as the agent of discharge for those demanding ideological purity. When it comes to radicalism and the attendant hatred it inspires, *the purity delusion itself is the problem*, not just the ideological platform. Consider for instance that both the left and the right of the American political spectrum are equally capable of harboring intense antisemitism: those afflicted from the right worship at the altar of an exclusive Christian God who denies salvation to billions of non-Christian souls; those afflicted from the

left proffer a perverse form of post-colonialism that excuses Islamic fascism and the attendant torture of women, homosexuals, and the errant blogger. Their agent of discharge does not represent a site of identification and ongoing transference; instead it is a short-circuit, in which all meaning stops on the hated Other, whose presence neatly explains all the world's ills.

Both psychoanalysis and Kabbalism resist this kind of short-circuiting essentialism. Their mutual goal, or preoccupation if you will, is in moving away (as Freud said) from haunting hysteria, away from "daemonic" repetition, into productive transference, or in the case of the Kabbalist, away from rote learning and unchanging meaning passed down by our fathers into a living Torah that propels creative lines of thought. Their formulations for interhuman and inter-textual relations cannot abide incestuous, quiescent inertia or pretensions to absolute truth because they require an active encounter and exchange with the Other. Here Eric Santner provides exceptional insight: what he terms the "*psychotheology of everyday life*" is a concept he asks be understood "along the lines of the psychoanalytic conception of 'working through,' the affect-laden process of traversing and dismantling defensive fantasies, the structured undeadness that keeps us from opening to the

midst of life and the neighbor/stranger who dwells there with us" (23). He writes:

> If there is a 'Jewish' dimension to psychoanalytic thought, it is this: the cure is indeed a kind of 'exodus,' only not one out of Egypt; it offers, rather an exodus out of the various forms of Egyptomania that so profoundly constrain our lives and, while sustaining a level of adaptation, keep us from opening to the midst of life.   [45]

Egyptomania can be understood in terms of the various repetition compulsions "that sustain idolatrous attachments," i.e., that cannot offer an experience of authentic being-in-community because they don't involve recognition of the neighbor/stranger who shares our own radical Otherness (115).

Here we might consider two important qualities that emerge in the discursive and social formulae of Kabbalism and psychoanalysis, qualities that are implicit in their understanding of intersubjective relations. These are the qualities of *willingness* and *curiosity*. Consider that fundamentalism is characterized by *in*tolerance towards outsiders. At bottom, group psychology displays an intolerance of the life processes themselves, of engaging what's "out there," the *umwelt*, the Other. Freud explains that the group relies upon regressive libidinal ties to other group

members that are unlike the social ties which support com-
munity-in-civilization (*kultur*). The group member imagines
that s/he is identified completely with the other as lead-
er, instead of doing the ethical work of being-in-society,
of reaching out to the Other with whom only a partial iden-
tification can be effected, but through whom a more authen-
tic experience of one's own self *through* the Other can oc-
cur.

        The qualities of willingness, and of curiosity, are
implicit in this kind of inter-human relationship. As the
well-known Orthodox Rabbi Schmuely Boteach explains:

> All boredom stems from the loss of Eros. Eroticism,
> far from being something only sexual, is curiosity in-
> carnate. To be erotically inflamed is to want to know
> something completely and to connect with it deeply.
> The foundation of eroticism is limitless possibility.
> It is built on the premise that all things have infi-
> nite depth and require further investigation.[35]

In the Kabbalist's decidedly erotic relationship to the
text, he imagines himself a lover of Torah, probing, seek-
ing, ever curious and open to new revelation. The opposite
of this playful Eros can be located in the ideologue for
whom the Other has no depth and no mystery and requires no
investigation. For Jewish mysticism and psychoanalysis,
imbalance propels any search for understanding; it too is
"curiosity incarnate." "The difference between [an] idea

and the approaching perception," writes Freud, "gives occasion for the process of thought, which reaches its end when the superfluous... perceptual cathexes have been conveyed...with this, identity is attained."[36] For there to be any curiosity at all, there must be a *difference* between the internal idea and the external thing to be perceived. For the ideologue there is no such difference. If the quality of curiosity abides in the secondary drives, i.e., of consciousness and judgment, then the fundamentalism and group-think Freud characterizes in *Group Psychology* represents the death of curiosity. Eco's iconic fundamentalist Signor Salon is no longer curious, because his curiosity is instantly satisfied by the immediate answers his essentialist ideology provides; his "quest" in Eco's quest novel is not "ever forward unsubdued" but rather extinguished before it can begin.[37]

Interestingly, Freud also offers a model for linear time that suggests the implicit qualities of willingness and curiosity. In "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'" (1925), Freud imagines a formula which hearkens the act of creative "withdrawal" discussed earlier, in relation to idolatry.

Freud believed the origins of linear time are to be found in a pulse-like, discontinuous engagement of the unconscious and the external world. He writes:

> My theory was that cathectic innervations are sent out and withdrawn in rapid periodic impulses from within into the completely pervious system Pcpt-Cs. So long as that system is cathected in this manner, it receives perceptions (which are accompanied by consciousness) and passes the excitation on to the unconscious mnemic systems; but as soon as the cathexis is withdrawn, consciousness is extinguished and the functioning of the system comes to a standstill. It is as though the unconscious stretches out feelers, through the medium of the system Pcpt. -Cs., towards the external world and hastily withdraws them as soon as they have sampled the excitations coming from it....I further had a suspicion that this discontinuous method of functioning of the system Pcpt.-Cs. lies at the bottom of the origin of the concept of time.[38]

Like other of Freud's models for the psyche, life and death partner here: the perfect balance of the "standstill" in which consciousness is extinguished comingles with the sampling, pulse-like probe into the external world. Together this activity constitutes time: a now, a present moment separate from past and future.

But consider the implicit nature of such a probe. While Freud does not overtly attribute affect or quality to the probe, his model nevertheless depends upon a quality of willingness and a quality of curiosity; it inheres in an active effort of *tolerance*; the organism's cathexis is

withdrawn when the threshold of tolerance is reached, but it does not remain withdrawn, its consciousness extinguished: immediately it reaches out again, into the Otherness.

I believe the ethical implication here speaks to Freud's overall theory of community and the social body. This model for time is so useful because it takes the implicit ethical turn. A social need to connect to the Other inhabits the heart of psychoanalysis, as it does Jewish mysticism. And the Other--whether human or textual Other-- is understood as a viable being in the social web *only* to the extent that we believe we *don't* know something about it; that there is always something to learn or an ongoing opacity, which through willingness and curiosity can be sampled, probed, and reached towards.

In "Psycho-analysis and Telepathy" (1921), Freud depicts the motivation and outlook of the psycho-analyst, who is, in Freud's view:

> [R]eady...to sacrifice everything—the dazzling brilliance of a flawless theory, the exalted consciousness of having achieved a comprehensive view of the universe, and the mental calm brought about by the possession of extensive grounds for expedient and ethical action. In place of all these, they are content with fragmentary pieces of knowledge and with basic hypotheses lacking preciseness and ever open to revision.[39]

Freud suspects this heroic portrait of the analyst runs

counter to the likely temperament of the occultist or the

mystic, but he is wrong, at least in the case of early Kab-

balist writing. It is in this same spirit that the text of

the Zohar and the Bahir intervene against the tyranny of

the perfect and the comprehensive, in favor of the contin-

gent, the fragmentary, and the ongoing openness to differ-

ence.

Constellations and Covenants

    Belief in a social covenant is another ethical under-

pinning shared by Freud and Kabbalah. There can be no ab-

solute truth but only that consensual truth which is held

together by social covenant. Community is constituted by

shared delusions that imbue symbols with particular signi-

fication. In the Jewish mystical tradition, the idea of

covenant is symbolized by *Yesod*, the dimension of Divine

consciousness associated with language. The stories, narr-

atives, and agreed upon law and history that are understood

as constellations of meaning in the Zohar rely upon this

internal covenant, not upon external or transcendent truth:

"Come and see," exhorts Rabbi El'azar to the members of the

chavuroth, "stars and constellations endure through a cove-

nant, which is indeed *the expanse of heaven*...in which stars and constellations are traced and engraved, in which they are suspended to shine."[40] Through *Yesod*, hidden matters of emanation are conveyed from higher rungs of Divine consciousness, which also reflects its association with language.[41] In the Zohar, attachment to the letter of the Law is not the predicate of the covenant; instead, the activity of covenanting, of effecting partial and incomplete exchange between individuals in a social body, as between members of the *chavuroth*, is what allows for a sense of being-in-community. In a psychoanalytic setting, meaning is also elicited through the covenant and activity of language: through verbalization the analysand, who is on a quest for answers, is led through an experience of internal truth.

Daniel Boyarin writes that in midrash, "the correspondences are not between things seen and their hidden or inner meanings, but between texts and the historical contexts in which they were produced or to which they apply, or texts and other texts, between signifiers and signifiers, not between signifiers and signifieds."[42] The same can be said of inter-subjectivity in a healthy community: the relations, however partial or transitory, rely upon a shared context and upon the willingness and curiosity to connect,

to reach out to the experience of the Other and identify some portion of the self through that alterity. Inter-subjective and inter-textual processes are therefore a powerful foil for paranoid knowledge and essentializing modalities, because they valorize the transferential action from signifier to signifier, and subject to subject; they resist the regressive obsession with complete knowability, and subvert the tyranny of one-point perspective.

Thomas Pynchon poignantly illustrates these ideas in his 1965 novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, a text in which intersubjectivity comes to the healthful rescue of the protagonist, momentarily restoring her to a state of sanity. Pynchon's heroine, Oedipa Maas, descends into what she believes is a conspiracy centering on patterns of mail delivery. The postal system represents a field of interchanging letters, across which patterns emerge whose shape is drawn by Oedipa. Under a barrage of disconnected events Oedipa, like the taxidermist, seeks some kind of meaning, attempting to "give them order" and "create constellations" (72).[43] That she indeed creates her own constellations is the open joke of the novel: "Under the symbol she'd copied off the latrine wall of The Scope into her memo book, she wrote *Shall I project a world*?" (64). Like Oedipa, a reader may also be tempted to "project a world," for the whole

fabric of Pynchon's text is saturated with one suggestive yet indeterminate and undeveloped reference after another, which the reader will either invest with meaning or will not. Oedipa's name, for instance, apparently cites the flashpoint of Freudian theory- *Oedipus*. Surely some psy-choanalytic meaning will attend Oedipa's character- meaning that awaits discovery through astute analysis. But by giv-ing Oedipa's husband the absurd name *Mucho Maas*--eponymous with the Spanish "mucho más" i.e., "much more,"--the text takes a comical swipe at logocentrism, that is, the idea that words have internal stability that transcends both their context and the subject who uses them. Instead, *Lot 49* displays the postmodern and particularly Derridean idea that words always retain traces of other, extra-contextual meanings, or call to mind still other words that sound sim-ilar to those being used. Thus the Derridean notion that we "abandon the logocentric quest for a meaning that exists outside and beyond the differential play of language (i.e., the quest for the 'transcendental signified')" has a power-ful voice in Pynchon's text.[44]

There is, however, a crucial scene in this subject-propelled detective story that defies all the paranoid con-stellations and meaning-less associations that fill the novel. The tone and tenor of this otherwise comedic text

change unmistakably in this scene as the text briefly ges-
tures to something exceeding itself. This crucial scene is
Oedipa's encounter with an old sailor:

> She saw an old man huddled, shaking with grief she
> couldn't hear.... When she was three steps from him
> the hands flew apart and his wrecked face, and the
> terror of eyes gloried in burst veins, stopped her.
> [102]

The frail, broken alcoholic is clutching a letter to his
wife, which he is too weak to mail himself. He beseeches
Oedipa to mail the letter for him. The old sailor fills
Oedipa with sadness and compassion. "Just mail the let-
ter," he insists, "Please...go now. You don't want to stay
here" (103-104). As she leaves he adds one final plea,
"Remember your friends" (104).

It has been pointed out that this exchange between Oe-
dipa and the old man is an intertextual reference to Cole-
ridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."[45] Like Cole-
ridge's wedding guest, Oedipa is *spellbound by the eye of
the old seafaring man, and constrained to hear his tale*."
And like the ancient Mariner, the old sailor is compelled
to convey a message to another person.

"The subject," writes Lacan, "manages...to symbolize
his own vanishing... in the illusion of the consciousness
of seeing oneself see oneself, in which the gaze is

elided."[46] In that moment, Oedipa's paranoid gaze is elided
by the "terror of eyes" of that old sailor who grasps her
and looks back. It is as if another text is grasping hold
of this one; for a brief instant, Oedipa does not perceive
herself as the single point at which all things converge—
she is momentarily liberated from the tyranny of one-point
perspective that has characterized her engagement with the
world over the course of the novel. Her encounter with the
old sailor is a *memento morie* inscribed into the text,
which leaves her contemplating death: "It astonished her to
think that so much could be lost, even the quantity of hal-
lucination belonging just to the sailor that the world
would bear no further trace of.... She knew that the sailor
had seen worlds no other man had seen.... But nothing she
knew of would preserve them, or him" (104-105).

The letter he begs her to deliver is a transaction at
two levels- between Oedipa and the sailor, and between *Lot
49* and the *Ancient Mariner*. The worlds no other man had
seen, and that Oedipa cannot see, persist nonetheless in
her field of awareness, momentarily eliding her own narrow
and obsessional worldview. As mentioned earlier, Eric
Santner explains the Freudian subject as defined by his or
her answerability to the Other *with an unconscious*.[47] Here
Santner's insight is poignantly illustrated: the intertex-

tutal and intersubjective exchange in this unique moment in
Lot 49 is possible because Oedipa is open, if only for a
moment, to this "Other with an unconscious," whose unknowa-
ble "quantity of hallucination" will be lost forever. In
this otherwise madcap and paranoid world, Oedipa here per-
forms an act of friendship, of charity, and of social re-
sponsibility to another human being whose memories and ex-
perience belong only to him. She is enjoined to transmit
something of him back into the world through this precious
letter, and in recognizing the old man's internal dimen-
sions of unknowability, Oedipa becomes *answerable* to him,
and has an experience of astonishment.

It is the only moment where she is authentically part
of a community--a community of two--outside of herself, al-
though in her quest she has come upon such communities,
looking in as an outsider:

> In Golden Gate Park she came on a circle of
> children in their nightclothes, who told her they were
> dreaming the gathering. But that the dream was really
> no different from being awake, because in the mornings
> when they got up they felt tired, as if they'd been up
> most of the night. When their mothers thought they
> were out playing they were really curled in cupboards
> of neighbors' houses, in platforms up in trees, in se-
> cretly-hollowed nests inside hedges, sleeping, making
> up for these hours. The night was empty of all terror
> for them, they had inside their circle an imaginary
> fire, and needed nothing but their own unpenetrated
> sense of community.   [96]

The children's "unpenetrated sense of community" emanates from their shared context and shared dreams, from their shared illusion in which the strange conventions of their waking lives are contained. The children's self-contained world is more than a trite affirmation of the "local nature of truth," or of a "plurality of truths" that exist side by side, ideas which serve as the somewhat reductive mottos of postmodern thought. Rather, what shines through their example, and through Oedipa's exchange with the old sailor, is the compassionate mutuality that underlies the activities of sharing and participation, interhuman activities that bind the subject to the Other, carrying the subject beyond the emptiness of mere pluralistic coexistence into an experience of well-being in community, however transitory, that the individual cannot achieve alone. It is this activity through which the Kabbalist subject and the subject of psychoanalysis are also constituted, as their ongoing experience of self-truth endures only through this constructive engagement, leading ever away from *daemonic* repetition and other short-circuits, and into the bonds of community.

Notes to Chapter 3

[1] See Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 41,133-137.

[2] John Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[3] Umberto Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum* (1988) (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997).

[4] Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses 1955-1956: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III*, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 22.

[5] Jorge Luis Borges elaborates this idea in his short story, "The Library of Babel" in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1962).

[6] Jacques Lacan theorizes the relationship of metaphor and metonymy to the psychoanalytic symptom and the unconscious drive in "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious" [translated elsewhere as *Instance* of the Letter](1957). See David Lodge, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1988), 80-106.

[7] Jacques Lacan, The Freudian Thing in *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002).

[8] In David Lodge, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* London: Longman, 1988 (80-106). Elsewhere translated as "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious."

[9] *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (*SE*), ed. James Strachey (Volume 1: 322).

[10] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 45.

[11] Sigmund Freud, The *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) (New York: Avon Books, 1965).

[12] Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (1990) (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

[13] Matt, *The Zohar* Volume II, 420.

[14] Matt, *The Zohar* Volume II, (5, 9-10).

[15] Daniel Matt, *The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism* (Edison: Castle Books, 1997).

[16] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 45.

[17] Arthur Green, "The Zohar: Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Spain" in *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, ed. Lawrence Fine (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 55.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 236-237.

[20] Matt, *The Zohar* Volume V, 532.

[21] Daniel Boyarin makes this point in *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (see note 35, below).

[22] In *Essential Papers on Kabbalah*, edited by Lawrence Fine (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 193-194.

[23] Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, edited and translated by Andrew Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968), 42, 72-73.

[24] In *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings.* New York: New Directions, 1962.

[25] Borges theorizes another Kabbalistic idea here, namely that all ideas be actualized are preexisting in the infinite blueprint of the Universe, and are made manifest through the vessels of human thought in the ongoing activity of creation.

[26] Borges, "The Library of Babel," *Labyrinths*, 58.

[27] Lacan, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious," in Lodge, 103.

[28] Paul Marcus, "'You are, Therefore I Am': Emmanuel Levinas and Psychoanalysis" (2007) *Psychoanalytic Review* 94(4):515-527.

[29] Michael Oppenheim, *Jewish Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: Narrating the Interhuman* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 7.

[30] Abraham Kaplan, "Spinoza and Freud" (1977) *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 5:3(316, 322).

[31] Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 5.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1959).

[34] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961).

[35] Shmuely Boteach, "Governors Gone Wild" (jpost.com, March 23, 2008).

[36] Sigmund Freud, "A Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895) (*SE* Volume 1: 361).

[37] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 50-51.

[38] Sigmund Freud, "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'" (1925) in Peter Gay, *The Freud Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 212.

[39] Standard Edition, 178-179.

[40] Matt, *The Zohar* Volume I, 210.

[41] "[T]he river *Yesod*...informs and enlightens *Shekhinah*... conveying to Her hidden matters of emanation" (Daniel Matt, *The Zohar* Volume V, 92).

[42] Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, 109-110.

[43] Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) (New York: Perennial Classics, 1999).

[44] See Stuart Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001) 306-307, and Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 150.

[45] Carol Denise Bork, in a discussion on postmodern fiction, Rutgers University March 2003.

[46] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Seminar XI (1964) (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981), 83.

[47] Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*, 82.

Chapter 4

A Charming Substitute for the Vanished text: Uncanny Narrative in the Zohar

Both psychoanalysis and Kabbalism are, in an etiological sense, predicated on the human encounter with suffering. It is the misery of hysteria that motivates the analytic quest for recovery, whilst for the Jewish mystic suffering originates in the spiritual dislocation of exile that works as a root narrative in Kabbalist cosmology. But deep-rooted as that narrative is, the condition of exile alone does not suffice to explain the strange turns that the Zohar takes when it addresses the haunting question of human suffering. On this topic, the Zohar exhibits a distinct pattern of peculiarity- a kind of *aporia* that we catch sight of through textual gaps, disruptions, or silences.

There are, for example, certain atypical sections of Zohar- sections that adhere to the conventions of narrative with an uncharacteristic predictability, telling linear and logical tales bound by the all the norms of ordinary storytelling. In a text in which alinearity and a dream-like character are quite the norm, these comparatively straightforward narrative sections call significant attention to

themselves: they are *symptomatic*- disruptive precisely for their apparent normality, which is highly out-of-place in the context of the larger work, and which, as we shall see, is linked up with a textual effort to symbolize and contain unsettling material. I shall argue that in these atypical sections, the Zohar self-consciously applies the limita- tions of conventional narrative in order to gesture towards something outside the text's capacity to mediate. The narrative sections are also often *unheimlich*, functioning as counter-texts that speak to the limits of knowability, the mystery of suffering, and most importantly, the inabil- ity of any narrative--including Torah--to fully signify what is outside the bounds of human understanding.

One notable example comes through in a brief Zoharic tale involving death, loss, and the bond between a father and his son. The story begins with the *ḥaverim* deciding to pay a visit to the home of a great Torah scholar, Rabbi Yose of Peki'in, whom they understand has recently died. Upon entering Yose's home, the Companions find a heart- breaking scene: Yose's four year-old son is weeping over his father's lifeless body. Crying out to God, reasoning with God, the precocious child cites the Torah passage (Deuteronomy 22: 6-7) which states that if along the road you should chance upon a birds nest, you are to take only

the eggs and leave the mother. Employing the logic of this
commandment, the weeping child decries God's failure to ad-
here to His own rules, admonishing Him for His injustice
and demanding He set things right:

> "Master of the universe, fulfill this word written in
> Your own Torah. My younger sister and I are the two
> children of our father and mother. It was Your place
> to take us instead and to fulfill those words of the
> Torah; and do not object, Master of the World, that it
> is written 'mother' and not 'father,' for since our
> mother had died and was taken from her children, our
> father was as both mother and father to us. And now
> our father, too, who had been out protector, is taken
> from his children. Where is justice and the law of
> the Torah?"   [143][1]

Witnessing the grieving child plead thusly with God, the
Companions are overcome with sadness, Rabbi El'azar declar-
ing that "the words and the tears of this child are too
much for me."

At that very moment, a disembodied voice bellows into
the scene to offer a startling proclamation:

> "Blessed are you, Rabbi Yose, for the words and the
> tears of this young child have ascended to the throne
> of the Holy King, and judgment has been given; God has
> designated for the Angel of Death thirteen persons in
> your place, and twenty-two years will be added to your
> life so that you might teach Torah to this child who
> is sincere and whole and beloved in God's eyes." Im-
> mediately they perceived that the fiery pillar had de-
> parted and Rabbi Yose opened his eyes, the mouth of
> his young son still cleaving to his mouth.   [144]

And with that, Rabbi Yose is restored to life! He spends
three days studying with the ḥaverim, after which time he
relates to them, once again, the story of this unusual mi-
racle whereby his own life was extended by twenty-two years
in exchange for the lives of 13 anonymous others. Like the
rest of the narrative, Yose's recounting of the miraculous
swap is adulatory, offering a surplus of references to di-
vine compassion, fairness, pity, and having been spared
harsh judgment:

> "The Holy One, blessed be he, was overcome with com-
> passion for me, moved by those words and by the boy's
> willingness to offer his life for mine. One Guardian
> rose and said.... '[H]ave pity on him by virtue of the
> Torah and by virtue of this youth who has expressed
> his willingness to offer his life for that of his fa-
> ther who was thus spared from death.' And He designat-
> ed thirteen persons in my place and made a pledge
> sparing me from this severe judgment. In fairness the
> Holy One, Blessed be He, called to the angel of death
> ordering him to return for me twenty-two years later.
> For there is no alternative to His taking to Himself
> what He has lent to us. And now, ḥaverim, as the Holy
> One, blessed be He, saw that you were truly worthy, He
> performed a miracle before your very eyes."   [145]

And finally--and although the terms of this exchange have
already been explained twice in the span of this brief
narrative--Yose recites the particulars of the deal yet
again, praising God and declaring that "twenty-two years of
life were given me because of my son's tears and words"
(146). The ḥaverim rejoice, and the story ends on this

joyful note, the initial scene of death and loss put right
by God. The narrative celebrates the simple and uncompli-
cated pleasure of this happy miracle, which lavishly extols
God's mercy and extols the just reversal of fortune that is
Yose's reward and implicitly the reward of all the righ-
teous of Israel who embrace Torah.[vi]

In the mystical and dream-like rhythm of the Zohar,
this story is decidedly *arrhythmic*. The language is linear
and clear. The usual probing, imaginative engagement that
the Zohar effects with scripture and events is absent in
this seemingly uncomplicated and gratifying tale. But more
than that, there is an unresolved oddness about the story,
an out-of-jointness that is never addressed, let alone got-
ten to the bottom of, and which persists long after the
happy ending. The tale is *unheimlich*- uncanny. But where-
fore does it effect this sensation? And what is this
strange story doing here?

It is precisely through Freud's study of "The Uncanny"
(1919) that we can begin to form a reply to these lingering
questions. Freud defines the uncanny as "that class of the

[vi] So ostensibly satisfying is this tale that the renowned
scholar of Jewish mysticism whose edition and translation
of the tale are examined here was prompted to write: "This
story is perhaps the most charming of all those found in
the Zohar" (147).

terrifying which leads back to something long known to us,
once very familiar." Drawing from Schilling, Jentsch, and
others Freud formulates a theory that turns on a dialectic
of concealment and the persistence of ambiguity:

> *Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to
> have remained...hidden and secret and has become visi-
> ble.*
>
> In general we are reminded that the word Heimlich is
> not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas,
> which without being contradictory are yet very differ-
> ent: one the one hand, it means that which is familiar
> and congenial, and on the other, that which is con-
> cealed and kept out of sight.   [123-124, 129][2]

The Freudian *unheimlich* links up too with a sense of inde-
terminacy- doubts, for example, as to whether something is
living or dead. Automatons, wax figures, and dolls fall
into this category, as do the effect of epileptic seizures
or manifestations of insanity which "excite in the specta-
tor the feeling that automatic, mechanical processes are at
work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of anima-
tion" (132). Phenomena linked to feelings of the uncanny
include motifs of doubling, substitution, or interchanging
selves; thus, according to Freud, mirroring and repetition
provoke an uncanny feeling, as does anything that reminds
us of the internal repetition compulsion. In the same way,

states Freud, anything that has undergone repression and emerged from it would be experienced as uncanny.

Returning to the tale of Rabbi Yose and his son, we plainly see repetition at work in the narrative's triple-recitation of events. An involuntary substitution that exchanges some quantity of life for death has also taken place. But these facts alone cannot account for the odd sensation which the story evokes.

If, however, there is a specific point of rupture in this narrative, i.e., some event that lets us hook in a little further, it would be the exchange itself- those thirteen people whom God substituted for twenty-two years of Yose's life. The reader is told nothing about them. On the face of things, that's troubling. We are not told these were "thirteen idolaters," "thirteen violators of Sabbath," or easiest still, "thirteen gentiles." We are only told, by the messenger-voice and later by Yose himself, of thirteen others dying "*in your place*" and "*in my place*" as substitutes. For a story in which words like *justice, fairness, law, Torah, mercy, pity, compassion*, utterly saturate the text, this seems like a disturbingly uneven exchange. And so the reader, after the initial announcement of the exchange, begins to hover, in effect waiting for details affirming these thirteen persons suita-

bility for death, or affirming perhaps the care God took in selecting them- details which never come.

With each recitation of the exchange, moreover, the cognitive dissonance surrounding the substitution seems to escape not only Yose, but all of the *ḥaverim* present. At no point in the narrative do any of the ordinarily brilliant, insatiably inquisitive Rabbis of the Zohar ever question--or make any reference whatsoever--to the startlingly unequal terms of the swap, nor do they wonder as to the identities of the anonymous thirteen on whom Yose has managed to trade off his death. Citing Jentsch Freud writes:

> In telling a story one of the most successful devices for easily creating uncanny effects is to leave the reader in uncertainty whether a particular figure in the story is a human being or an automaton; and to do it in such a way that his attention is not directly focused upon his uncertainty, so that he may not be urged to go into the matter and clear it up immediately, since that, as we have said, would quickly dissipate the peculiar emotional effect of the thing. [132]

Maintaining a sense of uncertainty--in this case, a kind of ethical uncertainty that centers upon the question of life and death--is something our story does exceptionally well. The narrative offers no opportunity for lingering over the identity of the substitute victims. It moves quickly into its recitation of the merciful deal and adulation of God,

followed by a narrative repetition, and yet another narrative repetition, describing the exchange. Thus three times the narrative asserts that God--because he is so astonishingly compassionate--has spared Yose and killed thirteen other people! The text displays the nervous affect of a speaker who repeats the same details over and over before a skeptical listener. This repetition is itself a poor substitute for the Zohar's usual hermeneutic of elaboration-activity which represents the whole raison d'être of the Zohar. And in a text that typically seizes upon repetition in scripture to explicate some mystical secret and construct always more insight, it is especially odd to come up against *repetitive* repetition- that is, repetition that hysterically calls our attention to the same details over and over without adding any substantive commentary about them. The repetition is thus symptomatic, speaking in a place where the narrative for some unknown reason cannot speak.

But there is another pathway into the feeling of intellectual uncertainty that surrounds this narrative, and it too centers on the exchange. The narrative provides only one identifying characteristic of these anonymous others who substitute Yose in death: that they are *thirteen* in number. As it turns out, thirteen is a monumentally impor-

tant number in the Zohar, as it is in all of Kabbalist tra-
dition. Here are the opening lines of the very same *Sefer
ha Zohar*:

> Rabbi Ḥizkiyah opened, "*Like a rose among thorns, so
> is my beloved among the maidens* (Song of Songs 2:2).
> Who is *a rose*? Assembly of Israel. For there is a
> rose, and then there is a rose! Just as a rose among
> thorns is colored red and white, so Assembly of Israel
> includes judgment and compassion. Just as a rose has
> thirteen petals, so Assembly of Israel has thirteen
> qualities of compassion surrounding Her on every side.
> Similarly, from the moment אלהים(*Elohim*), *God*, is
> mentioned, it generates thirteen words to surround As-
> sembly of Israel and protect Her; then it is mentioned
> again. Why again? To produce five sturdy leaves sur-
> rounding the rose. These five are called Salvation;
> they are five gates. Concerning this mystery it is
> written: *I raise the cup of salvation* (Psalms 116:13).
> This is the cup of blessing, which should rest on five
> fingers—and no more—like the rose, sitting on five
> sturdy leaves, paradigm of five fingers. This rose is
> the cup of blessing.[3]

By the Zohar's own internal understanding, thirteen is an

inescapable reference to the thirteen petalled rose- the

community of Israel and the protective divine compassion

that surrounds her. Thus the Zohar envisions the very ex-

istence of the Jewish nation as interpenetrated with this

primordial number and image.[4] Moreover the numeric value

for the word *ahava*--love--is also thirteen, and elsewhere

in the Zohar *another* Rabbi Yose (not the one whose life was

exchanged for thirteen people- a different one) uses this

bit of gematria to elaborate thirteen ways the faithful

should love God based upon the thirteen attributes of Divine Compassion![vii]

Whatever initial uncertainty was felt about God's actions in the narrative now takes on another dimension. The reader's subject position undergoes a kind of inversion: The reader, whom the Zohar always assumes is a Jew, is positioned in every outward way in the narrative to identify with Yose and his son, and to identify with the show of reverence and celebration that his resurrection provokes among the *ḥaverim*. But at the same time, all Jews--that is, all the Community of Israel--is not-so-subtly coded to identify with those anonymous others, the forgotten community of thirteen, over whom the narrative spills no tears and no ink. The reader, then, is in the uncanny circumstance of being in two places at once, or, *belonging to two sets of ideas, one coinciding with its opposite*.

[vii] The thirteen attributes of God's compassion are recorded in Exodus 34:6-7: "YHVH, YHVH! A compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in kindness and faithfulness, keeping kindness for the thousandth generation, bearing crime, trespass, and sin; yet He does not wholly acquit, inflicting the guilt of fathers upon sons and upon sons of sons, to the third and fourth generations." In the Zohar the thirteen attributes of God's compassion correspond to thirteen enhancements of the glorious beard of the Holy Ancient One. See Matt, *The Zohar* Volume V, 549).

Freud points to Jentsch's observation (however inade-
quate in Freud's view) that "the uncanny would always be
that in which one does not know where one is, as it were.
The better oriented in his environment a person is, the
less readily he will get the impression of something uncan-
ny in regard to the objects and events in it" (124). The
reader of this Zoharic narrative *should* be disoriented.
The Jew slated for death is substituted, but he is in some
broader fashion also the *substitute*: God's tidy solution
has coincided with the problem. If "*heimlich* is a word the
meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it
finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*" (131) then
the story offers up a perfectly un(heimlich) scenario, in
which God's compassionate act of rescue in the Community of
Israel is a death sentence in the Community of Israel.

In "Freud's Uncanny Narratives," Robin Lydenberg ex-
amines the uncanny effect generated by Freud's periodic
story-telling, in which he assumes the role of narrator in
"The Uncanny." Lydenberg observes that "while structural
doubling enables the writer to distance himself from the
story's events, the subject who is surprised by his own
double experiences the vulnerability of self-alienation."
The anecdotes Freud constructs in "The Uncanny" often con-
clude, argues Lydenberg, "with the disturbing discovery

that the outsider is always already within, that the uncan-

ny 'stranger' or 'intruder' is the self."[5] In our Zoharic

story, the thirteen anonymous "Others" who substitute Yose

in death are, in effect, any and all in Israel- a circums-

tance that provokes in the reader just this sort of unex-

pected vulnerability. Ambivalence--doubt, in fact--

surrounding the idea of divine compassion thus begins to

find a voice in this increasingly inverted portrait of

God's mercy, where the seemingly "safe" reversal of Yose's

fortune extends into a harbinger of death for all Jews.

This feeling of doubt that inhabits the tale's portrayal of

God escapes via another characteristic of the uncanny at

work in the story- that is, in the tale's performance of an

involuntary repetition.

Freud relates the uncanniness of involuntary return to

the same situation in his infamous anecdote of wandering in

an unfamiliar town in Italy. In his account, Freud de-

scribes how despite every conscious effort to the contrary,

he kept circling back to the same red-light district he was

trying to escape:

> Once, as I was walking through the deserted streets of
> a provincial town in Italy which was strange to me, on
> a hot summer afternoon, I found myself in a quarter
> the character of which could not long remain in doubt.
> Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the win-
> dows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the

narrow street at the next turning. But after having
wandered about for a while without being directed, I
suddenly found myself back in the same street, where
my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I
hurried away once more, yet only to arrive yet a third
time by devious paths in the same place. Now, howev-
er, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as
uncanny, and I was glad enough to abandon my explora-
tory walk and get straight back to the piazza I had
left a short while before. Other situations having in
common with my adventure an involuntary return to the
same situation, but which differ radically from it in
other respects, also result in the same feeling of
helplessness and of something uncanny.   [143-144]

Freud's adventure fills him with a feeling of something in-

escapable, something fateful that he is helpless to avoid.

This loss of personal control, which also attends the eerie

sense of *having been somewhere before* is a dynamic active

in our Zoharic story as well: first, we are provided a con-

tained narration that in every outward way is controlled to

provide a testament, by the community of Israel, to God's

compassion. The whole purpose of the story is to insist

how compassionate God is- through the glut of adulatory

language, the turnabout events, the scene of rejoicing,

etc. And yet, in spite of this effort to travel a safe

narrative path--a looping, repetitive path that recites the

details of the "merciful" exchange once, and again, and

again--we, the community of Israel, wind up *exactly* where

we did not mean to go: with a silent but nevertheless palp-

able counter-text in which the unspoken recognition of something merciless and horrible- and yet oh-so-familiar, reveals itself by this simple inversion and substitution. The counter-text gestures to an alternate story, one that questions God's judgment and calls attention to the massacre of Jews that God not only permits but orchestrates- events the "charming" and pious tale takes pains to distract from and ignore. What we have here, then, is a story inhabited by its own opposite, haunted by its double, and which cannot escape the ineluctable path towards the same, the same, the same: We, the Jews, just keep getting killed! "*'Unheimlich' is the name for everything that ought to have remained...hidden and secret and has become visible"* (129).[6] Here, the counter-text speaks precisely what the text works to hide, and if *unheimlich* involves familiarity with what is alien, and fear of what is familiar, then indeed the reader comes to identify at the exact space in the story about which the least is said. The death of the thirteen is the event from which the narrative is most distant, most silent, and yet it is precisely that blank space into which the Jewish people can project their own cultural memory- of the dead, the forgotten, the displaced, (or, in this case, the re-placed).

This happy story of a wailing child whose lament is magically answered by God is not our story. It is not the story of the community of Israel, not the story of the thirteen who silently represent us. The counter text--out there beyond language, beyond the formal constraints of the narrative--that's our story, the one the narrative won't bother to tell, or cannot bring itself to tell. In this way the tale works like a wish fulfillment or like a screen. Just as Freud's "screen memory" describes a safe memory from childhood associatively linked to a repressed one, this story is like a screen-story which appears as a substitute for the real story that goes untold. Beneath the screen of pious language lurks a portrait of God's injustice, God's merciless slaughter, God's abiding the suffering of the Jews; beneath the screen of joy and celebration lurks a capricious and inexplicable Judge.

But it also here that the story illuminates a certain quality of faith. It is precisely by forcing the reader to experience the uncanniness of feeling him or herself in two places at once, in which the Other is positioned as the self, that the story holds out an opportunity--a moment-- for the reader to be graced with an insight into the nature of faith. By effecting this dual identification, the story very effectively elides the boundary between what is just

or desirable and what is tragic; it effaces our ability to differentiate the outcomes or to decide what, exactly, we want to happen in the narrative. The child's tearful plea for mercy and justice echoes the historical condition of the Diaspora Jew, whose cultural or even personal reality *is* one of suffering, of crying out to the Holy One blessed be He, of mourning the loss of Jerusalem and hearing no reply from a seemingly absent God. The Book of Lamentations, which alludes to Jewish suffering throughout history asks God, "why do You ignore us eternally, forsake us for so long? (5:20). Here, in the Zohar's tidy and charming tale, the lament of the ages is at long last answered, and suddenly- the answer doesn't look so good. Maybe God should *not* have answered this little boy's cries, the cries over which the *ḥaverim* were so despondent and whose relief brought such apparent cause for joy. At this point, the rhythm and the consciousness of the Zohar are palpable again; signs and stories and the external calamities of human life are not all they appear to be. They are only garments which cloak something else, something turned, as Scholem says, "inward and away from us."[7] The visible narrative bursting with assurance of God's compassionate judgment is ever accompanied by its counter-text, whose discourse, like that of the hysteric, speaks from under the

veil of the mystical symbol. It is this counter-text which affirms the essential unknowability of the Divine, the mystery of suffering and the mystery of faith. It is this counter-text that, while holding a mirror to the calamities of Jewish life and history, also offers the queer solace that "you can't conceive, nor can I, the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God."[8]

The haunting awareness that God's mercy for the Jewish nation is, in fact, appallingly strange is too threatening for the narrative; it must be contained. This effort at containment is also expressed by the text's quantitative, mathematical character. Numbers are everywhere: the brief tale produces a surplus of overdetermined numeric references- to *twelve* (years, tribes, months); the child's *three hundred sixty-five* tears (days of the year); *twenty-two* years added to Yose's life (twenty-two letters of the aleph-bet), *three hundred thousand* righteous souls on High; and of course *thirteen* substituted for death- the divine brokerage for which any explanation is insufficient or obscured. In her study of "The Uncanny" Lydenberg also points out that:

> Many literary theorists...emphasize figuration as a
> shield against the abyss. One "function of figura-
> tion," [Mary] Jacobus argues, is managing anxiety;
> figures may multiply like some "fungoid growth" resis-

> tant to any order or meaning, but finally "any figura-
> tion is better than none."   [1084]

The figurations to which Lydenberg and Jacobus refer are those of the narrative genre, i.e., framing, temporal progression, and the other structural elements that accompany the telling of a story by a story-teller. Our Zoharic narrative deploys these weapons against the abyss, and reinforces them with the hyper-literal numeric figures that, like Jacobus' "fungoid growth," pop up readily and everywhere, but with the ultimate effect of resisting meaning and organization. The awful questions: why did these thirteen people--these Jews--have to die? Why has God inflicted so much suffering? Who were these anonymous ones whose memories and dreams are extinguished in an instant of violence?- these are questions that resonate in the collective heart of every generation of Jews. They cannot be contained or obfuscated by the narrative or its surplus of "fungal" distractions.

The numbers in our Zoharic story are also measures of time, quantity, and mortality, all cementing a sense of the unremitting economy of any knowable sign. The symbol--like the symptom--both spends and conserves; something is occluded, so that something may be revealed. But what is really at issue here are not the numbers within the narra-

tive, but narrative itself. Lydenberg points out that
narrative:

> [O]ften seems to be initiated by forces that threaten
> its structural integrity or that divide it within from
> its inception.... Narrative often appears to be moti-
> vated by the effort to condense and frame disruptive
> material, but once a narrative begins, it threatens to
> proliferate without stopping, generating that some-
> thing else beyond stabilizing structures and concepts
> that constitutes its irreducible literariness [1075,
> 1079].

The disruptive material in our story--i.e., the portrait of
a cruel God and the suffering and death of the Community of
Israel at God's possibly merciless hands--insist from under
the weight of every stabilizing structure in the tale's ar-
senal. At the same time, however, it is only fitting that
these unbearable questions stare at us from under the cloak
of narration. Narrative ever points to its own limitations
and its tradeoffs, the garments it can and cannot bear.
Unlike the rest of the Zohar, the atypical form and style
in this story are most like the linear narrative of Torah,
reminding us that Torah, too, in Kabbalist tradition, is
always and already a mediated text. It is *corpus symboli-
cum* that stands in the place of the Unknowable, just as
this uncanny story takes the place of an untold story- an
untellable story. No one knows why these thirteen people
will die and their loved ones--like Yose's son--will in

turn cry out to God. There is no answer to the mystery of
suffering that the garments of language and the symbolic
can fully shoulder, not even in Torah.

Remember that our story begins with the innocent child
who demands God be held to the Law of the Torah: *Master of
the universe, fulfill this word written in Your own To-
rah...do not object that it is written 'mother' and not
'father,'....Where is justice and the law of the Torah?"*
The child is parsing the letter of the law, and so extracts
from God some legal remedy. But the remedy is insufficient;
the letter of the law is insufficient, words are insuffi-
cient. Yose declares that "[his] son's words" brought him
back to life. Although elsewhere the narrative claims the
child's tears stirred God's compassion, it spotlights, in-
stead, the scholarship of this precocious child, whose
well-spoken words and logical argumentation helped extract
this tidy resolution. But words of scripture are meta-
phors, and like the interchanging people in this story, me-
taphors are also substitutes, for a signified that is ulti-
mately outside our reach. Like the "real Torah" that lay
in the blank white space of the parchment, this story too
is but a persistent commentary on a vanished text.[9]

But in the symbolic world of the Zohar, that persis-
tent commentary--these garments cloaking what is timeless

and resistant to disclosure--these are all we have. This
is the necessary medium through which, according to the Zo-
har itself, the Divine mind unfolds into manifest creation,
and it inheres in limitation. Thus when Rabbi Yose says
the Angel of Death will return for him after twenty-two
years, adding "there is no alternative to the Holy One
blessed be He taking to Himself what He has lent to us," on
the face of things that seems like a very strange state-
ment. Why is there no alternative? After all, isn't it
God we're talking about? The almighty Infinite without li-
mitation whatsoever? Why say "there is no alternative"?

The answer, it seems through this reading, is that we
are *not* brokering at the register of God the Timeless and
Boundless; we are brokering at the mortal register, dealing
in the limited currency of material existence as it is me-
taphorized in our narratives, our symbols, and our Torah.
For the all the Zohar's expression of alinearity, its
psychic flights of association and its performance of un-
conscious principles- this, the limited and constrained
narration, expresses too the nature of life and its atten-
dant mortality. Yose's statement that there is *no alterna-
tive* hearkens in some poetic fashion the moment in *Beyond
the Pleasure Principle* in which Freud speculates about the
nascent organism struggling between existence and non-

existence. The single cell can let dissolve its boundaries and sink back into the surrounding environment, or it can maintain its limited form in order to *exist*: to live, to struggle, and to die. "There is no alternative" Freud writes, "but to advance in the direction in which growth is possible –with no prospect of reaching the goal."[10] In this story, moving in the direction of life--back from death--means moving into the symbolic and material order with all its constraints.

In other sections the Zohar takes a different tack, calling attention to the unanswerability of some human questions by announcing its refusal to address them. These moments practically jump off the page: our brilliant rabbis--who daringly imagine the nature of Divine consciousness, and who parse the theosophical beginnings of the Universe--find themselves suddenly at a loss for ideas when the topic turns towards the mystery of suffering, the mystery of who lives and who dies.

One such section arises in the Zohar's treatment of *parshat Bo* ("Come") the Torah portion that deals with the death of all the Egyptian firstborn (Exodus 10-13:16). Like the story of Rabbi Yose and the thirteen substitutes, the Egyptians' summary execution by God involves the suffering of the innocent; also like the aforementioned story,

the horrible event is the predicate for an apparently happy outcome, in this case the exodus of the Jewish people and their freedom from slavery. But the murder of the firstborn is an event so awful and so seemingly unfair that the *ḥaverim* appear at times incapable of addressing it. In place of lyricism and fluidity the Zoharic text falls into a disorienting *aporia* accentuated, once again, by a series of *unheimlich* elements.

At the beginning of *Parshat Bo*, two of the Companions find themselves wandering in the middle of the night. They express fear at being alone in the darkness, but decide to expound upon words of Torah. The hour of night recalls for them the hour in which God killed all of the Egyptian firstborn, and one of the Rabbis commences to wonder about the injustice of the Egyptians' deaths. This Rabbi is none other than... Rabbi Yose.[viii] The verse he addresses states:

> "*It happened in the middle of the night that YHVH struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh sitting on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and every firstborn of the beasts*" (Exodus 12:29).[ix]

[viii] Not Rabbi Yose of Peki'in, a different Yose. It would be a stretch to assert the Zohar is deploying these multiple Yoses over matters *unheimlich* in some determined way, whether consciously or not. Still, the repetition of the same name across multiple *unheimlich* moments is, at the very least, amusing.

[ix] Elsewhere God includes the firstborn of the toiling maidservant edict: "*Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall*

Yose then begins to question his companion, Rabbi Ḥiyya:

> Rabbi Yose said, "Many times I have asked about what
> is written: It happened in the middle of the night
> that YHVH struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt
> (Exodus 12:29). Why didn't this happen during the
> day, so that the miracle would be publicized? And why
> did all those weaklings behind the millstones and
> those little lambs die, rather than the commanders and
> mighty warriors..."[11]

To these difficult questions, Rabbi Ḥiyya responds only:

"You have asked well, and I have heard nothing about this

and will not speak."[12] This rare decision to remain silent

on matters of Torah draws sharp attention to itself.[x] The

next day, they bring the question to Rabbi Shim'on in Tibe-

rias, who, after commencing an explanation, abruptly stops,

declaring: "Further, your question exceeds a burden that an

animal cannot bear!"[13]

At this point, the text's uncanny drifts are starting

to build: Shim'on's comment is telling not only because it

is the *second* time the text refuses to engage the question,

but because Shim'on makes this specific association to an

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die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne
to the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the mill-
stone and all the firstborn of beast" (Exodus 11:5).
[x] So unusual is this moment of creative lacuna that Zohar
editor Daniel Matt is prompted to remark: "this conserva-
tive attitude contrasts with the Zohar's frequent emphasis
on innovation" (IV, 169).

animal- like the innocent animals Yose is asking about, who

were sacrificed for the sake of Jewish liberation. In the

same way that finding themselves in the frightful midnight

setting recalled for the *ḥaverim* the slaughter of the Egyp-

tian firstborn, this association which Shim'on makes to a

burdened animal adds to a motif of reversals at work, a

sense of the self who is simultaneously in the locus of the

Other. Shim'on then resumes his struggle to construct an

explanation, only to break off again with this stunning

outburst:

> Rabbi Shim'on wept, raising his voice and groaning.
> He said, "Cluster of chiding! Have you pondered how
> many times the blessed Holy One praises himself? *Who
> brought you out of the land of Egypt* (Exodus 20:2);
> *YHVH your God brought you out of Egypt* (Deuteronomy
> 16:1); *YHVH your God brought you out from there* (ibid
> 5:15); *I brought out your forces* (Exodus 12:17); *Re-
> member this day on which you went out of Egypt* (ibid.,
> 13:3*); He brought you out of Egypt through His pres-
> ence with His great power* (Deuteronomy 4:37); *YHVH
> brought you out from here* (Exodus 13:3).
> [Matt, *The Zohar* Volume IV, 178]

Shim'on's stinging question posed through tears and groans-

-*Have you pondered how many times the blessed Holy One*

praises himself?--is practically heretical. What sort of

portrait of God is this? Holding the exodus over Israel's

head, keeping Israel hostage in piety for murders they nev-

er asked Him to commit— Shim'on paints the portrait of an

insane and murderous Parent telling His horrified children,
"I did it all for you!" Most importantly, Shim'on calls
attention to the symptomatic repetition which, like the
surplus adulation in the story of the thirteen, suggests a
short-circuit somewhere- a trauma or rupture that cannot be
dealt with and cannot be fully contained. Only here *God* is
the hysterical Patient whose repetition draws out the dis-
comfort, the doubt, the pangs of conscience confounding the
ḥaverim. Conscience is, of course, the "other double" of
which Freud speaks in "The Uncanny." The idea of the
double first seen in primary narcissism finds expression in
a faculty "able to oppose the rest of the ego, with the
function of observing and criticizing the self and exercis-
ing a censorship within the mind, and this we become aware
of as our 'conscience,'" he writes (141-142).

In *Bo* the Torah is very clear that God kills not only
the innocent firstborn--the ewe lambs of which Yose speaks-
-but also the firstborn of those who are suffering an al-
ready cruel fate: the prisoner languishing in a dungeon,
the powerless servant toiling behind a millstone- whilst
the taskmasters and torturers go unpunished. Where is
God's conscience? Where is the conscience of the Jew who
worships Him in gratitude, a kind of quid-pro-quo for being
brought out from the land of Egypt? An awareness of these

unanswerable questions lurks in the Zohar's treatment of *Bo*, where feelings of guilt and doubt find expression both in the subtle reversals and in Shim'on's not-so-subtle exasperation with God's repetitive self-praise. Mostly however this awful awareness finds its outlet in silence, in the refusals to deploy language and symbols over questions they cannot bear.[xi]

A similar moment to *Bo* is found in the Zohar's treatment of Luz, an immortal city where, according to the Talmud, the Angel of Death has no power. All the residents of Luz remain immortal for as long as they stay within its walls. A city such as this--whose purported existence is a symbol of the ultimate mystery of life and death--also provokes vexing questions without answers. Rabbi Yehuda asks:

> Why does that Destroying Angel have no power there? If you say that it is not his domain, then what about the Holy Land, which is not under alien dominion and people still die? Why do they not die in *that* place? If you say because of holiness—there is no place in all of civilization as holy as the land of Israel!

[xi] At one point, Rabbi Shim'on suggests the nature of the mystical symbol as he struggles to explain why God performed the miracle at night, when no one would see it. He states: "Further, why did it not occur by day, as you asked.... And it is written: *And the Egyptians were burying those whom YHVH had struck down [among them: every firstborn].* This is publicizing the miracle" (179). The burial, insists Shim'on, *is* the revelation- a fine metaphor for the Kabbalist symbol, which exists through a paradox of veiling and revealing (Chapter one).

> And if you say because of that man who built it—there have been many inhabitants of the world whose merit was greater than his....

> Rabbi Yitsḥak said, 'I have not heard, and I will not speak.'[14]

The mystery of Luzian immortality--a profound mystery to be sure--is still a considerably less vexing question than the one that provokes Yitsḥak's silence; again it is God's baffling verdict on who *merits* eternal life that's the real trouble. In the story of Yose's resurrection the *ḥaverim* are told that God performed the miracle before their eyes because they *were truly worthy* to see it; here the Luzians win immortality in spite of others' apparently greater merit. Neither case is ever really explained. Later Rabbi Shim'on will attempt to fashion a Kabbalistic explanation for the immortality of Luz centering on the enigma of the aleph-bet, but it's too little too late; the rupture has already occurred- our attention has already been drawn to Rabbi Yitsḥak's silence, which functions here as a metadiscourse, akin to the Lyotardian notion of the sublime- that is, as an expression that the inexpressible exists.[15]

The Undead: Two Narratives

The central project of psychoanalysis involves an ex-
ploration of our enduring connection to the past; of our
never-ending bond to those who mold our psychic life from
the determinative ties of early childhood to all the later
encounters these first ties inform. The mystery of how
other people--parents, loved ones, friends, and strangers--
continue to live within us and through us, shaping our pri-
vate mental life and manifest actions, permeating the
present generation and present moment with the undying
force of the past- these are foremost preoccupations of the
psychoanalytic journey. Freud did not believe in fate or
pre-destiny as such, but he understood that the psyche
works to mold the dreamer's future "into a perfect likeness
of the past," thus offering a basic premise for the idea
that most social relations are, in fact, attended by a
sense of the uncanny- of something internally familiar re-
turning from the outside in altered form.[16]

In the Zohar, and indeed in the Kabbalist imagination
at large, we encounter these same preoccupations. They
echo at a fundamental level in the Zohar's radically inter-
textual and inter-subjective view of human existence. Both
the text's theosophical paradigms and discrete literary

content often point, in one way or another, towards the mystery of our immortal connection to events and to people that have long since passed. Most often, this idea simply permeates the text post-facto, a theosophical presumption of the Kabbalist enterprise. But in some places, the immortal connection between human souls is addressed quite directly. There are two compelling tales in the Zohar that deal with the mystery of *gilgul,* or, the transmigration of souls. One is known as "The Child" (or, *yanuka*, wonderchild); the other is *Sava de Mishpatim*- Old Man (of the Torah portion) *Mishpatim* ("Laws," Exodus 21:1-24:18). Both form independent narratives with no ostensible connection to the other, but the title-figures who appear in these stories are vehicles through whom the Zohar explores the question of immortality in its broadest sense- that is, not just as an arcane matter involving the life of the soul after death, but also as an everyday phenomenon animating our very this-worldly inter-human connections through the forces of memory and introjection, elements of daily life through which we remain psychically and inextricably bound to our loved ones who have gone. Whilst the plot device and structure of these two narratives are almost identical--the wandering *ḥaverim* encounter a mysterious and wise stranger who produces brilliant interpretations of Torah--

these two strangers and the feelings they generate could not be more different. They can, I will argue, be seen as counterpoints to each other, one an exemplar of a "short-circuit," and the other, a portrait of a human soul being bound into the bonds of community.

In the first tale,[xii] the *ḥaverim* come to lodge in the home of a woman and her young son. As mentioned, this wondrous child displays an apparently supernatural ability to construct masterful analyses of scripture. Although the child's name is never given, we come to learn that he is the son of the great sage Rav Hamnuna Sava, and that--as the narrative suggests in multiple places--the boy is inhabited by the soul of his dead father. The child exhibits a powerful, prophet-like quality. He is also a prototypically *unheimlich* figure: When, for instance, his mother instructs him to approach the *ḥaverim* to receive their blessing, the child responds: "I do not want to get near them...because they have not said the *Shema* today, and I have been taught that whoever does not say the *Shema* at its proper time should be shunned the whole day long" (Tishby, 197).[17] Astonished, the *ḥaverim* affirm that the child is correct- they had not said the prayer at the proper time.

[xii] The first tale examined here; in the Zohar, this tale appears after Sava de-Mishpatim.

But how, they wonder, could the child know such a thing? "I knew it from the smell of your clothes," he declares, "as I came toward you" (198). The creepy child does little to put the Companions at ease, and instances of his strangeness only multiply as the tale goes on. He repeatedly calls their sagacity into question, while his own impossibly brilliant interpretations of Torah, not to mention his apparent extrasensory skills, prompt Rabbi Judah twice to remark, "This child does not seem to me to be human" (199, 201).

Nearly all the child's discussions reflect variations on *unheimlich* themes: he elaborates the significance of Torah verses in which names appear doubled, explaining how the words "Moses Moses" and "Abraham Abraham" (Exodus 3:4, Genesis 22:11) should be interpreted through the presence or absence of disjunctive punctuation; he fixates on the immanent presence of the "Other side" (S*itra aḥa,* the Kabbalist dimension of evil mentioned in chapter three) that permeates our living world, coexisting in every moment; the child offers a cautionary description of the extent to which this "Other side" has a share in blessings meant for God, and fixates on the need to separate from this immanent evil by marshalling the right quality of intent when uttering a benediction. The narrative also produces several mo-

ments of inversion and disorientation: when one of the

ḥaverim points out that one's host customarily recites the

blessing before meals and a guest recites the blessing af-

ter, the child declares, "I am not the host...and you are

not my guests" (204). In an earlier instance, after the

mother instructs her son to "come and be blessed" by the

ḥaverim, she whispers the turnabout question, "have you

tested them my child?"- indicating the boy is in fact spi-

ritually superior (and that mother is somewhat duplicitous

herself).

But the most obvious indication of something off-

kilter in this household is the incest motif running

through the story. Everywhere in the Zohar, for instance,

the *Holy One Blessed be He* is understood as Shekhinah's di-

vine Husband. During one of his skillful discourses howev-

er, the child exchanges the term "father" for "husband,"

thus describing the divine couple instead as a father-

daughter pair enmeshed in an erotic relationship: he

states, "Ḥittah is the daughter who endears herself to her

father so that he fulfills her desire"[xiii] [see note below].

[xiii] The child continues: "And what is *ḥittah?* It contains
all the twenty-two letters [of the alphabet]." He is re-
ferring to fact that *ḥittah* (wheat) is numerically equal to
22, the total number of letters of the aleph-bet, which
(like Shekhinah) comprises the totality of divine creative
power. In other words, *ḥittah* and Shekhinah are interpene-

This incestuous figuration may be unusual for the Zohar as
a whole, but it isn't altogether surprising to find in this
narrative. On the contrary, it neatly expresses the same
bleeding intergenerational boundaries between father and
son that have overtaken the household. All the signs that
Rav Hamnuna Sava's soul actively inhabits that of his son
position the child in the locus of father and husband.
This incestuous arrangement between mother and son is nei-
ther literal nor is it significant as a discretely psycho-
sexual dynamic; rather it is significant because it meta-
phorizes a short-circuit in this child's relationship to
knowledge and to Otherness, which lacks the necessary in-
completeness through which the bonds of community persist.
The qualities of willingness and curiosity, the active *eros*
of the inter-human relationship that is the basis of the
Kabbalist and psychoanalytic understanding of community--in
which the subject's partial and ever-incomplete identifica-
tion with Otherness allows renewed access to his own inte-
riority and propels the unceasing construction of the sub-
ject's own truth--these qualities and forces are no longer
present in this child.[18] They can no longer be effected,

trated in the boy's interpretation, with Shekhinah's desire
fulfilled by her *father*. The union of Shekhinah and her
divine *spouse* is one of the central dramas of the Zohar and
of Kabbalistic imagination, making the child's father-
daughter description noticeably peculiar.

for he has reached the "standstill" of which Freud speaks
in "Mystic Writing Pad"- the standstill of perfection.
While the rest of the *ḥaverim* are at once bewildered and
awestruck by the child, Rabbi Shim'on[xiv] offers his dis-
ciples this very plain conclusion:

> "With a child who says a word or two from time to time
> without full understanding, we can be assured that he
> will be worthy enough to teach Torah in Israel. But
> with this child, whose light is stable, and who has
> perfect understanding, it is different."
>
> "He will not achieve fame for himself in this world,'
> said Rabbi Simeon, "for there is something of the ce-
> lestial in him, and it is a mystery. A continuing
> light shines upon him from his father, and this mys-
> tery is not current among the Companions' [i.e., how
> the soul of the father continues to shine upon his
> son]."   [223, 205]

With the stable light of perfect knowledge and the wisdom
of generations inhabiting his five-year old body, the boy
is not--as Rabbi Judah suggested--truly human, at least not
by any Zoharic measure. For in the Zohar (as in the Bahir
before it) *perfection* is the dangerous short-circuit, an
anathema to the ongoing construction of meaning that enli-
vens and propels all human life and that allows for the
transferential exchanges that bind us into community. In
the Zohar, no one person creates stable meaning- least of
all by themselves. Rather, across its pages, we witness

[xiv] Transliterated *Simeon* in Tishby.

the communal construction of meaning, in which all members

of the brotherhood have a share in the unstable light of

their own hard-wrought truth. And although the child is

inhabited by the soul of his father, that bond does not

suggest the sort of immortality the Zohar favors; without

the questing spirit that animates our wandering brother-

hood, the child is come unhinged from the mortal bonds of

community, bonds through which things timeless and ineffa-

ble insist into the present moment. As the tale closes,

the reader is assured that the boy will die young.

Perhaps the problem represented by the other-worldly

yanuka is best understood by looking to his very this-

worldly counterpart, in the narrative of *Sava de Mishpatim*.

In this famous section of the Zohar, Rabbis Yose and Rabbi

Ḥiyya encounter an old donkey-driver on the road. The Sava

(Sava=Old Man) seems to be a fool but turns out to be a

great sage who offers profound mystical interpretation of

the Torah portion *Mishpatim*. Daniel Matt points out that

Sava de-Mishpatim "forms an independent composition, dis-

tinct in both style and content from the bulk of the Zo-

har," and that the narrative's "account of the theory of

gilgul (reincarnation or transmigration of the soul)

represents the first extensive treatment of the subject in

Jewish literature."[19] But the immense beauty of this tale--

and, I would argue, the effect it produces in the reader--
are not at all owed to the esoteric secrets of transmigra-
tion that the old man offers the Rabbis. These Kabbalistic
details pale in force to the emotional and spiritual effort
the old man displays in his struggles to articulate these
mysteries, and to the bonds of love and fellowship he
forges with the *ḥaverim* by his struggle to do so. In fact,
the tale produces a subtle disconnect between its arcane
content and what actually occurs at the end- a disconnect
that allows us to contemplate the life of the soul after
death in an entirely different fashion from the Old Man's
account.

As with the *yanuka*, the narrative suggests the pres-
ence of something undead inhabiting the Old Man, or that
perhaps he himself is reincarnated. He tells the ḥaverim:
"Rabbis, I have become a donkey-driver—yet only a short
time ago; previously I wasn't one."[20] It is unclear whether
the old man is referring to a prior profession or to a
prior lifetime. But *unlike* the yanuka, this undeadness
comes across less like possession from the outside than as
a persistent spark from within. Over the course of the
narrative, which is comprised almost entirely of his mys-
tical revelations, the Old Man stops again and again to ad-
dress himself, marshalling his creativity and courage,

searching for words to communicate his vision, and voicing

the fear and uncertainty that attend his creative work:

> "Old man, old man! What have you done? Silence would
> have been better for you! Old man, old man, I told
> you that you have set to the great sea without ropes
> and without a sail. What will you do? If you say
> that you will rise above—you cannot. If you say that
> you will descend below—look, the depth of the great
> abyss! What will you do?
> "Oh, old man, old man, you cannot turn back! In
> these times you have never been, yet normally you do
> not weaken in strength. Now, you know that no one
> else in this whole generation has ever entered in a
> boat this depth where you are."[21]

His constant self-references--"Old man, Old man!"--

strengthen the impression that this old donkey-driver is

inhabited by an internal Other, while also reflecting the

ambivalence and duality that characterize his uncanny top-

ic: he describes (among other mysteries) the Kabbalistic

blueprint for the soul's transmigration through Levirite

marriage[xv]; how the souls of those who die childless will

journey from generation to generation; how multiple souls

can inhabit a single body- all topics that speak to nature

of the relationship between the living and the dead, and to

[xv] Levirite marriage refers to the practice of a man marry-
ing his brother's widow in the event that her deceased hus-
band died childless. The first child born of this union
between widow and brother-in-law is considered the progeny
of the deceased husband.

the human desire to persist, somehow, beyond this life and time on earth.

Given the similar motifs (the wise stranger who seems to channel a separate spirit, the theme of reincarnation and internal Otherness), there is a certain connection to be drawn between *Sava de-Mishpatim* and the *yanuka* narrative. But where the *yanuka* would commandingly declare some supernaturally-attained bit of wisdom, the Old Man, like the Companions of the brotherhood--and indeed, like all of us--must struggle to give shape and meaning to some measure of these mysteries. As evidenced above, the Old Man truly labors to bring forth his every word. Like giving birth, the creative journey upon which he's embarked is difficult-painful in fact, at times frightening and at times stalled. We needn't wonder, as Rabbi Judah wondered of the *yanuka*, whether or not the Old Man is human. His speech is filled with breaths, sighs, and tears- all signaling his corporeality and, by extension, his mortality. His frequent pauses and labored search for words also create an acute sense of the limits of language and the limits of human understanding, which persist even with the highest attainment of wisdom. The Old Man reflects upon these limits in a revealing passage that cites the tale of Jacob wrestling with

the Angel (Genesis 32) together with a verse from Eccle-

siastes:

> "Now, my beloved friends, listen! I have not seen
> you, and I have spoken to you. *All words are tiresome*
> (Ecclesiastes 1:8), no human can speak—even words of
> Torah are tiresome! As it is written: *Jacob was left*
> *alone, and a man wrestled with him*, and it is written:
> *He saw that he could not prevail against him and he*
> *touched the socket of his thigh* (Genesis 32:25-26).
> That thigh he gained from Jacob, and that thigh re-
> mained in weakness—until Samuel arrived. What is 'in
> weakness'? That is did not conduct prophecy."[22]

In the struggle with his divine adversary, Jacob is blinded

to prophesy, to a full comprehension of the divine or know-

ledge of the future. In this moment, the Old Man, too, is

wrestling with things divine, and by telling the *ḥaverim* "I

have not seen you" he likens himself to Jacob in the bibli-

cal moment of struggle. People are not prophets; we have

only our tiresome words to grapple with the mysteries of

being, and through our metaphors some quantity of revela-

tion emerges partial and incomplete. But the story of Ja-

cob's encounter with the mysterious stranger--who adamantly

refuses to disclose his identity to Jacob--is not just

about the limitations that attend any human encounter with

the divine; it is also about the struggle of *becoming*. It

is in this struggle with the divine that Jacob is re-named-

he *becomes* Israel, the namesake of a people who will fore-

vermore struggle with God, wrestle with words of Torah, and extract by great effort of the intellect and the spirit some partial measure of understanding to navigate the depths and shoals of this strange world. One works through the uncanniness of Torah, and of life, by such efforts, and in doing so the Old Man of *Sava de-Mishpatim* forges an identity with the *ḥaverim*, whose own devotion to the same spiritual project is re-inspired by their vital encounter. Whereas the *yanuka* figure must die, the Old Man will live forever in their memory and spirit. The nature of his immortality is revealed in the Companions' poignant goodbye:

> They rose like one awakening from sleep and prostrated themselves before him, unable to speak. After a while they wept.
>
> Rabbi Ḥiyya opened, saying, "*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm. For love is fierce as death, [jealousy cruel as Sheol; its sparks are sparks of fire, a blazing flame]* (Song of Songs 8:6). *Set me as a seal-* when Assembly of Israel cleaves to Her husband, She says, *Set me as a seal*. With a seal, once it adheres to a certain place, it leaves its image there. Even though that seal moves elsewhere--not remaining there, removed--it leaves its entire image there, remaining there. Similarly, She says, 'Since I have cleaved to You, My entire image will be engraved in You; for even though I move here or there, You will find My image engraved in You, and You will remember Me.'
>
> ...."As for us, love and sparks of flame of the heart follow you. May it be the will of the blessed Holy One that our image be engraved in your heart as your image is engraved in ours!"
>
> He kissed them and blessed them, and they went.[23]

For all the esoteric secrets the Old Man reveals--for all the nether-worldly pathways of *gilgul* described in the story--in the end, the Old Man secures a form of immortality that relies on *none* of those hidden principles. Instead, with quiet subtlety, and from under the weight of all those Kabbalistic details, the narrative of *Sava de-Mishpatim* whispers an entirely different message: that *"the influence of each human being on others in this life is a kind of immortality."*[24] It is through the activity of sharing and fellowship that the Old Man secures his undying connection to the rabbis of the brotherhood; his own spirit will persist in theirs through the flame of love and the force of memory. In the final analysis, this is the only immortality the text holds in evidence- the only one it truly confirms.

The rabbis' encounter with the Old Man recalls, too, Lacan's insights on the evocative value of language, in which the Other evokes in the subject something he or she cannot access alone. The transference here does not so much *seek reply* as it seeks to *carry over* in the Other, an indelible seal upon the heart.[25] And of course, it is at the literary register that the text evokes reply in the reader, asking that we ponder the mystery of our own con-

nection to the souls that somehow persist within us with enduring psychic force.

The preoccupation with transmigration may be, at bottom, about these things. It speaks to our search for immortality, our desire to be bound into the bonds of eternal life, and to maintain, somehow, an immortal connection to the beloved Others who share our mortality. The challenge--in both the psychoanalytic experience as in these Zoharic narratives--is to cleave to these bonds of community, of family, and of fellowship, in psychic *health*, absent the hysterical misery that condemns us to involuntary repetition and other short-circuits that keep us, as Eric Santner puts it, from "opening to the midst of life."[26] On the circuitous path to death that is human life, Freud believed that only two things ultimately sustained these healthy psychic attachments: love and work. Freud's very practical, this-worldly conclusion comes as no surprise. What is surprising, and what continues to enlighten and to evoke ever more questions, is the discovery of Freud's same conclusion embedded in this most numinous text of Jewish mystical literature.

Notes to Chapter 4

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[1] All citations from this tale are taken from Aryeh Wineman, *Mystic Tales From the Zohar* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997).

[2] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in Benjamin Nelson, *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion* (New York: Harper, 1958), 122-161.

[3] Matt, *Haqdamat Sefer ha-Zohar* (Introduction to the *Zohar)* in *The Zohar* Volume I, 1-2.

[4] *The Thirteen Petalled Rose: A Discourse on the Essence of Jewish Belief* is one of the better known modern texts on Kabbalah; see Adin Steinsaltz, Basic Books, 1980.

[5] *PMLA*, 112:(5) 1080.

[6] Freud citing Schelling. Like other remarks by Rank, Schelling, and Jentsch, Freud will treat this observation as a starting point to be elaborated through his analysis of the castration complex at work the story of "The Sand-Man" in Hoffman's *Nachtstücken*.

[7] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 27-28. Scholem is describing the nature of the Kabbalist symbol, discussed in chapter 1.

[8] "You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the... appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God." Graham Green, *Brighton Rock* (1938).

[9] See Chapter 1. Gershom Scholem explains the Kabbalist idea that the "Real" Torah lay in the blank spaces of the white parchment, against which the black letters represent but a persistent commentary on the Vanished Text. See *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1978) 174.

[10] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 50.

[11] Matt, *The Zohar* Volume IV, 168.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 172.

[14] Matt, *The Zohar* Volume V, 384. As with Rabbi Ḥiyya's refusal to respond to Rabbi Yose in *Parshat Bo*, here too Daniel Matt remarks that "this conservative attitude contrasts with the Zohar's frequent emphasis on innovation" (Ibid.).

[15] See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1991), 89-93.

[16] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 660.

[17] All citations from this Zoharic tale are taken from "The Child," in Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar,* Volume I. Oxford: Lipman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1987.

[18] Here again I am drawing upon Santner, *Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, as discussed in Chapter 3.

[19] Matt, preface to *The Zohar*, Volume V, v.

[20] Matt, *The Zohar*, Volume V, 4.

[21] Ibid., 44.

[22] Ibid., 102.

[23] Ibid., 137-138.

[24] Widely attributed to John Quincy Adams (1767-1848).

[25] Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, ed. Wilden (42, 72-73).

[26] Santner, *The Psychotheology of Everyday Life*, 23.

Afterword

The first half of this analysis argues favorably for the infinity of interpretation and resistance to closure that I see as part of the shared hermeneutic of psychoanalysis and Jewish mystical writing. But if this openness is valorized, it is not for its own sake- not for the sake of the self or some self-aggrandizing narcissism. It is for the sake of the Other, so that we do not foreclose the possibility of the Other's truth in the quest for our own. This, I believe, is the ethical position through which psychoanalysis and Kabbalist writing hold the Subject to account. It is a position that binds the Subject, not only to the Other as radical alterity that defers totalitarian closure, but always also to a community of Others to whom he or she is responsible, and to the intertextual and discursive orders through which the Subject is constituted.

In reviewing chapters three and four, we can take the argument further by referring to Viktor Frankl, the Viennese psychotherapist and originator of logotherapy, whose experiences as a prisoner in Auschwitz and Dachau led him to theorize man's *will-to-meaning*, the striving to find meaning in one's life, as the primary motivational force in mankind. The drive to fulfill one's purpose in life does

not, according to Frankl, originate *in* the self, but is de-
tected *by* the self which responds to this call, and it is
through the therapeutic journey that the individual navi-
gates away from a sense of existential frustration and mea-
ning*less*ness and towards a state of psychosocial health.
Frankel's view was never a repudiation of Freudian psychoa-
nalysis, but rather an elaboration of it; a version of psy-
chotherapy that operates along ethical and spiritual lines,
and that takes up directly questions of personal responsi-
bility both to oneself and to one's community. "*Remember
your friends,*" implores Pynchon's broken alcoholic. Thus
while there are certain Derridean or persistent deconstruc-
tive motifs upon which the psychoanalytic and Jewish mys-
tical enterprise rely, it is, to my mind, the very this-
worldly currency of symptom and symbol--which retain always
something of the timeless and the holy--that ultimately em-
body the process and possibility of *becoming* for the mystic
and the psychoanalyst alike. Like Abraham, we can only
carve and censor our way into life, with earthly discursive
forms that allow us to make meaning, and the aggressive
drive to do so. Love, work, the performance of mitzvoth,
and the ongoing activity of scriptural exegesis all
represent psychospiritual acts that bring meaning to human
existence.

And while the parallelisms and similarities for which I argue in the first half of the analysis answer the "what" and the "how" of this comparison, the questions raised ultimately open to the "why" as this shared ethos that emerges in the dialogue between these two bodies of thought. I see Freudian psychoanalysis as filled with ethical turns and implications, not only in its regard for the individual-in-community, but also in terms of its very basic ontological structures and suppositions, which recognize irresolvable opacity and suffering in the core of human beingness.

There is also the question of how, exactly, Jacques Lacan fits into my argument, which purports from the outset to capture and define something precisely "Jewish" about Freudian psychoanalysis. In Lacan we have the strange problematic of a quasi-Catholic mystic who envisions himself as "completing" Freud, much as Christianity imagines itself completing Judaism, and whose explication of Freudian psychoanalysis, some argue, erases the particularity of Jewishness at its origins .

In counterdistinction to those opponents to Lacan that I cite in passing, my own tendency to opposition to Lacan stems not from any perceived disregard for Jewishness, but from Lacan's propensity to engage in certain exclusionary

and ideological misappropriations of Freud that recuperate the self-same liberal humanist narratives Freud's discoveries seem to unravel. I oppose Lacan's tendency to begin *a priori* with many of Freud's conclusions, beneath which he retroactively constructs an altered, mysterious, and usually untraceable edifice of disjointed (if poetic) ideas that disregard or misrepresent the scientific journey Freud took to reach those conclusions.

Nevertheless, to deride Lacan for effacing the Jewish character of Freudian psychoanalysis is, to my mind, to fail to take into account the deeper affinities between Lacan's explication of Freud and those features of psychoanalysis that link up with Kabbalah. What aspect of "Jewishness," then, falls away in Lacanian psychoanalysis? Certainly in a ways that are cosmetic, or cultural, or racial, Lacan is very much *not* a Jew. But we must remember that neither Freud *nor* Lacan are religionists in any traditional sense. They are more closely akin to modern ethical philosophers– philosophers of the mind, self, and community. And it is perhaps as an ethical philosopher that Lacan uncovers and explicates the principles and implications of Freudian theory in ways that bring to the fore not only what is most radical about psychoanalysis, but also what is most *Jewish*, in terms of its intersubjective character, its

regard for contingency and the dynamic processes by which we continually construct and apprehend truth in community. It is also worth remembering that Lacan's posture is always that of an earnest respondent challenging the domination of American ego psychology, which had largely overtaken psychoanalysis in the years since Freud's death. It was ego psychology's reductive and one-dimensional under-reading of Freud that Lacan so rightly and so passionately rejected, and in turning away from that flat and formulaic perspective, Lacan's "return to Freud" does, in fact, return us to *Freud*– Freud the maverick, Freud the ethical philosopher, Freud the Jew.

Thus in the spirit of this dissertation, which so valorizes the uncertain and the unpredictable, I do feel a certain *jouissance* at the unpredictability of my own interpretive turns, and I would like to believe that Lacan's ironic role in this analysis offers a comic twist that Freud himself would, if not agree with, at least appreciate.

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