FOREWORD

POSTMODERN JEWISH REASONING(S). How does that sound to you? On May 22, about eighteen of us joined host Eugene Borowitz for a delightful conference at Hebrew Union College (NYC) on postmodern Jewish philosophy and text reading. In-between sessions on Sifre Devarim and Mishnah Eduyot, we reflected on what to call what we were doing (a practice we have indulged in only too often in this journal). Philosophers, rabbis, text scholars, literary folk, we gathered around selections from these texts, read first in chevrutot, then in the context of background readings on modern and postmodern pedagogy broadly considered: modes of transmitting knowledge, that is, and thus of receiving and interpreting foundational texts. Then we asked what we had been doing _ what patterns of behavior were displayed? Many kinds of pattern, to be sure, but,if we had to label the whole collection of them, we tended to agree that "philosophy" was too determinate a term, even with the "postmodern Jewish" modifier. "Reasoning(s)" won the hour (the day is too much to ask): a mark that there were identifiable patterns of discursive behavior here, even if no one pattern was privileged, nor any single way

of decribing the patterns. Some of us would have been happy with "Reasoning" (singular, but non-imperious since as vaguely known as the divine word), others more suspicious of any master(s),would have preferred something like "reasoningsssss…." But we all tended to acknowledge our being engaged by a process that headed somewhere and by a dialogue, at once, with one another, with these texts, and with successive traditions of reading them that now begin to include our various "postmodern Jewish" discourses.

The text scholars among us may not be perturbed if "philosophy" per se has less of a hold on us, but it's an unsettling thought for students of Maimonides and Rosenzweig among us who are accustomed to serving their Talmud with two lumps of Aristotle or Kant. In THE BODY OF FAITH (Harper, 1983), Michael Wyschogrod offers what may prove to be mediating words:

It is difficult to avoid asking why the Bible does not focus on reason as [humanity's] distinguishing characteristic…. The Bible does not know of [the dissociation of matter and mind].. and speaks of [human beings] as being created in the image or likeness of God without expecting that this will be taken automatically to refer to the nonvisual likeness of an endowment, such as reason. In addition, the whole framework of definition is foreign to the biblical mind, especially when applied to the being around whom creation revolves . . .

And yet, reason plays a very important role in the Bible. It is best, at this point, to stop talking about reason and to begin talking about intelligence. Reason is a philosophical construct with definite theoretical implications. Intelligence is a working endowment rather than a theory and can be active in the absence of a philosophical theory about the rationality of the universe and the structure of mind that enables it to grasp the rationality inherent in the world. Intelligence is a quality of brightness that enables all normal human beings to some extent and some to an extraordinary extent to grasp relations and implications in complex situations. There are

various forms of intelligence, and an individual can excel in one and not in another.... (pp. 4-5)

What shall we do, then? Shall we label the Network business PMJ "Philosophy" and expand our understanding of the term? Try PMJ "Intelligence?" The latter may get us into more trouble. Here is one vote for moving to the title PMJ Reasoning [or PMJ Reasoning(s)] and for beginning to use the term "reasoning" AS what Wyschogrod calls "intelligence" (so that "reasoning" in his text would mean what "philosophy" means in ours).

You might call this a call-in editorial. We will print your responses in the next issues. It seems that calling-in is part of pmj reasoning, as is dialogue, text study, some philosophic discipline, and gathering together the way some of us did May 22, and the way we did last year at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting and, hopefully, this year again at the AAR (Nov 19 or 20 in Philadelphia). The general point of this paragraph is that PMJ Reasoning may have a personality even if it has no a priori essence and the personality (ies) may grow through our interactions. The specific point is to discuss some of these interactions, past and future:

FUTURE INTERACTIONS:

* AAR Additional Meeting Nov 19 or 20 1995:
The annual Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Network Meeting will offer a discussion of "Kabbalah and Postmodern Philosophy: Rereading as Rewriting in Lurianic Scriptural Exegesis," led by Shaul Magid, Rice University. The format will be the same one we enjoyed last year, with Aryeh Cohen's paper. Shaul's paper, "Lurianic Exegesis on Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden," is included in this issue. We invite you to submit responses to his paper in time for our late summer issue (submission deadline is Aug 15). We'll print the responses in the next issue and set up the AAR session as a study of the Lurianic Exegesis in the light of Shaul's

paper and your responses. Responses may be from 1-6pp and may address either the Lurianic text itself for Shaul's paper: they may therefore simply read (from out of your various postmodern perspectives) or also reflect on methods of interpretation displayed in the various levels of reading. If you may be late with a response, please let us know so that we can set up the AAR session.

* AJS Meeting, Dec. David Seidenberg has put together a session on Derrida at this year's Association of Jewish Studies Annual Meeting. Anticipating that, we include in this issue "Revelations/Derrida," a provocative paper on Derrida by Bernard Zelechow of York University. This paper may bear some relation to what he is presenting at the AJS. Once again, we invite you send us responses to Bernie's paper, to be printed in our issues up to December _ these may be responses to Bernie's paper itself, or to the texts he cites by Derrida. Later, we hope to present an issue on Derrida, as stimulated by the AJS meeting.

PAST INTERACTIONS:
* A POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY GATHERING: MAY 22, 1995 at Hebrew Union College/Jewish Institute of Religion, NYC; hosted by Eugene Borowitz (assisted by Peter Ochs).

Participants were: Leora Batnitsky, Eugene Borowitz, Perry Dane, Edward Feld, Robert Gibbs, Michael Gottsegen, Lauren Granite, Larry Hoffman, Susan Handelman, Gail Labowitz, Aaron Mackler, Peter Ochs, Vanessa Ochs, William Plevan, Daniel Schwarz, David Seidenberg, Susan Shapiro.

Welcome to a Postmodern Jewish Study Group: with remarks by Borowitz, Ochs, and Gibbs. Background reading for all sessions: a) Eugene Borowitz, "Postmodern Judaism, One Theologian's View"; b) Susan Handelman: "The Torah of Criticism and the Criticism of Torah, Recuperating the Pedagogical Moment" Journal of Religion 74#3 (1994): 356-371; c) Mark Schwehn, Exiles from Eden, Religion and the Academic Vocation in America (Oxford 1993): Chs 1, 6.

First Session: "Remembering the Days of Old": A discussion of the Rabbinic Mesoret Self-Described _ Sifre Dvarim Piska 4. Facilitator: Susan Handelman. Concluding remarks on how we studied: David Seidenberg. Required Reading: a) Sifre Dvarim Piska # 310, 41, 48, 13, 306; b) Steven Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary (SUNY,1991): Ch 3: "The Early Rabbinic Sage."

Second Session: "Rules for Disagreement": A discussion of Eduyot Perek #1. Facilitator: Robert Gibbs. Concluding remarks on how studied: Leora Batnitsky. Assignment for discussion: Propose an outline for how the whole chapter of Eduyot 1 is redacted (on what basis are these ishnayot collected, compared and arrayed?).

Third Session: Planning Session for a 1997 International Conference on Postmodern Jewish Reasoning. Facilitator: Peter Ochs.

* Academy for Jewish Philosophy Annual Meeting: University of Virginia, June 6-7, with host: David Novak (assisted by Peter Ochs). While traditionally a forum for studies in modern and medieval Jewish philosophy, the Academy moved this year in a direction more friendly to the kind of text-based study the NETWORK has been cultivating. In place of individual papers (pre-read), all participants were asked to submit 2 page abstracts on one of the 3 session topics: i) Sanhedrin Perek Helek (session facilitator, Jeffrey Macy); ii) Eschatology in Jewish Philosophy (facilitator, Novak); iii) What is Jewish Philosophy? (facilitator, Ochs). A fourth session was a panel by University of Virginia Faculty in Religious Studies (Moslem, Protestant biblical theologian, and Catholic mystic on the place of philosophy in their work). The sessions then moved from text-study to brief statements/arguments and round-the-table discussion: the most lively format some of us have seen in the Academy.

Of particular note for postmodern philosophers were the following.

i) Novak's paper on Eschatology, in which he criticized philosophic doctrines of immortality of the soul and of eternity as opposed to the post-foundational and, in his terms, rabbinically sound, doctrines of the resurrection of the dead and of God's "everlastingness." He writes, for example, that "resurrection of the dead is most consistent with the anthropology of the Bible. . . . It assumes that life cannot be anything but embodied. The soul (nefesh) is not a separate substance temporally housed in flesh (basar); rather it can be conceived as the range of relations in which an embodied person (adam) is engaged. The relationship with God is the upper limit of that range of relations. Therefore, when that range of relations collapses into the body, the person is dead to all, including God" ("Jewish Eschatology," Academy for Jewish Philosophy 1995 Abstracts, pp. 1-2); ii) Papers on "Jewish Philosophy," by Ze'ev Levy and "Defining Postmodern Jewish Philosophy," by Ochs, with responses by Richard Cohen and others; iii) The fact that most Academy members responded with great discomfort when asked to describe their methods for conducting Jewish philosophy and the communities of inquiry to which they belonged. A telling reply was "I am not limited to any particular community; I belong to humanity, and there is no limit to what I might wonder about." The reply may mark some border between modern and postmodern Jewish inquiries.

The June, 1996 meeting is scheduled for Vanderbilt University, with host Lenn Goodmann. The topic is "Liberty" (as a socio-political concept), with preliminary readings on kingship in I Samuel and in Sanhedrin 20b. NETWORK members may find this meeting of particular interest. For information, contact Prof. Lenn Goodman, Department of Philosophy, 111 Furman Hall, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37240.

* Judaism and Postmodernism Conference, Lehigh University, June 19-20, hosted by Laurence Silberstein (Berman Center for Jewish Studies, 9 West Packer Ave., Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA 18015-3082: "___"). Reports are not out yet on this gathering, but the preliminary schedule

looked enticing, with papers by Laura Levitt, Hannan Hever, and Elliot Wolfson, and a discussion of Derrida.

* News About the Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Listserv: As many of you are well aware, David Seidenberg, of the Jewish Theological Seminary, has taken over stewardship of Norbert Samuelson's listerv network, now called The Postmodern Jewish Network: "pomo@jtsa.edu." Inviting discussion within and beyond the purview of "philosophy," per se, David has attracted a vigorous series of exchanges over the last three months. The topics of over 120 postings have ranged from "nature and halakha" to "subjectivity and community" to "liberal Judiasm in Israel." Comments have appeared from over thirty folks, including Alice Bach, Marc Bregman, Charlotte Fonrobert, Robert Goldenberg, Susan Handelman, Martin Jaffee, Steven Kepnes, Harvey Shapiro, Jeff Spitzer, Martin Srajek, Laurie Zoloth-Dorfman, etc. Some NETWORK members may want to redact these discussions into dialogic essays for this NETWORK and for other journals! (Postmodern reasoning seems also to include redaction, commentary, and labor.)

This issue features the following sections:
NEW MEMBERS INTRODUCTIONS

KABBALAH AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: "From Theosophy to Midrash: Lurianic Exegesis on Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden," by Shaul Magid.

DERRIDA AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: "Revelations/Derrida," by Bernard Zelechow, York University.

FUTURES
MEMBERS.

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Peter Ochs, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940.

NEW MEMBERS INTRODUCTIONS

Dan Biber: "I am a psychologist in private practice in Charlotte, NC, specializing infamily and marital therapy, and I hope to remain so until managed care completely changes health delivery systems in this country. For the past 19 years, I have taught two classes a semester – Theories of Personality, Abnormal Psychology, and Theories of Counseling — at "the other" Queens College, a small liberal arts school here in Charlotte. My academic interest is the interface between psychology and religion. My personal interest is philosophy of religion and biblical studies."

Beryl Levinger: "I am a graduate school professor and consultant in Third World development issues. Judaically, I have done some graduate work at the Jewish Theological Seminary and am active in a lay-led Torah study group that meets weekly. I am currently organizing a retreat where some of the post-modernist Jewish writings on the nature of God will be explored. Next spring, I plan to take a leave of absence from my regular work to study more extensively with Neil Gillman and others at JTS."

Michael Satlow: "I currently teach Jewish Studies, especially Second Temple and rabbinic history, literature, and thought, at the University of Virginia. My primary research interest has been issues of rabbinic

secuality and gender construction, but I am now beginning to consider other areas of social history, especially Jewish marriage in antiquity. I am beginning a project of creating a hypertext environment for the Babylonian Talmud, as a teaching tool."

Ola Sgurdson: "I am a doctoral student in systematic theology at the University of Lund, Swenden. My dissertation is on the reception of Karl Barth's theology in Swedish theology. I believe that Barth is misunderstood in Swedish theology and could be more fruitfully understood if seen in the context of postmodern philosophy. Among postmodern philosophers, I find Jewish thinkers most interesting, since many of these are neither nihilistic nor communitarian. Previously I wrote a small book on moral and political philosophy for the Department of Education and Educational research at Gothenburg University, Sweden. This takes up the "problem" of multiculturalism; this means that in the future I have to do something on theology of religions. I also teach hermenueutics at a Methodist seminary in Gothenburg, where I live. I belong to the Chruch of Sweden, a Lutheran church. Besides the articles in this NETWORK, which I find to be of great interest for me, I would appreciate a section with presentations on new books on postmodern Jewish philosophy. Information about them is not very east to get in Sweden."

KABBALAH AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

From Theosophy to Midrash: Lurianic Exegesis on Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden

Shaul Magid, Rice University

Excerpted for the NETWORK from a longer study, here is an attempt to understand the nature of reading as practiced by the Lurianic kabbalists of 16th century Safed. By "reading" I mean how the Lurianic kabbalists utilized the theosophic system inherited from Sefer Ha-Bahir and more

significantly the Zohar, to re-read or perhaps re-write Scripture.1 I will not dwell on the important historical discussion of the emergence of the Lurianic school nor will I discuss the messianic nature of Lurianic kabbala as a response to the expulsion of 1492. I refer the reader to the various studies by Gershom Scholem, Isaiah Tishby, Ronit Meroz, Joseph Avivi and Moshe Idel on this topic.

The uniqueness of Lurianic exegesis emerges when juxtaposed to earlier exegetical methodologies: the midrashic method of the rabbis, allegorical interpretation introduced by Philo and later developed by Maimonides2, and the theosophicmidrashic method of the Bahir and the Zohar. These three differ from one another but share a common thread when juxtaposed to Lurianic exegesis. While each tradition of interpretation mentioned may wander from the base-text or biblical narrative, each retains at least a nominal concern for the plain-sense meaning of the verses in question, leaving the text open to alternative readings3. As Elliot Wolfson has recently argued, even the Zohar, perhaps the most eisogetical of the three, never closes the text or abandons peshat as a viable and relevant category.4

My claim is that Lurianic kabbala deviates from these traditions by claiming to transform the text, redeeming it, as it were, from the pre-redemptive category of peshat as plain-sense meaning. This is not to invalidate the entire category of peshat. Rather, peshat in Lurianic exegesis emerges by reversing the entire midrashic program. Whereas the allegorist, midrashist or medieval kabbalist allows a meta-textual thesis to emerge from a reading of the base-text (Scripture), Lurianic exegesis begins with a predetermined meta-text: the theosophical cosmogonycosmology of rupture-sin-repair [tikkun]. In this way, the Lurianic kabbalist views Scripture not as the base-text, but as the symbolic rendering of the meta-text. To understand Scripture is then not to read the symbolic meta-text out of the narrative _ the method of the Bahir and the Zohar _ but to de-symbolize the narrative and thus reveal its "true" (peshat) meaning. The Zohar's categories of peshat, drash and sod become

obsolete in the Lurianic corpus. There is no open-text in Lurianic exegesis, no "deepening of peshat" or hyperliteralism. To the contrary, this kabbala imposes an independent and non-exegetical system of quasi-prophetic authority that imposes itself on Scripture and thus claims to render a closed-text reading. Daniel Boyarin argues that the midrashic enterprise "fills in the gaps" of narrative "by means of a hermeneutic of recombining places of the canonized exemplar into a new discourse."5 In Lurianic exegesis, to the contrary, the theosophic "text" _ perceived as the fully uncovered Torah of Sinai filtered through the Zohar _ fills in the gaps of Scripture by placing scriptural passages into its extra-scriptural framework of rupture-sin-repair. This exegesis is drawn from a body of knowledge that is presented independently of tradition and, as such, cannot be challenged by tradition: in Betty Roitman's words, it belongs to a reading that is "autonomous and invariable, chosen from among what the kabbalah considers the values founding the world."6 The Lurianic meta-texts produced by this exegesis transform the Bible into a symbolic rendering of the Lurianic cosmos.

Beyond its general significance, the following statement by Alfred North Whitehead illustrates the Lurianic understanding of the relationship between base-text (Scripture) and meta-text (theosophy).

Why do we say the word 'tree' – spoken or written – is a symbol to us of trees? Both the word itself and trees themselves enter into our experience on equal terms; and it would just as sensible, viewing the question, for the trees to symbolize the word.7

In the context of symbolic reading, one might say that, unlike allegory or midrash, Lurianic exegesis views Scripture as the symbolic rendering of the cosmos rather than the other way around: in Whitehead's example, the analogy is regarding the actual tree as symbol for the word "tree."8

The allegorist gets at the deeper meaning by way of the literal meaning of Scripture. Fraade suggest that Philo, "never claims to have exhausted the

biblical texts' possible meanings. Even when he favors his own, final allegorical interpretation over those that have preceded it, he leaves open the possibility of still other, yet deeper meanings to be uncovered . . . "9 Maimonides' concern for the plain-sense meaning of biblical language in the first part of the Guide exhibits his allegiance to the base-text even as he offers allegorical interpretations that square tradition with philosophical speculation.10 The midrashist, using inner-biblical and inter-textual exegesis as tropes of reading, also trusts that solutions to the problems posed by the text lie within the text itself.11 Although theosophic in nature, the Bahir exhibits a similar pattern.12 While theosophy is more independent in the Zohar and less rooted in the midrashic wordplay style of the Bahir, Wolfson's thesis that conventional peshat still plays a role in the zoharic corpus is convincing.13 The Zohar remains a pious reader of Scripture, identified as the Garment of Torah (or exoteric Torah) whose innder "Soul" (or esoteric Torah) is laid bare through the Zoharic reading.14 For Lurianic kabbalah, however, these two Torot have become one, since, through its reading of the Zohar, Lurianic Kabbalah is able to infuse the essence (the esoteric Torah) into its symbolic forumulation (the exoteric Bible). Inheriting the Soul of Torah in the Zohar, the Lurianists no longer have to read Scripture; they may rewrite it, as it were, by desymbolizing it into the explicit theosophy that is revealed to them. Since the Zoharic midrash still leaves the Bible intact, as an open-text, the Lurianists seek to complete the Zoharic repair of Scripture by "redeeming" it from its symbolic garb.

This attempted "redemption" is illustrated in Lurianic readings of the sin of Adam and Eve. I will have space in this essay to offer only brief comments on how the Lurianic exegesis works in the following two texts.

A Word About the Texts: The corpus of Lurianic literature is highly complex and disorganized. Luria himself wrote almost nothing during his brief time in Safed. Most of what exists from the Safed circle is the product of various students, the most prolific and prominent being R. Hayyim Vital and R. Hayyim Ya'akov Zemah. The foundational texts in the

Lurianic corpus are Etz Hayyim and the Shemonah She'arim, written by R. Hayyim Vital and edited by his son R. Shmuel Vital in Damascus.15 Most of Lurianic literature bearing the word Sha'ar in the title comes from the Vitalian school. Other texts, some of which bear the title Sefer, come from other members of the circle, the most prominent being R. Meir Poppers, R. Ya'akov Hayyim Zemah, R. Nathan Shapira, R. Joseph Ibn Tabul, R. Moshe Zakuto, and R. Israel Sarug.16 The texts presented here come from three collections, Sha'ar Ha-Pesukim, Sefer Ha-Likkutim and Likkutei Torah, all

of which are running commentaries to the Torah. Sha'ar Ha-Pesukim is one of the Vitalian Shemonah She'arim. R. Meir Poppers, in his Derekh Etz Hayyim,17 call Sefer Ha-Likkutim (and Sefer Derushim) part of the "early edition" the Lurianic corpus. This would make it part of the Vitalian school as well.18 We know that the first edition of Sefer Ha-Likkutim (published under that title) was edited by R. Benjamin Ha-Levi, a student of Vital. Likkutei Torah, first printed in Zolkeiw in 1775 appears to be a mosaic of various earlier material consisting largely of the second section of R. Meir Poppers' Nof Etz Hayyim combined with portions of R. Ya'akov Zemah's Ozrot Hayyim, Adam Yashar, and Sefer Derushim.

Text A – The Paradoxical Birth of Adam and Eve, Sefer Ha-Likkutim 5b

Preface: This text attempts to integrate the meta-textual notions of zimzum and the rupture of the vessels (shvirat ha-kelim) into the biblical depiction of the birth of Adam and Eve. The characters include the parzufim (sephirotic clusters) Zeir Anpin and Nukva . They serve as catalysts between the supernal world and the higher realm of the primordial parents Abba and Imma, who reside in a realm unaffected by human action or extraneous forces. Mayyin nukvin [feminine waters] serve to transmit supernal energy from below to above, facilitating alefemale union in the cosmos.

Text: [As a result of the rupture] Zeir Anpin (ZA) and Nukva were back to back. If they were face to face, the kelippot would have grabbed onto

their backs. The mayyim nukvin [that which is elevated as the result of either the performance of mitzvot or conjugal union] would have risen as the result of the strength of the dinim which would have taken with them the kelippot as well... However, for ZA and Nukva to unite and thus give birth to Adam, they had to be face to face, yet this was impossible [for the reason just explained]... What did they do? They passed on their mayyim nukvin to their respective malkhuiot [the lowest portion of each parzuf [which has no independent active component and thus remains stationary] and rose to their palaces [the root of their existence, i.e., the place of the parzufim of Abba and Imma]. They rose to their chuppah in the palace of Abba and Imma where the kelippot have no jurisdiction. There they united [face to face] as it is said, And the Lord fashioned the rib (Genesis 2:22).19 This whole episode can be understood with the introduction just explained... Behold: before the birth of Adam and Eve, the mayyim nukvin of the malkhuiot of ZA and Nukva were not sufficiently pure. Therefore the mayyim nukvin of Binah [often interchangeable with Imma] were used for the union in the palace of Abba and Imma... However, as a result [of the use of that higher mayyim nukvin] Adam and Eve would have emerged too pure and exalted [and thus unable to perform the tikkun in the kelippot of the world below Yezira]. Therfore, ZA and Nukva had to descend to their original place in order to bring down the sould that would become Adam and Eve [and thus humanity]. As a result, they had to return back to back to give birth to Adam and Eve. This is what it means when it is said that Adam and Eve emerged from ZA and Nukva back to back. If they were able to generate Adam and Eve face to face, Adam and Eve would have emerged complete and all the worlds would have been perfected...

Text B – Two Adams and the Inevitability of the Sin, Likkutei Torah 4a,b

Preface: This text attempts to understand the apparent ambiguity in the sin narrative that accompanies the creation of Eve. It uses a two Adam theory, which as far as I know is unique to the Lurianic circle. Kabbalistic tradition, beginning with the Zohar, divides the Garden of Eden into

upper and lower gardens. In Lurianic kabbala, the upper garden is in the world of Beriah (yesod of Beriah) and the lower garden is in the world of Asiah (malkhut of Asiah).20 Adam's aloneness is the result of the geographical change which takes place from the sin, an act which the text suggests is decreed through God's warning.

Text: "The Lord God took Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to till it and tend it" (Genesis 2:15) And Lord God took Adam of Asiah. Regarding Adam of Yezira it has already stated, The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there Adam whom he had formed (Genesis 2:8). Now (Genesis 2:15), it is speaking about Adam of Asiah. This Adam was taken from [the world of] Beriah and placed in the Garden of Eden ofYezira21 in order to serve as Nukva [the feminine] to Yezira. This is what it means to till it and tend it [lit. to work it and guard it]. It is in this garden [the world of Yezira] that work [avodah] and protection [shemirah] are necessary because in this place [Yezira] the kelippot have power. This is the nature of the warning, Of every tree of the garden you may eat; you [Adam] can repair and thus benefit from all the other realms; but as for the tree of knowledge good and evil, you must not eat of it (Genesis 2:16,17); as the kelippot benefit and gain sustenance from this tree. This verse is juxtaposed to the verse, it is not good for Adam to be alone (Genesis 2:18) in the infinitive. As soon as this was said [lit. as soon as the word went from His mouth], it was inevitable that he would eat, sin and descend below . . . This is what is meant that it is not good for Adam to be alone. This refers to Adam of Yezira, who would be alone without his Nukva (Adam of Asiah). Until now, it was intended that the entire world of Asiah would be Nukva of Yezira. Now [after Genesis 2:18] it was necessary that Asiah22 would descend below [Yezira] and thus it would not be good for Yezira [Adam of Yezira] to be alone without his Nukva. Therefore, God "placed the cure before the disease." So the Lord God case a deep sleep upon Adam of Yezira. And God fashioned; this was the Binah of Yezira and is the meaning of, and He fashioned [lit. built, from the root boneh, similar to binah]. And Adam of Yezira said, This one at last [lit. this time], Is bone of my bone And flesh of my flesh. Until now, his Nukva

was from another world below him, which is Asiah. But, this time bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. For this (Zot) one shall surely be called Women . . . And he ate from the tree (Genesis 3:6) This refers to Adam of Asiah and his Nukva who descended below. This is the meaning of, they made themselves loincloths, that is, garments. This is the physical world. On this it is said, thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:18) . . . . And the Lord God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them with the garment of the physical world.

Another interpretation: It is possible to say more on, "it is not good for Adam to be alone" as an infinitive referring to Adam of Asiah. Until now, all of the worlds were back to back. God wanted to repair Adam of Asiah through nesirah23 [lit. division referring to, fashioning the rib] which would have repaired all of the worlds. Therefore He said, I will make him a helper k'negdo [opposite him]. Opposite him in the front [face to face] and not the [back to back].24 On the verse, for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die (Genesis 2:17). As soon as this went from His mouth it was inevitable that it would be done and Adam would die . . . Therefore it says, it is not good for Adam to be alone, it would be impossible for him to reproduce (kayyam) as a man. At least he should reproduce with one of his own.25 Therefore, he needed a women. Also, if it was inevitable for him to eat and die he would do so without a woman.26 Therefore, after the nesirah, "new faces" arrived.27 There was never any indication of the possibility of his not sinning.28 Therefore, it says, if he is worthy she will be a helper (ezer), if he is not worthy, she will be against him (k'negdo).29 He was not worthy in that he had relations with her at the wrong time, before Shabbat. Thus it says, and they were both naked (Genesis 2:25) They saw the serpent involved in a sexual act and they desired them.30 This is the meaning of, and they perceived they were naked [arumim] (Genesis 3:7). As the sages said, 31 they saw the serpent involved in conjugal relations and they desired them. Thus it says, and they felt no shame (hitbosheshu), the serpent seduced them because they felt no shame. Shabbat contains the same letters as shame (BShT). If they would have waited until Shabbat, (i.e., if they felt shame [BShT]), the serpent

would have had no effect on them. They did not wait until Shabbat (ShBT) which is (BShT),32. Therefore the serpent came upon them. The serpent was the shrewdest (arum) . . .Genesis 3:1). Since they sinned they saw themselves naked (arumim), that is, they were no longer able to receive the light of Yezira and thus remained without a garment and descended below. . . Then they became more physical, and made for themselves loincloths.

Comments:

The following section consists of brief explanations and extrapolations on each text. The interpretations are my own and should not be seen in any way as the definitive reading of the material. As for the postmodern implications of this material, I defer to those whose training makes them more equipped to make such determinations.

Text A: This text reflects the basic motif of Lurianic kabbala: cosmic vulnerability resulting from the rupture of the vessels (shvirat ha-kelim). When the Lurianists describe the birth of Adam and Eve, they are replaying their understanding of the paradoxical relationship between light and vessels in the Lurianic descirption of creation. The cosmic trope of "back to back" and "front to front"33 reflects the Lurianic paradox of a union that cannot be maintained.34 This cosmic paradox is then replayed in the unity and disunity of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were conceived in an unnatural place (the palace of Abba and Imma) and birthed in the proper location but in an unnatural posture (back to back). As a result, they simultaneously contain the loftiness of their conception and the alienation of their birth.

Other Lurianic texts make a strong connection between shvirat ha-kelim (creation) and the sin (human action). According to these texts, the first six days of creation constituted an organic process of tikkun or healing which would have repaired shvirat ha-kelim and brought creation to its conclusion had the sin not occurred. From this text, it appears that the unnatural character of their conception and birth destined Adam and Eve

to act in a way that would replay the shvirah as sin, thus interrupting the organic process of natural tikkun and placing the fate of creation on their shoulders. For the Bible, humanity stands at the center of creation. The Lurianic text plays out this theme in striking fashion by situating the birth of humanity in the dysfunctional dynamic of the cosmos. So situated, humanity is destined to reflect this dysfunctional dynamic in both its physical and spiritual existences. At the basis of human existence is a delicate balance of union and retreat (razo v'shov): a subtle re-reading of what it means to be created, "in the image of God!"

Text B: This text reiterates more explicitly the inevitability of the sin but does so by introducing a provocative theory of two Adams: Adam of Yezira and Adam of Asiah. At first blush this appears to be a hermeneutic tool to solve the apparent repetition of Genesis 2:8 and 2:15. Something more profound is at work here, however. Adam of Asiah is really the higher Adam as he descends from the world of Beriah (which stands above the world of Yezira, where the second Adam resides). In the first part of the narrative, Adam of Asiah serves as the feminine partner of Adam as Yezira (his Nukva) as the world of Asiah has yet to become independent and serves as Nukva (Malkhut) of the world of Yezira. It is Adam of Asiah who receives the divine warnings35 not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 2:16,17), since he stands on the cusp of the kelippot and is thus susceptible to them. Adam of Yezira remains aloof and disengaged. When we move to Genesis 2:18 (it is not good for man to be alone), the narrative switches back to Adam of Yezira, since the divine decree (Genesis 2:16,17) will inevitably result in the descent of Adam of Asiah (the feminine partner of Adam of Yezira) and leave Adam of Yezira without a partner. The verses dealing with the creation of Eve refer to Adam of Yezira (who now accepts Eve as his true wife [Genesis 2:23]) . This mythic interpretation falls under the midrashic rubric of God's, "creating the cure before the disease." The temporary "wife" of Adam (Adam of Asiah) is replaced by the permanent wife (Eve) who shares the world of Yezira with her husband and remains secure from the extraneous matter below.

I am struck above all by two features of this highly charged and bizarre reading of Genesis 2: the androgynous nature of Adam of Asiah, who is the female for Adam of Yezira and the male for his own Nukva ; and Eve's being created to fill a gap created by the sin, rather than emerging as the culprit of the sin. The alternate interpretation offers a different twist: the Eve verses refer to Adam of Asiah, and Eve is created as the result of human mortality (one of the necessary consequences of the sin) in order for humanity to procreate "according to their species." It follows from this reading that, if Adam were not destined to eat of the tree (and thus die), the female would not be necessary: which may imply that the status of the female in the redeemed world is highly ambiguous. I am inclined to think that, according to the Lurianists, the female is a temporary creation to be integrated into the male when procreation is no longer necessary.36

The alternate interpretation offers a highly suggestive, zoharic image: witnessing conjugal relations between the serpent and some undetermined partner, Adam and Eve are aroused to imitate their actions.37 Such a correlation between the serpent and Adam/Eve may be implied in the Bible's applying the word arum to both of them: "naked," in Gen 2:25, 3:7 and "shrewd" in 3:1. Thus, the tone of Genesis 2:25 _ "the two of them were naked . . . yet they felt no shame" _ goes from one of praise to one of caution. Shame (BShT) and Shabbat (ShBT) become interchangeable in order to show that the sin was the result of the lack of consciousness of Shabbat (they had no BShT, they had no [sense of regard for] Shabbat). The dysfunction of the cosmos in Text A is manifest in the misappropriated letters B and Sh which would have been rectified if the organic (natural) process of tikkun had completed its course. Hence 3:7, they perceived they were naked, can be read to mean that they became arum (shrewd) like the serpent.

Both texts illustrate how Lurianic exegesis begins with a "meta-text," or a body of knowledge independent of Scripture but also revealed at Sinai along with the exoteric Torah. For the Lurianists, the biblical narrative is

thus the symbolic representation of this meta-text. Only by identifying the latter, and thus desymbolizing the text, can the kabbalist display the true meaning of the former. The question of how the Lurianists read Scripture is part of the larger question of reading as worship among kabbalists in general. For the Lurianic kabbalists, who view worship in general as redemptive in nature, Talmud Torah (reading) is an act which redeems the text. Although an in-depth study of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this short essay, the reader of Lurianic texts should at least be cognizant of the fact that, for the Lurianic kabbalists, reading serves the same end as the performance of any mitzvah. What differs may be that other mitzvot repair the supernal world whereas reading repairs the text.

Notes:

1. On the notion of interpretation as re-writing Scripture, see P.S. Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament" in It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honor of Barnabas Lindars, D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson, eds.(Cambridge, 1988): 99-121 and M. Fishbane, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel" in Garments of Torah (Bloomington, 1992): 3-19.

2. See Scholem, Origins of the Kabbala (Princeton, 1962): 386,387, "The kabbalistic mysteries of the Torah are altogether different qualitatively from those of which the philosophers speak. In philosophical usage, especially in the works of Maimonides and his disciples, "secret" means that which can be deduced speculatively by the application of rational principles to the literal text of Scripture of the Aggadah. Sod, for the philosophers, is the achievement of thought in disclosing a level of meaning that unveils a rational truth contained in the world of Scripture…In brief, sod is a rational concept determined by allegory." Cf. Jon Whitman, Allegory: The dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique (Cambridge Ma., 1987).

3. For a discussion on the "open-text" nature of classical kabbalistic exegesis see, B. Roitman, "Sacred Language and Open Text" in Midrash

and Literature, G.H. Hartman, S. Budick eds. (New Haven, 1986): 141-175 and R. Schatz, "Kabbala: Tradition or Innovation" [Hebrew] Masu'uot: Studies in Kabbala and Jewsih Thought in Memory of Professor E. Gottlieb (Jerusalem, 1994).

4. E. Wolfson, "Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: Peshat and Drash in Zoharic Hermeneutics" in The Midrashic Imagination, M. Fishbane, ed. (Albany, 1993):155-204, idem. "The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience: Revelation and Interpretation in the Zohar," Religion 18 (1988). On Philonic allegory open text, see David T. Runia, "The Structure of Philo's Allegorical Treatises: A Review of Two Recent Studies and Some Additional Comments," Vigiliae christianae 28 (1984); T.H. Tobin, The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation (Washington, D.C., 1983) and S. Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary (Albany, 1991): 1-25 and notes.

5. Intertextuality and Midrash(Indiana, 1971): 40.

6. "Sacred Language and Open Text," in Midrash and Literature, Hartman and Budick eds. (New Haven, 1986): 166-67.

7. A.N. Whitehead, Symbolism and its Meaning (Virginia, 1927): 11.

8. This seems obvious in light of the language theory of early kabbala, especially the influence of Sefer Yezira, However, Sefer Yezira is not an exegetical text and thus presents its theory of language largely outside the purview of Scripture. Cf. P. Hayman, "Some Observations on Sefer Yesira: (1) It's Use of Scripture" Journal of Jewish Studies (1984): 168-184, Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala" Diogenes 79 (1972): 59-80 and 80 (1972): 164-194 and J. Dan, "The Language of Creation and its Grammar," Tradition und Translation (BerlinNew York, 1994): 42-63.

9. Fraade, From Tradition to Commentary: 8,9.

10. Cf. S. Rosenberg, "Maimonides as a Commentator on Scripture" [Hebrew] Mekhkarei Yerushalayim 1 (1980).

11. Cf. M. Fishbane, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interpretation in Ancient Israel" in Garments of Torah (Indiana, 1989):3-19 and D. Weiss-Ha-Livni, Peshat and Drash (New York, 1991).

12. A good example can be found in Ha-Bahir # 50 on Proverbs 25:2, The Glory of God is to hide a word.

13. See above note 4.

14. Zohar 2.99a; Cf. D, Cohen-Alloro, The Secret of the Garment in the Zohar [Heb], (Jerusalem, 1987): 69ff.

15. For a general bibliographical outline of Vital's writings, see G. Scholem, Kabbala (New York, 1974) pp. 444-448.

16. A good example of this distinction may be the anonymous Sefer Ha-Gilgulim, first published in Frankfort, 1684, and Vital's Sha'ar Ha-Gilgulim, part of the Shemoneh She'arim, published in 1875. There are many examples of Lurianic literature from the Safed circle which do not conform to this broad categorization. Cf. R. Moshe Yonah, Kanfei Yonah, R. Joseph Ibn Tabul, Drush Hefzi Bah and R. Israel Sarug Sod Ha-Azilut.

17. Karetz,1782: 57, 69

18. For a more comprehensive bibliographical analysis of the Lurianic corpus, see J. Avivi, Binyan Ariel (Jerusalem, 1987); Ronit Meroz, Redemption in the Lurianic Teaching [Hebrew] (dissertation, Hebrew University, 1988) and R. Ya'akov Hillel's Preface to his edition of R. Hayyim Ya'akov Zemah, Kehillat Ya'akov (Jerusalem).

19. This is a reference to the nesirah or separation of the hermaphrodite Adam into two independent genders. According to this, Adam was created with two genitalia, the male in the front and the female in the back. In order to procreate he had to be separated to allow for sexual union. Cf. Sha'ar Ha-Pesukim: 22d,23a where a similar formulation is given for the initial emanation of the parzufim Abba and Imma.

20. Cf. Pri Etz Hayyim: 81d-82b.

21. This is the upper garden, referred to as the garden of Beriah. It is sometimes termed the garden of Yezira in that yesod of Beriah extends into the world of Yezira. Alternatively, the upper garden is called yesod of Beriah before the sin and Yezira after the sin. For yet another reading see, Sha'ar Mamrei Rashbi: 36b where the upper garden is called Nukva of Azilut.

22. It appears from this that Asiah follows Adam of Asiah in his descent below. Therefore, Asiah which was before the sin Nukva of Yezira (and thus Nukva for Adam of Yezira) becomes severed from Adam of Yezira. Thus he is left without a mate.

23. The concept of nesirah is complex in Lurianic literature. Here it refers specifically to the division of Adam in the creation of Eve, but it serves as a fundmental point in Lurianic cosmology. For some examples, see Etz Hayyim, Sha'ar Ha-Kelalim, Chapter 13, Sha'ar Ha-Kavannot, drush Rosh Ha-Shana 1, p. 91ab, and drush 8, p. 98b, Sha'ar Mamrei Rashbi, p. 65 and Sha'ar Ha-Pesukim p. 23b.

24. This is obviously in reference to Genesis Rabba which views Adam before the separation as "two faces – back to back" (du parzufim)

25. This may refer to Genesis Rabba which has Adam having sex with all the animals until Eve was created.

26. This also seems to imply that woman emerges after the decree of mortality is rendered. Rather than seducing him to sin, which is a more common rabbinic interpretation, she exists so that the species can continue to exist.

27. The meaning of "new faces" is unclear. It may refer to Eve and Adam, who are considered "new" creations after the nesirah. The result of the nesirah is that they become two independent entities who can unite "face to face" and thus procreate. After his consciousness (mohin) rises into the womb of Imma which yields Eve, he receives "new consciousness" (mohin hadashim) after which he awakens. This idea appears throughout the Lurianic corpus.

28. Therefore the creation of Eve already implied the sin of eating from the tree. An implicit distinction is made here between the decree of mortality and the sexual sin of Adam and Eve. Only the latter was the result of Adam and Eve's actions.

29. Rashi uses this rabbinic reading as peshat in the verse.

30. It's not clear who the "them" refers to. Alternative Lurianic readings of this episode have the serpent having relations with Lilith, which Adam and Eve witness and are subsequently aroused toward each other.

31. This is referring to the Zohar, which is often referred to as Hazal in Lurianic texts.

32. The implication is that Shabbat is the correct arrangement of the letter BShT. This was the component of creation that remained to be repaired in the afternoon of the sixth day. The re-reading of Genesis (2:25), the two of them were naked…yet they felt no shame, is quite remarkable. Conventional interpretations view this phenomenon in a positive light, the lack of shame as the absence of desire. R. Meir Poppers turns it on its head. Because they felt no shame (BShT) they were seduced by the serpent.

Their nakedness (arumim) is thus likened to the schrewdness (arum) of the serpent. Their mistake was not to wait until shame became Shabbat, whereby their nakedness (arumim) and likeness to the serpent, would dissolve.

33. The intertext of this image may be Psalms 139:5, Back and front You formed me.

34. The back to back, front to front motif may very well be drawn from the midrashic image of the male and female cherubim's in the Temple, whose position reflected the status of the covenental relationship between God and the Jewish People.

35. According to this rendering, these verses are not warnings but divine decrees. The fact that they were uttered in the infinitive is highly charged for the Lurianic exegete. Thus, the serpent's statement, you are not going to die (Genesis 3:4) is not seductive but rather a direct challenge to the divine decree.

36. This theory has been recently argued by Elliot Wolfson in earlier kabbalistic traditions. See his Circle in the Square (Albany, 1995). A reading in Likkutei Torah has Lillith as the serpent's sexual partner, evoking the classical image of Lillith as the demonic jealous female who is constantly trying to destroy the union of Adam and Eve.

DERRIDA AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Revelations/Derrida

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This brief synopsis is an appraisal of Derrida's later works. The emphasis is on his overtly autobiographical writings and the implications of these essays for Derridian interpretation. Is there a new Derrida? Or, is it all a

matter of where one is placed? Can one write autobiography masked as textual commentary? Do intimations of mortality bring forth confession or, as Derrida would have it, "circumfession?" Derrida's first project explored the possibility of first philosophy. Could philosophy be propositionless? Could philosophy ground the negative in identity? Derrida's work exposed two heterogeneous systems, ontological and grammatical, thereby refocussing criticism on the exclusivity of textuality and its corollaries, transcription and transformation. The projects' results are dense scholastic and Talmudic commentaries that demonstrate mournfully the logical impossibility of doing the thing that he loves, metaphysics.

Derrida is a perceptive, witty reader of texts. That, however, should not blind the reader to the simple conceptual apparatus that he manipulates so subversively. The "logical" canon of metaphysics turned on its head shapes the Derridian discourse. If the tradition of metaphysics from Plato to Hegel moved from ontological ground to the history of philosophy, Derrida re/moves from the history of philosophy to the impossibility of ontology. Appropriately, Derrida espouses a position that falls between literature and philosophy. Strategically, he substitutes hermeneutical canons for logocentrism. Instead of a universe, he posits an aesthetic text. Metaphors replace objects, difference/differance supersede identity. Derrida undermines the traditional ascription of self-identity of texts by "showing" the undecidability of textual meaning.

Derrida's later work focuses on the grammatical nature of personal pronouns, the last bastion of presence and self-identity. Is there anything in a name? Does speaking it take precedence over writing it? Can you speak it "correctly?" Do I maintain authority in speaking my own name? Writing it? Derrida shows that even personal pronouns lack transparency and presence. There is nothing "naturally" inviolable in a name, when written names are part of the train of signifiers signifying death, the author's death, the death of the self. Derrida's work leads to the edge of the abyss.

Incongruously, denying the inviolability of personal pronouns leads Derrida to focus on personal history. It is all a matter of where one begins. Derrida authors this Kierkegaardian phrase. In Acts of Literature he announces without amplification that his work is autobiographical, that his writing is a struggle to create a personal literary-historical communication. Derrida's openness about his intentions (yes, intentions) distinguishes these essays from the earlier works.

Acts of Literature opens with an interview entitled "Acts as Literature." The title suggests unambiguously Derrida's belief that literature is a moral doing in the world for writer and reader. It becomes for him, as for Kafka before him, a matter of life and death. In what appears to be a reversal of early positions, Derrida asserts that undecidability is a call for responsible reading/writing. The dangerous supplement (residue) is paradoxically what make undecidability a moral category. Like Kierkegaard Derrida proclaims the call to decision. Ironically decidability is transfigured undecidability.

Derrida's justification for privileging literature morally is its singularity and uniqueness. Literature bears the mark/ and we can remark/ of a signature and a date. Nonetheless, Derrida maintains a bond with his philosophical orientation. Literature's essential particularity makes reading impossible. The singular cannot be translated. However, Derrida insists that the impossibility of translation makes translatability a necessity. His double-edged definition allows him to insist that the uniqueness of a literary text and the singularity of its context insures its cryptesia. Translated, Derrida means that knowing is a partial interpretation of the infinite totality which remains, must remain, opaque. The writer joins the reader in beginning where s/he begins, is placed where s/he is placed.

Appropriately in these essays, Derrida's metaphysic transcends the demonstration of unreadability. Literature is, in what Buber called

existence, the in-between. This literary in-between is autobiography. Literature, he hopes, is what he does. All reading/writing that is literary is autobiographical. All philosophical writing is really autobiographical and potentially literary. For philosophy to think otherwise is bad faith. But Derrida insists that philosophy by definition, to be authentic, must always be in bad faith. The last disclosure focuses sharply on what Derrida's project has been from the beginning; that is, to undermine the logical, eternal, rational, absolute, universal with its opposites, the singular, autobiographical, historical, and contextually dependent communication. The universal proclaims the transparency of its truths while the autobiographical exemplifies opacity in the crypt of persons, persona, masks necessitating translation (interpretation).

Derrida reveals the meaning of autobiography/ literature in an astonishing joint project with Geof Bennington. Bennington attempts a positivist reading of Derrida. To what extent can Bennington encompass Derrida's truth? Derrida's double contrapuntal contribution demonstrates the impossibility of Bennington's task. He offers his "circumfession" with commentary on St. Augustine's Confessions. Its theme is, literally, metaphorically, religiously, culturally, creatively, circumcision. The circumfession confirms Acts of Literature and illuminates the project on blindness and his political statements about the Maasstricht Treaty. It authenticates Derrida's commitment to autobiographical writing. In hyperbolic writing, Derrida reveals (conceals) that his act of writing transfers blood to ink. Writing is circumcision and autobiography is prayer. While Derrida assures us that confessions have nothing to do with truth, that confessions lie, and he is the greatest liar, the links he makes between circumcision, the sign of Jewishness and the absence of his Hebrew name on his "baptismal certificate," points to a truth at the core of his existence.

The "old" Derrida remains present in the circumfession. His themes are creative repetitions similar to a Nietzschean eternal recurrence. The repeated sameness is different each time. Derrida sheds profuse

metaphoric and literal tears to illuminate his unarticulated autobiographical agenda. First, identity, the metaphysical self-identity is more than a philosophical canon in his life. It signifies autobiographical and cultural trauma, difference/ differance in Derrida's worldview. Second, the reader learns the truth of Kierkegaard's phrase that everything depends on where one is placed. The circumfession discloses as truths/lies, the tale, so he says, of the child, Derrida, unconscious of his Jewishness, expelled suddenly from the Garden of French Catholic culture by the Vichy regime. It reveals the promise, disappointment and compulsion for Derrida from bearing a variant of the Hebrew name, Elijah. Circumcision, the dominant and infinitely repeated theme is not only an "external" sign of election as in Augustine, but also the central event of Derrida's life. It is the undecidable of his life. It is his metaphor for the task of writing, the exclusion from his beloved French classical culture, the weight of a Jewish past, the guilt of a non-Jewish future (his sons remain uncircumcised), a failed conversion, an incomplete circumcision.

It is all a matter of where one is placed. Athens and Jerusalem make up Derrida's worldview. But it isn't Levinas' Jerusalem. Nor is it classical Athens. The "circumfession" reveals an ever present equivocal Jerusalem that subverts the Derridian Athens. It expresses the depths of ambivalence, tension, love-hate, Derrida feels about a wanting Judaism and a betraying French Catholicism.

His mother's terminal illness and his bout with paralytic Lyme Disease provides the arras-like context of the circumfession. Ambiguous identity, personal and metaphysical, dominates every page. Why did his parents have him circumcised but raise him without religious identity? Or so he says! Why the negative inscription of difference, without ontological meaning? The complaint is hurled primarily at his mother. The text displays anger, attempts to explain his mother's, all mothers' action, as love, protectiveness, necessary sacrifice. But the accusation against his mother remains the link to Latin Catholicism. Motherhood, paradoxically

ties Derrida to his ambivalent relationship to St. Augustine. Derrida's tearful agonized rhetoric reveals his belief that he is caught between two unfulfilled signs, two mothers. Circumcision marks him but is a failed sign. His mother's attitude toward Jewishness contrasts ambivalently with Augustine's Monica. For Monica, Augustine's Christian conversion (the circumcision of the heart) was complete. It conveyed identity, presence. According to Derrida Georgette (his mother), had him marked, but suppressed the sign: the absence of his Hebrew name on his birth certificate. To add insult to the injury, Derrida is marked by the name of the messianic sign. Derrida understands circumcision as a wound, a wound with a difference, one engendering guilt. Even if you, the reader don't make the association, Derrida does. But Derrida's complaint calls for a sceptical response. If he blames his mother he is also thankful. He reveals that conversion means enslavement.

Derrida writes enigmatically, in riddles, hyperbolically. He repeats that confessions are lies. But he is too devoted to Nietzsche for us to believe him. Lies tell their own truth. His complaint about his natural mother is only the half of it. His identity is at stake. Derrida protests that he is not a marranos _ neither Jew nor Christian. He says this truth emerges from the innermost recesses of his consciousness. But Marranos did not speak their loss. The comparison is both odious and full of pathos. Circumcision and loss _ all spoken in the same breath with the compulsive repetition of the loss of innocence resulting from his expulsion from the lycee during the Petain regime _ point to the loss of another mother: Latin-French Catholic culture _ Marianne not Georgette. His expulsion from the lycee during the Vichy regime is the metaphoric excision or circumcision. In a candid moment Derrida acknowledges hyperbolically that his revenge is the destruction of a "world" in the name of truth. But Derrida lies to himself. The pain of excision, expulsion, loss, becomes the rationale for positively averring the circumcision of his beloved sons. But is this one more example of Derrida's famed blind spots? Does he believe that by sparing his sons the physical marking that he has excised the metaphoric marking?

How, with his obsession, could that be possible? What, we may wonder, do his sons accuse him of? He hints but does not say.

This circumfession dissimulates. It is undecidable whether Derrida is blind to what he says or is disingenuous. Derrida says that he shed all things Jewish. The undercurrent is that it is too late. But too late for what, for whom? What did he have to rid himself of? Yet again, he accuses his parents of failing to give Jewish content to his life. But, in another work, Memories of the Blind, Derrida alludes cryptically to knowledge of Jewish practices. He tells us that his father performed the mitzvah of presiding over the chevra kaddusha (burial society). Moreover, in the circumfession he describes the act of "schlagging kappures." Some Jews and most gentile readers wouldn't know what this means. Derrida's knowledge of arcane customs doesn't guarantee a religious life but suggests lived experience. But would a gentile reader understand anything beyond a picture of a decapitation? Are Jews barbaric? Do we face a self-hating Jew being either consciously malicious or one who is unaware? Derrida gives some warrant for the questions. Immediately after describing "kappures" he portrays his attendance at a Yom Kippur service in a New York "reformed" synagogue. The tone, and the lacunae suggests that attendance did nothing for his spiritual life. The quotation marks around "reformed" in context suggest illegitimacy.

"Reformed" is a curious word. There is no form of Judaism called "Reformed." There is a branch of Judaism called Reform. Its name suggests an ongoing process of change sometimes toward tradition, often away from it. There is a reformed church movement, implying completion. Is this locution a slip of the pen or is Derrida being nasty? Or, does the reader face a Derrida who unconsciously identifies "authentic" Judaism with what he rejects as "too late"- in his case sephardic practice. Reform truly undermines his postJewish vulnerability. It is much harder to reject something that aims to incorporate contemporary Jewish sentiment than something that appears archaic and remote to the postmodern mind.

A chance comment at a conference on the Final Solution sets the stage metaphorically for his most dramatic true/false confession. A young "idiot" asks Derrida what he did to help the Jews during the Holocaust. Stung to the core, after all Derrida had been expelled from his French Catholic cultural Eden merely for being Jewish, Derrida realizes suddenly that the student didn't know that he, Derrida, is a Jew. This comes as a surprise to Derrida, just as cultural anti-semitism of the left surprised him! How, one thinks, can the person who argues about undecidability, be so surprised? The reader hadn't noticed anything specifically Jewish in either his choice of subject matter or his language. Perhaps Derrida didn't know that himself until....

Derrida's truth about himself is ambivalent. He attacks his Jewish contemporaries who, having suffered similar indignity now reclaim their Jewishness, through circumcision, learning and practice. We infer that Derrida believes them to be inauthentic. He concludes his circumfession with the extraordinary statement that he represents what is left of Judaism. He understands his career as a revenge on French Catholic culture. He says "...and the last of the Jews that I still am is doing nothing other than destroying the world on the pretext of making truth..." It is unlikely accidental that he then identifies with the Grail. His ambivalence emerges again. Derrida undoubtedly knows Levi-Strauss' interpretation of it. Levi-Strauss' view subverts the Gentile world view. Hei dentifies the Grail with the Jewish myth of incest aborted (the Jesus story) as opposed to the Greek incest Oedipal tale. Leslie Fiedler makes the final leap and identifies the Grail with the foreskin severed during circumcision. Even if Derrida never heard of Fiedler, I am sure he would appreciate Fiedler's reading on the subject.

Although Derrida denies the possibility of truthful contextual reading, paradoxically, the "circumfession" provides just such a reading strategy. It addresses the issues of placement and intertextuality. Geoff Bennington suggests that the agony of Jewishness revealed circumfessionally does not

mean that Derrida writes Jewish philosophy. Basically Bennington is correct. But Bennington underestimates the importance of the hurt expressed by Derrida about the betrayal of Latin Christian culture and Jewish modes of thought. It would be fruitless to seek coded Jewish messages in Derrida's writings. Significantly, however, from the very earliest essays Derrida attacks logocentrism as ethnocentricity. Moreover, his intellectual autobiography suggests something of a relation to his personal life. This, notwithstanding his assertion that the autobiography is not the same as the life. There is a connection. Derrida's love of Latin Christian culture is tinged by suspicion caused by betrayal. The clarity and lightness of that culture is subject to the sly marginal suspicious light of marranos consciousness. It is no wonder that Derrida's favourite authors should include Nietzsche, the lapsed Christian at the radical edge; Kafka, the writer twice removed from Latin Catholic culture _ a Jew, a minority within a minority, writing in minority language (German), in a host culture radically opposed to the Western metaphysical identity; and Joyce, a self-imposed marginalized Irishman who fancied himself the expression of the Jewish condition. His three heroes all seek a "home," a home that represents a new condition. Nietzsche sought it in the logic of music; Joyce, in the deconstruction and reconstruction of English (he rejected Gaelic); and Kafka, at the end of his life, in the possibilities of Judaism.

It is a matter of where one is placed, where one begins. Derrida's questions are all pseudo-questions, unanswerable questions. Does Derrida ask these questions repeatedly because he remains blind to their impossibility or because Latin Christianity is blind? The answer is truly undecidable. Derrida asks the question again and again and always comes to recognize the impossibility of rendering a judgement. But he never changes the question. Derrida must live the paradoxes of his marranos cultural inheritance. Judaism balances the unitary sovereignty (identity) in Latin Catholic metaphysics with the divided sovereignty of Hebrew biblical culture (covenant), Latin closure with Jewish intellectual openness. True, the metaphysical self is an impossibility, but the paradoxical biblical self is absurd but existent; the philosopher's God isn't present, but the biblical

God is paradoxically infinitely present and infinitely removed. Philosophy cannot be read, while the biblical texts invite interpretation (or, in Derrida's language, translation). Notwithstanding Derrida's revelations, he remains blind to the possibilities of the universality of biblical insight in face of ethnocentric logocentrism.

Perhaps, Derrida transcends ambivalence (as far as transcendence is possible for him) in his late commentary on Kant. In this work, Derrida defends enlightenment critique against contemporary mystogogues. Critique and deconstruction are the same, with the added touch of Jewish irony and Nietzschean passion. Like the minor prophet whose words close the Hebrew canon, Derrida offers consolation without reconciliation. He offers an apocalypse without apocalypse, a closure without end, and an end without end. Derrida gives us an openness and a sanctified task.

"The end approaches, now it is too late to tell the truth about the apocalypse. But what are you doing, all of you will insist, to what ends do you want to come when you come to tell us, 'here now, let's go, come, the apocalypse, its finished, I tell you this, that's what's happening.' Is that not the final end, the ultimate apocalypse?"

FUTURES

KABBALAH AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: Please remember, first responses to Shaul Magid's paper are due August 15. Plan to join us at the AAR.

DERRIDA AND POSTMODERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY: Responses to Bernie Zelechow's paper are welcome, from now through mid-autumn.

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